

Cookie Chronicles

WORLD NEWS

North Pole Nightmare—Rudolph Missing

Legendary reindeer team leader Rudolph disappeared during a recent test flight of Santa's new sleigh system, the Snowbell 5000X.

Rudolph has been missing since December 1. He was joined on the test flight by three other reindeers, old-hand Prancer and young apprentices Windstorm and Zigzag. Isaac Jingle, Test Engineer for North Pole Design Services, drove the new sleigh for the trial run.

"We ran into difficulties over Alaska," explained Jingle. "A freak storm snapped one of the towing harnesses. We landed to make repairs, but we discovered we couldn't fix the damage in the field."

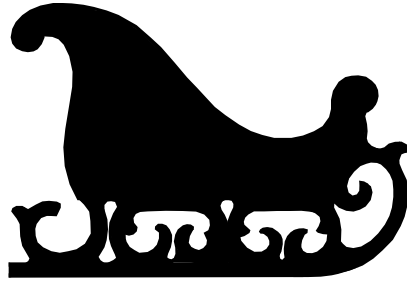
Rudolph and Windstorm decided to fly home for help while the others took shelter. "It should have been routine," said Windstorm, son of another long time team member, Comet. "We were making good time, but the wind was fierce, and it kept blowing us apart."

"The snow was terrible. At one point, the light from Rudolph's nose disappeared. I called out and tried to find him, but there was no sign. So I figured we'd just been separated and would meet back up at the stables. Rudolph has flown in worse storms. How was I to know he wouldn't make it back?"

Reindeers can smell their way home, and Windstorm followed his own nose, without the light from Rudolph's. There was no sign of the team leader, but at first, no one was worried. The Elf Rescue Squad focused its efforts on recovering the Snowbell team stuck in Alaska.

By the time everyone else was back home, the storm was over, but Rudolph was still missing. The Elf Rescue Squad searched for two weeks but found no trace of the famed reindeer.

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THE SNOWBELL 5000X AND RUDOLPH'S DISAPPEARANCE

In a recent press conference, Hans Candle, chief of the Elves Guild, said, "We're all worried about our missing friend, but I'm afraid it's time to switch to contingency plans. Rudolph's son Lightning will light Santa's way this year." Lightning takes after his father with his glowing red nose.

Santa has appointed Prancer, who has been Rudolph's rival since the 1996 fiasco over Blitzen's firing, to take over Rudolph's leadership role for Christmas. The leader provides directions to the sleigh team and handles other organizational functions.

"I think it's premature to offer condolences to the family," said Santa Claus in an interview with Clark Kent of the Metropolis Daily Planet. "I'm hopeful we'll find him while I'm making my rounds on Christmas Eve."

Rudolph's wife Clarice wouldn't speak to the media, but a family friend, Hermey Dent, said, "We're not giving up. I know he's okay. He's a survivor."

For this year's run, Santa will be flying an older model of the Snowbell, the 3000. Retired reindeer Donner will be rejoining the team this season to fill in for his missing son.

Blitzen Bounces Back

Representatives for superstar Blitzen have announced the reindeer's planned return to entertainment following his release from jail this coming February.

Blitzen is serving a four month term for election fraud following his rigged landslide victory for North Pole mayor. Election officials nullified his term last April after it came out that Blitzen had secretly funded the Voters for the Northern Lights (VNL), the group who organized the recall election for former mayor Martin Frost, the brother of ice expert Jack Frost.

HEALTH

Candy Cane Cure-all

A recent study has demonstrated that peppermint candy canes provide effective pain relief for arthritis.

"We discovered the benefits by accident," explained Dr. Charles Brown, head researcher at Lucy Van Pelt Medical University. "Last December, several patients in an arthritis study suddenly showed great improvement. We thought this was due to a new drug we were testing, but the changes actually appeared in our control group. One of our post-doc students, Marcie Merryweather, made the connection to the candy canes."

Merryweather discovered that a nearby portrait studio had been passing out candy canes to university visitors to advertise their holiday photo specials.

The disbelieving researchers set up a six month study for the spring and announced the results at Thanksgiving.

"This news couldn't have come at a better time. With all of the recent problems with prescription medicines, we were getting desperate for some new options," explained Patty Periwinkle, Director of Public Relations for the hospital. "We plan to extend our research on candy canes into new areas. Who knows? This may prove to be the most versatile medicine since cookies and milk!"

"Everyone was shocked to find out about his monetary relationship with the VNL," said political pundit Sugar Sprinkle. "But it was par for the course for North Pole politics. It was only when the VNL got caught stuffing ballot boxes that the real scandal came out."

Blitzen was arrested for his involvement with the election fraud, although he continues to proclaim his innocence. Martin Frost resumed his position as mayor after Blitzen went to jail.

Jail-time doesn't seem to have dimmed Blitzen's career. As soon as he gets out, he's scheduled to film *Antlers over the Amazon*, and he'll also be appearing as a guest host on the *Frosty Night Show*, substituting for Frosty the Snowman who is planning some time off to work on his new charity, Frosty's Food Bank.

"He was in the wrong place at the wrong time—that's all," said Frosty. "Blitzen say's he's done with politics. Everyone still loves the old guy. He's a natural born entertainer."