

ANTA CLAUS OF ANTARCTICA Serialized



15. The Great Santa-Anta Race

Every Christmas season it grew worse. Shortly after Thanksgiving, pictures of Santa Claus appeared all over the world. Plastic Santa statues showed up on front lawns, and Santa dolls, candles, games, and ornaments arrived in stores.

One Christmas season, Anta Claus saw Santa Claus on a billboard drinking a bottle of cola, and he had enough.

“Santa Claus is the biggest star in the world,” he said to his two trolls. “Yet I am totally unknown. I need a way to make a name for myself. If only I could top Santa in something.”

“You have your air-yaks, Anta,” Twas said. “You always make fun of Santa’s puny reindeer.”

“Why not challenge Santa to a race?” Twas said. “Beating Santa Claus would certainly make news.”

Anta Claus scratched his black whiskers. “Oh! Oh! A win over Santa Claus would surely impress people. Yes, I challenge Santa Claus to a race around the world!”

The Four Winds heard Anta’s challenge. At once, North Wind whisked to the North Pole and whispered it to Santa Claus. South Wind whisked to the South Pole and whispered Santa’s reply to Anta.

“Ho! Ho! Anta! I accept your race challenge. Once around the world. May the top Claus win.”

The Santa-Anta Race took place on December 21, the first day of winter on the North Pole and the first day of summer on the South Pole. The start and finish line were on the North Pole.

Anta arrived at the pole in his black sleigh pulled by the eight yaks. Tis and Twas sat in the back with a sack of turnips. To make a good impression, the trolls

had combed the yaks' colorful fur and waxed their curved horns. But one look at Santa's grand cottage, the enormous toy factory, and the spacious reindeer barn, and both Anta's helpers and the yaks turned for home.

"Oh! Oh, lads!" said Anta. "None of this fancy stuff matters. It's pluck and ploy that wins races."

At that moment, the air filled with the jingling of bells. Santa's barn door swung open and out of the barn stepped Santa's eight reindeer drawing a red sleigh trimmed with gold. The reindeer marched in step with their noses held high. Hundreds of round silver bells jingled from their harnesses.

"Oh, those bells!" said Anta. "Those jingling jangling bells!"

Inside the sleigh stood Santa Claus himself. His long white beard flowed down the front of his new red suit. The white ball at the tip of his red hat hung over his shoulder. He waved to the army of elves who had gathered to watch the race.

The elves cheered. They sang, "*Here Comes Santa Claus! Here Comes Santa Claus! Right down Santa Claus lane!*"

"Great bother, this," Anta grumbled.

Anta and Santa drove their teams of yaks and reindeer to the starting line. The black sleigh and red sleigh parked side by side. The reindeer stood with their noses still up. They ignored the eight yaks completely.

"Ho! Ho! Hello, Anta," Santa called out. "It's Claus versus Claus. This should be fun. But I must warn you, my fleet reindeer have had many more years of flying time than your yaks."

"Oh! Oh! Hello, Santa," said Anta. "I'll see you and your team back here on the North Pole. Don't keep me waiting too long."

Prime Meridian was the race referee. He was the man who discovered the line that splits the earth into eastern and western hemispheres. Later, he named the longitudinal line after himself. The tall gangly man now stood on the starting line between the two sleighs. He wore a tall top hat with a large 0 in the middle. In his hand was a pocket watch.

"Welcome to the sleigh race between Santa Claus and...er...what's his name?" Prime Meridian said. He paused as an elf whispered into his ear. "Ah yes, Anta Claus."

The hundreds of elves burst into cheers again. They sang, "*You better watch out! You better not cry! You better not pout! I'm telling you why! Santa Claus is going to take you down!*"

Tis and Twas were easy to spot in the crowd. They stood three times taller

than any elf. In fact, several elves tried to climb up the trolls' legs for a better view.

"Fa la la la la! La la la la!" Anta's helpers cheered.

Prime Meridian read off a clipboard. "Here are the race rules. One...the race begins at midnight. Two...the sleighs will fly around the world one time. Three...on the way south, the sleighs must follow my famous meridian line at 0° longitude. Four...the sleighs must pass over the South Pole, and travel north along the 180th meridian. Five...no substitutes of reindeer or yaks are allowed, and six...no pushing, hitting, blocking, or biting."

Prime Meridian checked his pocket watch. "Ten seconds until midnight," he announced.

The crowd grew silent.

"Ready! Steady!" said the referee.

A cannon went off.

"Go!"

Both Anta and Santa cracked their whips in the air.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" shouted Santa. "Dash away! Dash away! Dash away, all!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Anta. "Get on White-Back Yak! Get on, Black-Back Yak! Get on, the rest of you lads!"

Like comets, the sleighs streaked into the sky. Southward they flew. Calls of "Oh! Oh! Oh!" and "Ho! Ho! Ho!" trailed after them.

Across the polar ice cap, the race remained close. First Santa led and then Anta took the lead. The reindeer surged ahead again, but several lines of latitude later the yaks pulled even.

"Boo, Anta! Boooooooo!" called a herd of blubbery walruses on the edge of the ice, and the yaks fell behind once more.

"Great bother, this, lads," said Anta. "Walruses can be such rude creatures."

Below the Arctic Circle, the race remained tight. At the 45th parallel, Santa's sleigh pulled up alongside Anta's. One look at the yaks, and the reindeer raised their noses.

"Ho! Ho!" Santa called. "We're one-quarter of the way around the world. Your shaggy yaks are doing better than I expected."

"Oh! Oh!" Anta returned. "I hope your reindeer with their stuck-up noses don't get lost the rest of the way around."

But at the equator, disaster struck. Before the race, the Four Winds had agreed not to assist either racer. On one condition. When the Clauses passed over Null

Island at the intersection of the Prime Meridian and Equator, they must pay a tribute to the winds with a simple gift.

Santa Claus was the first to fly over the island. He tossed down a Christmas wreath. But Anta, concentrating on keeping his sleigh on course, forgot to drop any gift at all.

This made the Four Winds furious. They blew in a circle and formed a powerful cyclone. In a rage, the whirling winds took off after Anta's sleigh. They caught up with it at the 45th parallel south. The cyclone touched the back of the sleigh and spun it around and around. The sleigh did a loop-the-loop and flipped upside down. It spun some more and flipped back upright.

Inside, Anta tumbled about like popcorn in a pan.

"Oh! Oh! Ohhh!" he called.

Fortunately, when the fast-moving cyclone reached the cold air over Antarctica, it lost its strength. Still dizzy, Anta steered the yaks out of the wind's hold. He sped straight for the South Pole.

As Anta flew over his cottage he saw the trolls' windmill spinning fast.

"We have some catching up to do, lads," Anta told the yaks. "You need to fly faster than you've ever flown before."

Anta aimed the sleigh at the 180th line of longitude, and the yaks tore northward. But when they reached the equator, Santa Claus was still nowhere in sight.

"We need more speed, lads," Anta called. "I have an idea. On the way south the Four Winds were a hazard. On the way north, they might be a help."

Anta stood and turned a full circle. "Four Winds," he called out "You and I have something in common. Oh! Oh! We are both unpopular with people. Except for sailors and kite flyers, few people like the wind. You ruin picnics and days at the beach. You knock down trees and blow hats off heads. But I know a way to make everyone a Four Winds fan."

This caught the Four Winds' attention. A blast of wind struck the sleigh from all directions.

"How Anta?" said East Wind.

"In the near future people will need to stop burning coal and oil to power their cities," Anta said. "They will need a source of clean energy. The Four Winds could provide that energy. Wind power could run the world."

"Tell us how, Anta," North Wind said.

“My troll helpers, Tis and Twas, are wind farmers,” said Anta. “They can teach people how to build wind generators, big windmills that create electricity. Enough of these windmills could power an entire city. Think how happy people would be on a windy day.”

“And what do you want from us?” South Wind asked.

“A small push,” said Anta. “A little help to win this race.”

After a pause, West Wind said, “It’s a deal.”

Instantly, a great gust of wind struck Anta’s sleigh from behind. The sleigh swept northward at a terrific speed. It flew over lines of latitude in record time.

“Oh! Oh!” Anta called. “Blow wind blow!”

Meanwhile, on the North Pole, the crowd of elves and trolls waited for the sight of the first sleigh.

One elf held a spyglass to his eye. “I see Santa’s red sleigh!” he said.

The elves cheered wildly and tossed their green caps in the air.

“Wait! I also see Anta’s black sleigh,” the elf said.

“*Fa-la-la-la!*” cheered Tis and Twas.

The red and black specks on the horizon grew larger and larger.

“It’s close,” shouted the elf with the spyglass. “Too close to call. A tight one. Neck and neck! I can’t look!”

Prime Meridian held up a checkered flag.

Anta and Santa cracked their whips in the air. The yaks and reindeer streamed toward the finish line. They stretched their necks forward. Down came the flag. The sleighs crossed the finish line in a blur. A cloud of powdered snow rose into the air.

“And the winner is...” the referee called. “Er...*what’s his name!*”

When Anta finished his story, the polar bears waved their Antarctica candy canes.

“So, you really beat Santa in a race, Anta?” one bear asked.

“By a nose,” Anta said. “If Santa’s reindeer hadn’t been holding their noses in the air, the yaks would have lost.”

“And your trolls helped develop wind energy to fight global warming?” asked another bear

“Their wind turbines are getting better each year,” Anta said.

The polar bears nodded in approval.

“Now it’s time to get my sleigh back on route,” said Anta. “I need to finish my

rounds before the first rays of sunlight shine on Christmas morning.”

With the polar bears waving good-bye, Anta’s sleigh flew off the ice floe. When Carol looked down she saw the bears had already resumed their meeting on global warming

“Good story, Anta,” she said. “The polar bears were impressed.”

“My victory in the Great Santa-Anta Race didn’t improve my standing with people,” said Anta. “But the Four Winds have been my friend ever since.”

“And wind power is more in demand than ever,” said Carol. “I see wind turbines all over the place, on hills and in the ocean.”

Carol looked forward. The colorful backs of the yaks glistened in the moonlight. “Too bad everyone doesn’t have reindeer or air-yaks for traveling,” she said. “The Claus’s sleighs are zero-emission vehicles.”

“Oh! Oh! Oh!” said Anta. “Right you are, Carol. Right you are.”