

“A NIN-mas Carol”

Well, I was sitting around the other day, and it suddenly occurred to me that it was almost Christmas. I had completely forgotten about it. You'd think there would be at least something out there to remind everyone that it's the holiday season, preferably a month or so in advance, just to make absolutely sure that there's not even the slightest chance that any one person on the face of the earth could possibly forget that it's **The Christmas Season**.

Anyhoo, in order to annoy all of you on this fine holiday and make you want to put even more liquor into your eggnog, I now present my own interpretation of the classic, beloved story *A Christmas Carol*, and officially guarantee that Charles Dickens will beat the crap out of me in the afterlife.

A NIN-mas Carol

Chapter One: Richard's Ghost

Richard Patrick was dead, to begin with. There was no doubt whatsoever about that. He was a dead Nine Inch Nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what Richard did in Nine Inch Nails. I might be inclined to think he did nothing, although I recall that he was credited for the drone guitar at the end of "Sanctified". But the fact remained that he was a dead Nine Inch Nail.

Trent knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Trent and he were partners for a couple years or so. Trent was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole friend, and Richard was Trent's sole punching-bag.

There is no doubt that Richard was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come from the story I am going to relate.

Trent never painted out Old Richard's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the studio door. Sometimes people called Trent Trent, and sometimes Richard, in which case he'd smack them upside the head.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand in the recording studio, Trent. A self-centered, mean, controlling, perfectionistic old sinner! Secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait, and made him take a really long time to record new albums. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his studio in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.



Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, 'My dear Trent, how are you? When's your new album coming out?' But what did Trent care? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way across the crowded paths of life, warning all fans to keep their distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Trent.

Once upon a time -- of all the good days of the year, on Christmas Eve -- old Trent sat busy in his studio. It was cold, bleak weather, and he could hear the obsessed fans lingering outside, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already.

The door of Trent's studio was open so that he might keep an eye on his assistant, Leo, who in a dingy little room beyond, was mixing tracks. Trent's fire was small, but Leo's was so very much smaller that he was forced to burn pages from his pornographic literature to try and keep warm.

'A merry Christmas, Trent!' cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of programmer Charlie Clouser, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

'Bah!' said Trent, 'Fuck off!'

Charlie had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

'Fuck off?' said Charlie. 'You don't mean that, I am sure?'

'I do,' said Trent. 'Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? You only have one comprehensive website dedicated to your work as a remixer.'

'Come, then,' returned Charlie gaily. 'What right do you have to be so depressed? You're a big famous rock star.'

Trent having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said 'Bah!' again, and followed it up with 'Fuck off!'

'Don't be such a dick, Trent,' said Charlie.

'What else can I be,' returned Trent, 'when I live in a world of piss such as this?'

Trent!' pleaded Charlie.

'You know, let Christmas to surf a pine tree up my ass,' returned Trent, sternly.

'Look,' said Charlie, 'You go ahead and keep being a bastard, see if I care. I'm going to have a merry Christmas, and there's not a thing you can do to stop that! I believe that Christmas has done me good; and I say, God bless it!'

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Leo, back in his tiny room, applauded involuntarily. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

'Let me hear another sound from you, Leo,' said Trent, 'and you'll be living on the street again!'

'Don't be angry, Trent!' said Charlie. 'Come! Dine with us tomorrow.'

'Leave me alone,' said Trent.

'I don't know what your problem is. You think you always have to be dark and gloomy, even on Christmas. At least I tried to be nice and invite you to dinner.'

'Leave me alone,' said Trent.

At length the hour of shutting up the studio arrived. With an ill-will Trent shut down his computer, and tacitly admitted the fact to Leo, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his pants.

'You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?' said Trent.

'If quite convenient, sir.'

'It's not convenient,' said Trent. 'How am I supposed to put out a new album with you lazy fucks taking off every other day?'

Leo smiled faintly and reminded Trent that it was only once a year.

'A poor excuse for delaying the album!' said Trent, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. 'But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier the next morning.'

Leo promised that he would, and Trent locked the studio door, and then walked home with a growl.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing strange about the knocker on Trent's door, except that it was very large. Let anyone explain to me, if they can, how it happened that Trent, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without undergoing any immediate process of change, not a knocker, but Richard Patrick's face.

As Trent looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say he was not startled, or altogether creeped out, would be untrue. But he unlocked the door anyway, walked inside, and lighted his candle. He went upstairs to his room, and double-locked his door, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he changed into his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sat down to brood beside the fire.

Suddenly there was a loud, clanking noise, deep down below, as if someone was dragging a heavy chain across the floor downstairs. Then he heard the sound much louder, coming up the stairs, toward his bedroom door.



'What the fuck?' exclaimed Trent.

His color changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Richard Patrick's Ghost! It wasn't wearing the cool, kick-ass clothes that Richard was known for wearing in life, but instead what appeared to be a nasty old bed-sheet, and a bunch of chains.

'What do you want with me?' said Trent, cold and caustic as ever.

'Much,'- Richard's voice, no doubt about it.

'Well, be specific, goddamn it!'

'You will be haunted', replied Richard's Ghost, 'by three Spirits. Expect the first tomorrow, at around one o'clock. Expect the second on the next night, same bat time, same bat channel. And the third, the night after.'

And with that, Richard's Ghost vanished.

Trent tried to say 'Fuck', but stopped before he could. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, went straight to bed and fell asleep upon the instant.

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“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 3)*Chapter Two: Spirit Number 1*

When Trent awoke, it was so dark, that he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavoring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when his alarm clock went off.

'Oh shit, it's twelve!' said Trent.

Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. It was a made-in-Taiwan piece of crap. Twelve!

'Why, it isn't possible,' said Trent, 'that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that someone has turned off the sun, pulled the stars from the sky, and this is twelve at noon!'

Trent thought, and thought, and thought it over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavored not to think, the more he thought.

Richard's Ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, his mind flew back again, like a strong spring released, to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through, 'Was it a dream or not?'

Trent lay in this state for a good while, until he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation at around one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed, in order to prove once and all that Richard was full of shit, even in death.

The wait was so long, that he was more than once convinced that he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

'Beep, beep!'

'The hour itself!' said Trent triumphantly, 'and nothing else!'

He spoke before the clock stopped beeping, which it did with a solitary, melancholy tone. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn. Trent found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them, and he looked oddly familiar.



'Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me by Richard Patrick?' asked Trent.

'What do you think?'

The voice was dull and deadpanned. Singularly low, as if instead being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

'Who, and what are you?' Trent demanded.

'I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.'

'No you're not... I know you from somewhere!'

'No, I'm the fucking Ghost of Christmas Past.'

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him by the arm.

'Get up off your ass and walk with me!'

It would have been in vain for Trent to plead that the weather and hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was only wearing a crappy dressing-gown. The Ghost's grasp was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe in supplication.

'I may have been named most vital artist in music by Spin magazine,' Trent remonstrated, 'but I am still mortal, and liable to fall.'

'Bear but a touch of my hand there,' said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, 'and you shall be upheld in more than this!'

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of New Orleans was to be seen. A sign bearing the words 'Welcome to Mercer' stood a short distance away.

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'Holy shit!' said Trent, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. 'I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!'

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its touch, although it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the musician's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odors floating in the air, most of which were of manure.

'Your lip is trembling,' said the Ghost. 'And what is that upon your cheek?'

Trent muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple, and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

They walked along the road, Trent recognizing every gate, and post, and trailer, until the town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its bar, and its liquor store. They left the high road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a little house of dull red brick. There was an earthy savor in the air, a chilly bareness in the place.

They went, the Ghost and Trent, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room. A lonely boy was playing the piano near a feeble fire, and Trent sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed upon his younger self, intent upon his music. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, breathing fire and making obscene gestures.

'Why, it's Gene Simmons!' Trent exclaimed in ecstasy. 'It's fucking Gene Simmons! Yes, yes, I know. One Christmas time, my Uncle purchased for me my first KISS album. I listened to it every day. It changed my life!'

To hear Trent expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying, and to see his heightened and excited face, would have been a surprise to his musician friends in the city, indeed. Especially the guys in Pantera.

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, 'Poor boy.' and cried again.

'If I could fix myself, I'd--' Trent muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: 'but it's too late for me.'

'What is the matter?' asked the Spirit.

'Nothing,' said Trent. 'Nothing. I was kind of a dick to Charlie Clouser the other night. I should've been a little nicer, that's all.'

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, 'Let us see another Christmas!'

Trent's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked, and fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling. There he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not playing the piano now, but sitting on the floor, listening to 'The Wall' by Pink Floyd. Trent looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.



It opened, and a man entered.

'Come on, Trent, we're all going out to IHOP to have Christmas dinner,' said the man. 'Put on your shoes.'

'I don't wanna go, Dad,' said the boy. 'I'm listening to my new record.'

'Suit yourself', said his father, and left the room, closing the door behind him.

'You know, Trent,' said the Ghost. 'Your family was very sad that you didn't join them for dinner. You wouldn't have had to eat pancakes; IHOP serves lots of things besides pancakes, despite its misleading name.'

Trent seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, 'I know.'

Although they had but that moment left the house behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy cars and trucks battle for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain door, and asked Trent if he knew it.

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'Know it!' said Trent. 'Was I apprenticed here? This is the old Right Track studio!'

They went in. At sight of a young gentleman sitting at a drum machine, Trent cried in great excitement:

'Why, it's old Chris! Bless his heart; it's Chris Vrenna!'

Chris laid down his sandwich, and looked up at the clock, which pointed at the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands and called out in a comfortable, jovial voice:

'Yo ho, there! Trent! Come here!'

Trent's former self, now grown a young man with his hair in short dreadlocks, came briskly in.

'Yo ho, Trent!' said Chris. 'No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Trent! Let's have the shutters up,' cried old Chris, with a sharp clap of his hands, 'before a man can say Thompson Twins!'

'Nah,' said young Trent. 'I'm gonna stay here and work on this 'Purest Feeling' demo some more. I think it's really going to kick ass.'

'Don't you want to go out and drink cheap beer with me and Richard?' Chris asked. 'He said he'd actually buy this time.'

'No, I said I want to stay here and work,' returned young Trent briskly.

Chris paused for a moment, and then left to party with Richard.

'No more!' cried Trent. 'No more, I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!'

'I told you these were shadows of the things that have been,' said the Ghost. 'That they are what they are, do not blame me!'

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.

'Leave me! Take me back! Haunt me no longer!'

Trent was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

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“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 6)*Chapter Three: Spirit Number 2*

Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Trent had no occasion to be told that the alarm clock was about to again beep one o'clock. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the special purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Richard Patrick's intervention. But, finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he put them every one aside with his own hands, and lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For, he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise, and made nervous. All this time, he lay upon his bed, the very core and center of a blaze of ruddy light. At last, he began to think that the source and secret of this Ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Trent's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. It was brighter, prettier, and not nearly as gothed-out as before. Upon his couch, which was now free of dog hair, sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see, who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike that A Perfect Circle symbol, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Trent, as he came peeping round the door.

'Come in!' exclaimed the Ghost. 'What's up, man?'

Trent entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Trent he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

'I am the Ghost of Christmas Present,' said the Spirit. 'Look upon me!'

Trent reverently did do. It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. It was quite 'pimping'.



'Maynard?' said Trent.

'Huh?' asked the Spirit.

'I know it's you, Maynard! What the hell are you doing?'

'No I'm not. I'm the Ghost of Christmas Present. Damn it, you're fucking up the story, man!'

'Sorry,' Trent muttered.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

'Spirit,' said Trent submissively, 'conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.'

'Touch my robe!'

Trent did as he was told, and held it fast.

Instantly the room disappeared, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

'Spirit?' said Trent, after a moment's thought, 'I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment.'

'I!' cried the Spirit.

'Yeah... you,' returned Trent.

'I!' cried the Spirit.

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'Yes! You! Goddamn it!'

'I!' cried the Spirit.

'What the hell's your problem? Jesus!'

'Sorry,' said the Spirit. 'I guess I just got a little carried away there. Anyway, there are some upon this earth of yours who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all out kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us.'

Trent promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost, that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Trent's clerk's; for there he went, and took Trent with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Leo Herrera's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch.

Then up rose Mrs. Herrera, Leo's wife, dressed but poorly in a nasty, ugly-ass gown, but brave in ribbons, which are really cheap at Wal-Mart; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Herrera, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Herrera plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and got more stains on his father's Ricky Martin T-shirt. And now two smaller Herreras, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Herreras danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Herrera to the skies, while he blew the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

'What has ever got your pervert of a father then?' said Mrs. Herrera. 'And your brother, Tiny Meathead? And Martha warn't as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour!'

'Here's Martha, mother!' said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

'Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are.' said Mrs. Herrera, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal. 'Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!'

'There's father coming,' cried the two young Herreras, who were everywhere at once.



In came Leo, the father, with his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Meathead upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Meathead, he bore a little crutch, a prosthetic leg, a glass eye, and a pacemaker. The two young Herreras hustled Tiny Meathead, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Herrera, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Meathead, excited by the two young Herreras, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried 'It's about fucking time already!'

There never was such a goose. Leo said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Herrera said with great delight.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The beer in the fridge being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Herrera family drew round the TV. Then Leo proposed:

'A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!'

Which all the family re-echoed.

'Hooray, Dad's drunk again!' said Tiny Meathead, the last of all.

'Spirit,' said Trent, with an interest he had never felt before, 'tell me if Tiny Meathead will live.'

'I see a vacant seat,' replied the Ghost, 'in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, Meathead will die.'

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'No, no,' said Trent. 'Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared. I kinda like those Perspective things.'

Trent hung his head, and was overcome with penitence and grief. He bent before the Ghost, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

'Mr. Reznor!' said Leo; 'I'll give you Mr. Reznor, the Founder of the Feast!'

'The Founder of the Feast indeed!' cried Mrs. Herrera, reddening. 'I wish I had him here. I'd give that dickhead a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.'

'My dear,' said Leo, 'the children! Christmas Day.'

'It should be Christmas Day, I am sure,' said she, 'on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling bastard as Mr. Reznor. You know he is, Leo. Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow.'

'My dear,' was Leo's mild answer, 'Christmas Day.'

'I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's,' said Mrs. Herrera, 'not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year. He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt, as I have no doubt that I have a wicked buzz right now!'

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness. Tiny Meathead drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for it, as he was more of a liquor person. Trent was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Trent the Baleful being done with. Leo Herrera told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, a full five bucks weekly.

They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; they smelled funny; their shoes were far from being water-proof; they had hair in weird places; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and drunk most of the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Trent had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Meathead, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Trent and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was pretty cool.

Now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of exquisite red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

'Now where the hell are we?' asked Trent.

'A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth,' returned the Spirit. 'I guess we kinda went into the void.'

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Trent hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped -- whither. Not to sea. To sea. To Trent's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled and roared.

The Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea -on, on-until, being far away, as he told Trent, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, Ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune (except for one jackass who was humming Kid Rock), or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it.

It was a great surprise to Trent, while staring at the sea, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss: it was a great surprise to Trent, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Trent to recognize it as Charlie Clouser's and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at Charlie with approving affability.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Charlie. 'Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!'

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest in a laugh than Trent's keyboardist, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll kick his ass.

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THE MEATHEAD PERSPECTIVE



Wednesday, August 11, 1999

<http://www.theninhotline.net/meatpers/meatpers.html>

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'He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!' cried Charlie. 'He believed it too!'

'More shame for him, Charlie!' said Keith Hillebrandt, indignantly.

'He's a comical old fellow,' said Charlie, 'that's the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be. However, he does make some pretty bad-ass music, and I have nothing to say against him.'

'I'm sure he is very rich, Charlie,' hinted Keith. 'At least you always tell me so.'

'What of that,' said Charlie. 'His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking-ha, ha, ha!-that he is ever going to benefit us with it.'

'I have no patience with him,' observed Keith.

'Oh, I have!' said Charlie. 'I am sorry for Trent; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to sit in his studio all day long, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner.'

'Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner,' interrupted Keith. 'We even ordered his favorite pizza. That bastard.'

'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to Trent, whatever he is,' said Charlie. 'He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless.'

The alarm clock beeped twelve.

Trent looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last beep faded away, he remembered the prediction of old Richard Patrick, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

(continued on next page)

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“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 10)

Chapter Four: The Last Damn Spirit

The Phantom slowly, silently approached. When it came, Trent held his nose; for in the very air through which the Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom, mystery, and a slightly nauseating odor not unlike that of old cabbage.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

'Okay,' said Trent, 'I assume you're either Jerome Dillon or the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come.'

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

'You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us,' Trent pursued. 'Is that so, Spirit?'

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

'Ghost of the Future!' he exclaimed, 'You are creepier than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?'

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

'Lead on!' said Trent. 'Lead on! The night is waning fast, and I don't want to miss *Walker, Texas Ranger*. Lead on, Spirit!'

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Trent followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and made him look like a transvestite.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, at the heart of it all; on 'Change, amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, as Trent had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of roadies. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Trent advanced to listen to their talk.

'No,' said a great fat man with an Ozzy T-shirt, 'I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead.'

'When did he die?' inquired another.

'Last night, I believe.'

'Why, what was the matter with him?' asked a third, cracking open a can of Coors Light. 'I thought he'd never die.'

'Who cares,' said the first, with a yawn.

'What has he done with his money?' asked a red-faced gentleman with a nose ring and a long scraggly beard.

'I haven't heard,' said the man in the Ozzy shirt, yawning again. 'Left it to Nothing Records, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know.'

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Trent knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Trent listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were musicians: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

'Well!' said one. 'Old Rez has got his own at last, hey?'

'So I am told,' returned the second. 'Cold, isn't it?'

'No shit. The weather here sucks ass.'

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“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 11)

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Quiet and dark, beside Trent stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. He fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very weirded out.

'Cut it out,' said Trent.

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Trent glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Trent glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Trent's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to tell the spectre at his side to fuck off.

'Spirit!' he said, 'this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!'

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

'I understand you,' Trent returned, 'and I would do it, if I could. But man, that's just fucking creepy. Give me a dollar and I might do it.'

Again it seemed to look upon him.

'If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this guy's death,' said Trent quite pissed, 'show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!'

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed poor Leo Herrera's house. He found the mother and children seated around the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Herreras were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a magazine before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in surfing the Inter-net. But surely they were very quiet!

The mother got up from the computer, and put her hand up to her face.

'The monitor hurts my eyes,' she said.

The monitor? Ah, poor Tiny Meathead!

'They're better now again,' said Herrera's wife. 'It makes them weak by monitor-light; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time.'

'Past it rather,' Peter answered, shutting up his July issue of Swank magazine. 'But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, Mom.'

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, intoxicated voice, that only faltered once:

'I have known him walk with -- I have known him walk with Tiny Meathead upon his shoulder, very fast indeed.'

'And so have I,' cried Peter. 'Often. But that was usually just because Big Al's House O' Porn was closing in five minutes.'

'But he was very light to carry,' she resumed, intent upon her work, 'and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble: no trouble. And there is your father at the door!'

She hurried out to meet him; and Leo came in. His beer was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Herreras got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, 'Don't mind it, father. Don't be pissed!'

Leo was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Herrera and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

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'Sunday! You went to-day, then, Leo?' said his wife.

'Yes, my dear,' returned Leo. 'I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!' cried Leo. 'My little brat of a child!'

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother surfing the Inter-net still. Leo told them of the extraordinary kindness of Charlie Clouser, who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little-just a little pissed off you know,' said Leo, inquired what had happened to distress him. 'On which,' said Leo, 'for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. 'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Herrera,' he said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' By the bye, how he ever knew that, I don't know.'

'Knew what, my dear.'

'Why, that you were good in the sack,' replied Leo.

'Everybody knows that.' said Peter.

'Very well observed, my boy.' cried Leo. 'I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his pager number, 'give me a page sometime.' Now, it wasn't,' cried Leo, 'for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Meathead, and felt with us.'

'I'm sure he's a good soul!' said Mrs. Herrera.

'You would be surer of it, my dear,' returned Leo, 'if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised -- mark what I say! -- if he got Peter a better situation.'

'And then,' cried one of the girls, 'Peter will be keeping company with some strippers, and setting up for himself.'

'It's just as likely as not,' said Leo, 'one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and when ever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Meathead -- shall we -- or this first parting that there was among us?'

'Never, Dad!' cried they all.

'I am very happy,' said Leo, 'I need more beer!'

'Spectre,' said Trent, 'something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what guy that was whom we saw lying dead?'

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him, as before -- though at a different time, he thought: indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future -- into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Trent to stop for a moment.

'This place,' said Trent, 'through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see Nothing Studios. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come.'

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

'My studio is right here,' Trent exclaimed. 'Why do you point away?'

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Trent hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life; choked up with too much burying; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place!

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“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 13)

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

'Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point,' said Trent, 'answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?'

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

'Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead,' said Trent. 'But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!'

The Spirit was immovable as ever.



Trent crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Trent Reznor.

'Am I that man who lay upon the bed?' he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

'No, Spirit! Oh no, no! Shit! This sucks!'

The finger still was there.

'Spirit!' he cried, tight clutching at its robe, 'hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if there is no hope for me, after all is said and done?'

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

'Good Spirit,' he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: 'Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life?'

The kind hand trembled.

'I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try not to be such a dick to people in general. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!'

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

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“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 14)

Chapter Five: The End of All This Crap

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in.

'I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!' Trent repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. 'The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh, Richard Patrick! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Richard, on my hands and knees!'

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and he was slipping on the tears the Spirit made him cry.

'They are not torn down.' cried Trent, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, 'they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here -- I am here -- the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will! They fucking better be, anyway!'

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

'I don't know just what I should do!' cried Trent, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings. 'I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man, like Leo Herrera! A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Yee-haw! Hallo!'

Really, for a man who had been too 'goth' for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

'I don't know what day of the month it is.' said Trent. 'I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a sissy. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a sissy. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo there!'

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell! Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet smell of sunshine; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!

'What's to-day?' cried Trent, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

'Hey, you're Trent Reznor!' returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

'I said, what's to-day, my fine fellow?' said Trent.

'You dumb ass,' replied the boy, 'it's Christmas.'

'It's Christmas Day!' said Trent to himself. 'I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!'

'Yeah, whatever,' returned the boy.

'Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?' Trent inquired.

'God, leave me alone!' replied the lad.

'An intelligent boy!' said Trent. 'A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? -- Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?'

'What the hell are you talking about?' returned the boy.

'What a delightful boy!' said Trent. 'It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!'

'Your buck, what?' replied the boy. 'I'm telling my mom.'

'No, no,' said Trent, 'I am in earnest. Go and buy a turkey, and tell them to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you twenty bucks. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I'll give you thirty!'

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The boy was off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand at a trigger who could have got a shot off half so fast.

'I'll send it to Leo Herrera's.' whispered Trent, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. 'He sha'nt know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Meathead!'

The handwriting in which he wrote the address was quite sloppy, but write it he did, somehow, and went down-stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man.

It was a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped them short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

'Why, it's impossible to carry that to Leo's house,' said Trent. 'You must have a cab.'

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he gave the boy his thirty bucks, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he got stomach cramps.



He dressed himself all in his best, and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Trent regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, 'Wow, look, Trent's smiling for once!'

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and almost got arrested. He had never dreamed that any walk -- that anything -- could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his keyboardist's house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

'Is Charlie here, my dear?' said Trent to the girl.

'Yeah, he's in the dining room.'

'Thank you. He knows me,' said Trent, with his hand already on the dining-room lock, 'well, he thinks he does.'

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always anal-retentive on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

'Charlie!' said Trent.

'What the hell?' cried Charlie, 'who's that?'

'It's I. Industrial rock god Trent Reznor. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Charlie?'

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. Danny Lohner looked just the same. So did Robin Finck when he came. So did Jerome Dillon when he came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the studio next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Leo Herrera coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Leo. A quarter past. No Leo. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Trent sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into his room.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his pants too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

'Hey!' growled Trent, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. 'What do you mean by coming here so fucking late?'

'I am very sorry, sir,' said Leo. 'I am hung over.'

'You are!' repeated Trent. 'Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please.'

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THE MEATHEAD PERSPECTIVE



Wednesday, August 11, 1999

<http://www.theninhotline.net/meatpers/meatpers.html>

“A NIN-mas Carol” (page 16)

'It's only once a year, sir,' pleaded Leo, appearing from his room. 'It shall not be repeated. I was getting really shit-faced yesterday, sir.'

'Now, I'll tell you what, man,' said Trent, 'I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,' he continued, leaping from his plush leather chair, and giving Leo such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into his room again; 'and therefore I am going to take you out to the strip club later!'

Leo trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary lapse of reason, and the idea of knocking Trent down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-jacket.

'A merry Christmas, Leo!' said Trent, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he claped him on the back. 'A merrier Christmas, Leo, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your poor, stinky family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon! Make up the fires, and buy another six-pack before you dot another i, Leo Herrera!'

Trent was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Meathead, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; screw them, for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. He was happy: and that was quite enough for him.

He was nice to people ever afterwards; and he was able to release a lovely double-album entitled 'The Fragile'. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Meathead observed, It's about fucking time already!

The End.