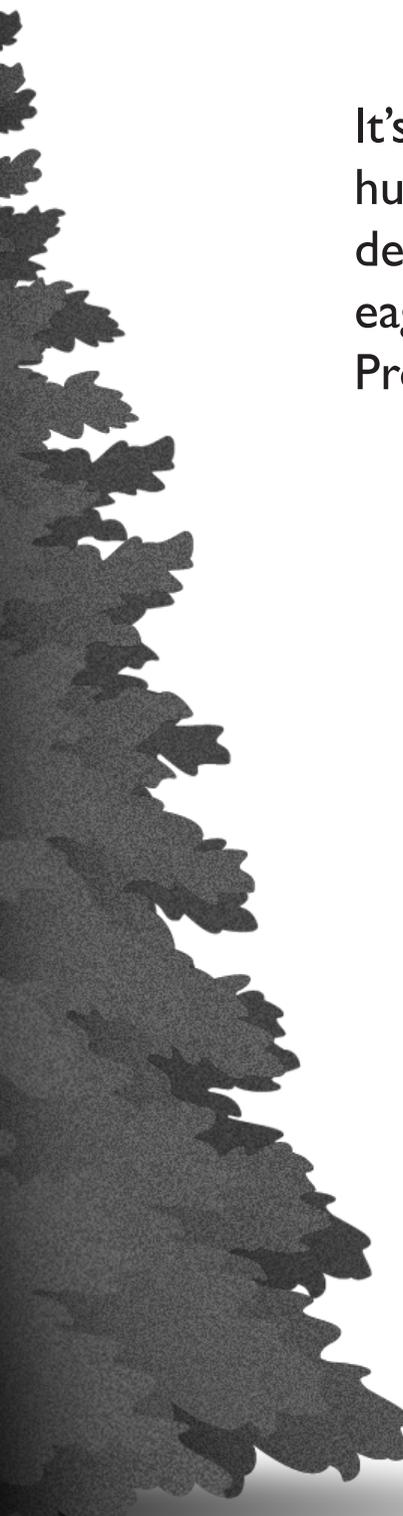




CHRISTMAS IN THE NIGHT ZOO

By the Night Zookeeper



It's Christmas Eve in the Night Zoo. A wreath hangs from the huge metal gates and a number of the animals have begun to decorate their enclosures. The beaver's dam is draped in tinsel, the eagle's nest is covered in sparkling golden stars and the Penguin Professor's house is adorned with thousands of fairy lights.

Winter Flowers

In the centre of the zoo, on top of the Elephant Temple, stands a huge Christmas tree made entirely of green light bulbs. The bulbs cast their light outward, illuminating many large red and silver baubles which hang above the zoo, seemingly attached to nothing but the clouds. Even the Night Zookeeper has covered his magical Teleporting Torch in a golden Christmas bow.

"T'woo T'wis the season," sing out the owls flying overhead.

Below, the Night Zookeeper begins his final nightly round before Christmas in a terrible mood. He drags his feet and sighs to the stars. "It's so unfair!" he declares unhappily.

The winter flowers in their earthy beds beside him bend their stems and cock their heads, as if to ask; "What's unfair?" So he continues, "Why doesn't Father Christmas visit animals as well?"

The winter flowers all bob together in silent agreement and nod themselves back into an icy sleep, leaving the Night Zookeeper alone with his troubles.

Light Bauble Moment

The Night Zookeeper likes to be faced with tricky questions, particularly those with currently sad and unfair answers. Therefore it isn't long before his head is whirling like a computer hard drive, looking for a way to right this wrong. The answer strikes him just as a bauble hanging above is lit up by the moonlight; "I could be Father Christmas for the animals and give them all presents!"

He races back to Night Zookeeper HQ and starts a list of all of the presents that he could give his animal friends in the zoo.

He sits at his desk ready to start writing but finds his pen stuck in the top left corner of the paper. For ten minutes his pen moves more slowly than a turtle with nowhere in particular to be. Coming up with ideas for presents is a lot harder than he imagined. There are so many animals in the Night Zoo and they all have different interests!

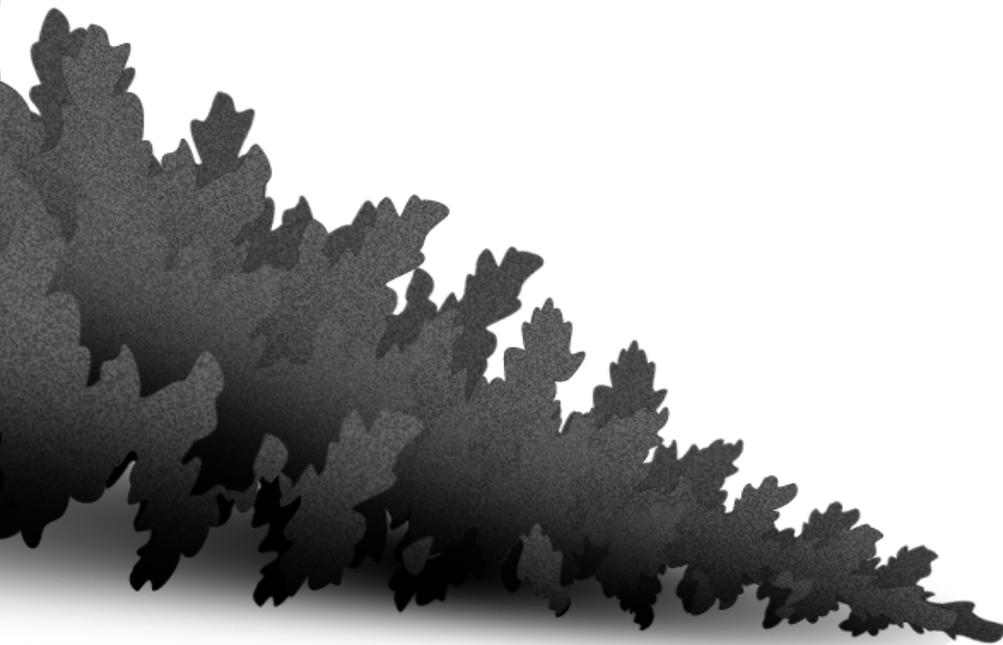
Deciding he has to start somewhere he finally writes, 'The Time Travelling Elephant' and ideas start to flash through his mind. First he sees a space hopper, which she sits on and pops. Then an iPad, which she steps on and breaks and a Christmas jumper that just looks ridiculous.

Finally a Grandfather clock appears in his mind. He jumps up and runs into a back room. There stands the most marvellous looking Grandfather clock. It is made of an old, dark wood and has carved into it, cats wearing cowboy outfits hunting down mice dressed as Indians.

He smiles, knowing how much the elephant likes time and fears mice, this should make an excellent gift. He returns to his list and writes beside the Time Travelling Elephant's name 'Grandfather Clock', before adding the names of more of the animals in the zoo and starting to imagine all manner of great gifts.



It is nearing the end of the Night Zookeeper's Christmas Night. He has spent the evening giving gifts to the magical animals that live in the Night Zoo and he just needs to deliver the Grandfather clock to the Time Travelling Elephant and he will be done.



Christmas Night

He teleports to the Elephant Temple doors.

"I really should have delivered this first," he mutters to himself, dragging the old clock on a sledge behind him up the porch steps.

He huffs and puffs and gruffs and stuffs the sledge through the temple entrance, calling out Merry Christmas to the Time Travelling Elephant and asking for her help... but no answer comes. He stands the clock up in the corner of the main chamber and goes searching for her. 'Hello,' he whispers, "Hello!" he shouts, "HELLO!" he yells but still no reply comes.

He gets out his torch and begins searching the many different elephant sized rooms that adjoin the main temple. He visits room after room and with each empty space his mood worsens. "I've brought her a present, the least she could do is be here to receive it." he mutters walking out of yet another empty room.

BANG! CLATTER! CRASH! The sudden noise make the Night Zookeeper nearly jump out of his skin. Something else is here, but maybe it isn't the Time Travelling Elephant... The silence that follows isn't a peaceful one. It is a silence full of fear, even the Night Zookeeper himself breathes as quietly as possible; willing his ears bigger so as to detect the smallest of sounds.

He makes his way slowly towards the room where the sound had come from, pointing his torch out in front of him as he goes. He takes a deep breath and edges his head around the door frame, there covered in Christmas decorations, stands an apologetic looking Sam the Spying Giraffe.

"MERRY CHRISTMAS!" shouts the Time Travelling Elephant, "Sorry we wanted to surprise you, but I suspect Sam just ended up scaring you!" Slowly from the darkness emerged Paul the Penguin Professor, Ant the Anthropologist and Florence Flamingo with a special gift just for The Night Zookeeper.