

[Singing from radio: Dashing through the snow, in a one horse open . . .]

We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a special news bulletin.

Long time North Pole resident Kris Kringle (aka Sam Claus) has been reported missing without a trace just hours before Christmas Eve. Previous reports confirm the jolly old man had been suffering from Advanced Christmas Anxiety and Distress Disorder (otherwise known as C-A-D-Duhduh) but so far no clues have emerged as to his whereabouts. Meanwhile the National Guard has been dispatched to investigate primal screams and paranormal activity detected inside the Arctic Circle. We'll continue to bring you the latest updates.

“Hmmpf, The old coot should have retired centuries ago. Anybody can see he can’t compete in the digital age.” My Uncle Herb mumbled, nearly choking on mouthfuls of a leftover fruitcake he managed to inhale like loose change.

“Maybe he's been abducted,” I suggested jokingly.

：“More likely joy riding,” Herb replied. “And Good luck traveling in that jalopy of a sleigh. Should have retired that too.”

“But who will deliver our presents,” my little brother JJ asked, his eyes welling up to the size of flying saucers.

“Don’t worry, there's always a Plan B, and I've got one,” Herb said almost triumphantly. “All we really need is a vehicle with the speed and safety record to make it around the world in just under 24 hours.”

“Uh, oh,” I thought. The “Uh oh” of course was in response to the 'We' pronoun.

“Why can't we we just call FEDEX?” JJ asked.

“Because, little genius, even FedEx isn't going to go almost 25,000 miles in 24 hours. According to my calculations, you'll need a vehicle that can go at least 760 mph to make that trip.”

I had recently heard that military planes could go 1500 mph, but I didn't dare challenge Herb on his logic.

“We won't have to find another driver for a sleigh because there won't be a sleigh.” Herb added. My solution is self-driving, sustainable, able to navigate any terrain—land, air, ocean, extraterrestrial.”

Herb paused. J.J. And I sat motionless, preparing for the but, except or some other preposition that would indicate this was a less than perfect plan..

“My 1964 Buick Skylark.” He announced proudly, pointing toward his garage.

“Powered by AI. More efficient than ANY vehicle in automotive history. 100% profit for me (I mean 'Us'), and the kiddies all get their presents on time without a glitch.”

J.J. and I shook our heads in unison.

“With a little quality control testing we'll be ready go live a few hours from now,” Herb explained. “Of course we'll need a few testers. Siri, Gemini, and the three of us. That'll do.”

Everyone got right to work. Tires rotating [sfx], Engine rev'ing [sfx], Dashboard flashing [sfx] like christmas lights on a Times Square billboard. Herb's garage, aka Santa's workshop, was flooded with the joyful noises of hope and the loose change still dancing in Herb's head. [sfx: sounds of entire workshop]

Every function of the car was meticulously grilled. Transmission, check. [Automatic Emergency Braking](#), check. [Forward Collision Warning](#), check. The list went on til over 100 AI-powered features had been cleared to go.

Then Siri yelled: “Hey, don't forget to check the wipers; There'll be snow.”

I turned on the wipers. And as if the sky had just been ripped open, the Skylark started screeching:

“Danger Will Robinson, Danger!!!” First, we all just stared blankly at each other, wondering what abberant code could have caused this glitch.

Our cold stare eventually melted into an upward gaze as we witnessed a strange beam of light hovering over the garage. We heard an otherworldly whirl and whatever it was bathed the Skylark in its dazzling glow. We also heard the faint sounds of a keyboard and the click of a mouse; after which, the screeching just faded to silence---a silence so serene it was as if peace on earth had settled in Western New York.

We cheered. The Skylark was ready to fly. And the countdown began. Christmas Eve was here, and true to tradition, not a creature was stirring, except the smartphones, of course, all sending notification beeps and bongs to ensure all gift recipients had the most up-to-date tracking information.

But Murphy's Law doesn't take a break for Christmas and for our mission, the worst was still yet to come. Shortly after takeoff and without warning, the Skylark started to veer off its course and spin like a UFO gone viral. Presents went flying out of the back seat, from under the seats, hood, trunk and glove compartment, even from the undercarriage and through the windshield—soon to be ---you guessed it . . . lost in space. And instead of getting delivered to their proper street addresses, due to QR codes colliding every which way and becoming unscannable, the presents ended up in spam folders of recipient email addresses.

What a nightmare. We needed a miracle and fast. . . AI AI AI. I couldn't get the letters out of my mind. Was I too being programmed by this unseen sinister algorithmic force masquerading as simple arithmetic?

We interrupt this program. . . again. . . with another special news bulletin. The previously reported missing Kris Kringle has just been spotted riding in the back seat of a 1964 Buick Skylark, apparently driving itself. Whatever is driving the skylark is also controlling every other vehicle—trains, planes, automobiles, scooters, desktops, laptops, tablets and mobile devices—in essence, anything and everything digitally operated that might be infected with ---alien intelligence. So, we're asking all of you listening out there to turn off all your devices, and leave them off until we've resolved this crisis and the world is safely offline again. Oh, and another thing, don't reboot.

"I've got it," I found myself screaming at the top of my Uncle's lungs.

"What now," Herb snapped, still trying to renovate a smashed up QR code.

"Music," I answered simply. . . "Music can calm the beast in anything. "

"Calm it, we need to kill it!" Herb groaned. "Didn't you hear that news bulletin? We need to turn everything off. Including the Skylark." Herb then began fidgeting with a small hand held device that seemed to be flashing to the tune of 'Jingle Bells.' "But before we do that, we'll need to use the GPS tracker in the remote to locate the Skylark first and deactivate its AI controls. All right then, Here we go!" (Geronimo effect of voice)

All at once, an organ started playing. Gasping and choking sounds emanated from all the machines—as if they too were stricken with Christmas Anxiety and Distress Disorder. And after just a few seconds they all crumbled into lifeless lumps resembling leftover fruitcake.

Meanwhile, the Skylark had morphed into a sparkling red sleigh powered by eight tiny but very fuel efficient reindeer; as celestial harmonies filled Christmas morning. Yes, we had traveled the 25000 miles to save a most precious day. Not by artificial or even alien intelligence but by an Amazing Intervention. And even though not a single present got delivered, something far greater and more powerful did.