

A Snowflake's Guide to Christmas

How to survive a deeply
problematic holiday



DAVE SKINNER



Atlantic Books
London

Published in hardback in Great Britain in 2020 by Atlantic Books,
an imprint of Atlantic Books Ltd.

Copyright © Dave Skinner, 2020

The moral right of Dave Skinner to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior
permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

Every effort has been made to trace or contact all copyright holders. The
publishers will be pleased to make good any omissions or rectify any
mistakes brought to their attention at the earliest opportunity.

The picture acknowledgements on p. 134 constitute an extension of this
copyright page.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Illustrations by Carmen R. Balit unless otherwise noted

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Hardback ISBN: 978 1 83895 209 9

E-book ISBN: 978 1 83895 210 5

Printed in Great Britain

Atlantic Books

An imprint of Atlantic Books Ltd

Ormond House

26–27 Boswell Street

London

WC1N 3JZ

www.atlantic-books.co.uk



To Sal, Charlie, Grace and
all the Snowflakes everywhere







Contents



Introduction	* * * * *	1
The Problem with Christmas Trees	* * * * *	7
The Problem with Christmas Crackers	* * * *	13
The Problem with Carol Singers	* * * * *	21
The Problem with Christmas Shopping	* * *	25
The Problem with Gifts for Children	* * * * *	31
The Problem with Gifts for Grown-Ups	* * * *	37
The Problem with Christmas Decorations	* *	45
The Problem with Christmas Cards	* * * * *	49
The Problem with Christmas Food (& Drink)	*	55
The Problem with Family Gatherings	* * * *	65
The Problem with Christmas Party Games	* *	71
The Problem with Office Christmas Parties	* *	77







The Problem with Santa * * * * * 85

The Problem with Snow * * * * * 93

The Problem with Christmas Music * * * * * 99



The Problem with Christmas TV * * * * * 107

The Problem with New Year's Eve * * * * * 117

The Problem with New Year's Resolutions * * 123

The Problem with Conclusions * * * * * 127

Appendix A: A Snowflake's Christmas



Letter to Santa * * * * * 129

Appendix B: Emotional Support Animals

to Quell Christmas-Induced Rage * * * * * 131





*Christmas is a time
for snowflakes...*

Introduction



Like so many things that predate Instagram, Christmas can be a deeply problematic season for any compassionate, contemporary person who considers themselves switched-on, sensitive and socially engaged. Outwardly a time of light-hearted fun and celebration, it's arguably a motorway pile-up of intersectional issues.

*But also
for snowflakes...*



When else are you likely to find so many people of different generations, often with such diverse beliefs and opinions, compelled to come together? Usually in a confined, overly warm, heavily tinselled domestic environment, where there are astonishing amounts of free alcohol on tap, where old grievances and familial recriminations can quickly bubble over, and where there is a constant underlying pressure to HAVE FUN.

Aside from all the potentially explosive 'chat', Christmas is a time of colossal consumption. Not just of vast quantities of booze and food (especially heartbreaking, climate crisis-inducing meat), but also of STUFF.

Christmas is all about exchanging stuff: plastic stuff, shiny stuff, sparkly stuff – much of which cannot be recycled. You're obliged, by the unspoken laws of the festive season, to give people stuff you're not entirely sure they'll

want – and, in return, to receive and say 'thank you' for stuff you don't really want or need.

Frankly, for a modern millennial, Yuletide can be a merry freaking minefield.

This book is here to help.

Whether you yourself are a loud, proud, wide a-woke Snowflake, you're related to one, or you work with one – and need to give him/her/they/them a 'Secret Santa' gift – this invaluable guide is packed full of relevant and contemporary festive hacks, hints and tips designed to help you navigate this most troubling of holidays.

Over the following pages, *A Snowflake's Guide to Christmas* breaks down the component parts of the 'classic Christmas', identifies where the most problematic triggers lie, then offers advice and solutions to help achieve safe passage through the potentially choppy Christmas waters...

A note on terminology

The current use of the word ‘Snowflake’ as a derogatory term for liberal-minded, easily offended individuals has its origins in Chuck Palahniuk’s 1996 novel *Fight Club*, in which a member of the anarchist group Project Mayhem tells the other members, ‘You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake.’

Recent events (Brexit, Trump, the climate emergency, the verbal diarrhoea of Katie Hopkins) have brought the term into widespread use, particularly in the right-wing press, where it is used to lambast anyone with even the vaguest hint of a conscience.

For many people, even the word ‘Snowflake’ itself has a triggering effect, and some may question its use in this book (I call these people ‘meta-Snowflakes’).

The author uses the term here in an attempt to ‘reappropriate’ it, throwing it back in the faces of those who use it to stigmatize us. So be loud, proud progressives and reclaim the label, and remember... enough Snowflakes can make an avalanche.



The 'Are you a Snowflake?' checklist

Before you begin reading this book, you may want to check whether you are, in fact, a Snowflake.

Take a look at these questions, which should help you decide how strong your Snowflake status may or may not be:



1. Is this girl...?

- a) A heroine, one of the most important voices in the modern world
- b) A bit intense
- c) Annoying



2. Is this man...?

- a) A force for evil, one of the most hateful figures in the modern world
- b) Probably just as bad as all the other politicians
- c) Doing a great job!



3. When you see this, do you want to...?

- a) Scream, shout and sob at the sheer inhumanity of it all
- b) Give Veganuary a try
- c) Get a milkshake





4. If someone gave you this, would you...?

- a) Glue yourself to the nearest train, as a mark of protest against climate change
- b) Put it in a drawer with the spare batteries, keys, screws and rubber bands, and forget about it
- c) Use it to assemble the scale model you're building of the world's biggest passenger airliner – the massive (and gorgeous) Airbus A380.



5. When you look into one of these, do you see...?

- a) A unique and precious individual, capable of extraordinary things and deserving of every opportunity to be the best version of themselves
- b) Someone who could probably make a bit more of an effort
- c) Muggins

If you answered all or **mostly As**, congratulations, you are a bona fide, card-carrying Snowflake.

If you answered **mostly Cs**, you are not at all a Snowflake – in fact, you are a 'Noflake'.

If you plumped for **mostly Bs**, you sit roughly midway on the spectrum of Snowflakery. By the end of this book, you might well find you've gone further one way or the other...

The good news is, whatever result you came up with, this guide has something to offer *everyone* as Christmas approaches. So, without further ado, let's crack on.



The Problem with Christmas Trees



You don't need to be Greta T to know that trees are beautiful, precious, life-giving... Now more than ever we should celebrate and cherish them; they are the carbon-cleansing lungs of this poor, beleaguered planet.

So, let's be honest, there's something more than a little problematic about growing a Christmas tree, only to chop it down in the prime of its life, stick it in the corner of a living room, festoon it with cheap tinsel and fairy lights, then watch it slowly die. You wouldn't do it to a cow, so why do it to a conifer?

Like the turkey – another of the great losers in the Yuletide game – Christmas trees have long been the woody victims of systemic oppression.

Denied their true names in the cause of consumerism, the noble Douglas fir, majestic Fraser fir, fragrant balsam fir and countless proud pines are rebranded as generic, anonymous 'Christmas trees'. Intensively farmed all year round, saplings are cultivated with limited space and in vast numbers

– like green, branchy, battery hens. Then they are



Jack

@Jack99Croydon

Happy NY. Unless you're a Christmas tree... They're lying in the street up and down my road, like dead prostitutes... Makes me want to cry all day. #friendofthefir

literally cut off in their prime and displaced from the other so-called 'Christmas trees', squirrels and associated woodland creatures they've come to know – only to be pimped with

gaudy decorations and heavy baubles, then unceremoniously chucked outside into the cold by 5th January.

It's an ecological horror story.

From this...





To this...

And then this.



Possible Solutions

- ✿ Rather than cut a tree down and kill it, you could give it a little holiday in your home... Increasingly, garden centres and nurseries offer a **Christmas-tree hire service**. Often, they'll even deliver and collect the tree to save you the bother. It's a win-win: you get to have a tree for the festive season, the tree gets a change of scene – and, best of all, it can carry on growing after it's returned. (Just make sure it's grown sustainably, by looking for the FSC or Soil Association logo.)
- ✿ Instead of a Christmas 'tree', why not welcome a **Christmas pot plant** into your home? An aloe vera plant requires very little care, costs less than £10, and will live for years, given a little TLC. A nice silk ribbon around its pot will make it 'pop' for Christmas and saves the environmental cost and headache of stringy, tangled lights. As a bonus, the leaves contain a clear gel that can help heal first- and second-degree burns. So, if your neighbour's twinkly illuminations set their conventional Christmas tree on fire and burn their house down, you can offer more than just a cup of cocoa...
- ✿ **Draw or paint a picture of a Christmas tree.** All this requires is a large piece of paper, a little artistic imagination and a few blobs of Blu-Tack. Alternatively, coat a wall with blackboard paint (available in all good DIY stores) and draw a jolly Christmas tree using coloured chalk. Friends and family can muck in, and you can change the tree and its decorations every day if you like... Christmas cactus? Christmas oak? Christmas monkey puzzle tree? Anything's possible...



If a friend or family member (probably of a different generation) takes issue with these Christmas tree alternatives, why not suggest that they become a **human Christmas tree**. Offer to drape them in tinsel and lights, and hang baubles from any piercings they might have. Make a space in the corner amongst the presents, where they can stand still and silent, largely ignored, with their arms outstretched for a few hours.

#SolidarityWithThePine #ScrewYouAuntieSue







The Problem with Christmas Crackers

Interesting historical fact: Christmas crackers were first devised around 1845–1850 by a London sweet-maker called Tom Smith.

On a trip to Paris, Tom had seen the French 'bonbon' sweets (almonds wrapped in pretty paper) and had tried, fairly unsuccessfully, to sell these back home, accompanied by a small motto or riddle. Legend has it that Tom was sitting in front of a crackling, popping log fire, when inspiration hit him... Wouldn't it be fun if his sweets, or even toys, could be accompanied by a 'crack' when their elaborate wrappers were pulled in half!

After much R&D, in 1861 Tom launched what he called his 'Bangs of Expectation', and the rest is history...

For today's ecologically aware, environmentally sensitive soul, the principal problem with Christmas crackers is that they are to 'low waste' what RuPaul is to 'shy and retiring'. (A secondary problem is that they are, by and large, crap.)



A typical Christmas family braced for cracker-based disappointment

Modern-day crackers are, generally, over-priced and underwhelming. The bang you get – if you get one at all – rarely lives up to the buck that was spent. Worse than the waste of money and the post-pull anticlimax, though, is the cracker's anti-eco status: shiny, foil-coated or glittery cardboard crackers cannot be recycled.

To add insult to injury – like swearing at Mother Nature and then kicking her in the shins – they usually contain a 'surprise' you don't want or need, often made out of non-recyclable, single-use plastic. All that, and you get a scrap of paper with a joke that's staler than last year's Christmas stuffing – whether you want it or not.

It's time the cracker was called out as the pointless, wasteful, eco hand grenade it really is.



Just a few of the Christmas cracker 'surprises' you don't need or want, and which cannot be 'unmade'... 'Game of microscopic skittles, anyone?'

Five Things You're Unlikely To Hear After The Pulling Of A Christmas Cracker

1. ❄️ 'OMG! A plastic jumping frog! I LOVE it!'
2. ❄️ 'This flimsy paper crown makes me feel like the actual Queen of England!'
3. ❄️ 'Yikes, that bang was so spectacular I think Grandad might be having a heart attack!'
4. ❄️ 'This tiny, ineffectual plastic magnifying glass will be invaluable to me in my work as a hairdresser. I will treasure it ALWAYS.'
5. ❄️ 'There's real wisdom in this "truth-telling fish". From now on, for every major life decision - I'm going to consult it first!'



Possible Solutions

If you think the absence of crackers at your Christmas table will lead to a festive family uprising – tears, anger, possibly even violence – there are companies online that make more sustainable, ‘bespoke’ or ‘curated’ crackers. However, these tend to be expensive, and most people born after 1995 need to save their precious pennies to pay for rent, clothes and electric Ubers.

Why not save your money and the planet’s resources, by sharing ‘virtual crackers’ with your loved ones? Not only are these cheap, they’re fun and can be tailored to the person you ‘pull’ them with...

! How To Pull A Virtual Cracker

1. Turn to the person immediately next to you, gently hold their wrists up in front of their face about six inches apart, then swiftly clap their hands together. At the point of impact shout, 'Bang!' or 'Crack!', or, if you'd prefer, something else – for example: 'Wow!', 'Howzat!', or 'Shit the bed!'.
2. In place of a traditional paper 'crown', put on their head one of your own hats from your personal collection: a woolly hat you knitted yourself, a nice beanie, a beret, a fedora, a fez, whatever you've got. (Don't forget to get your hat back at the end of proceedings. Beanies, berets, fedoras and fezzes don't grow on trees and will last a lifetime if you take care of them.)
3. Swap out a small, useless, disposable plastic 'gift', for something larger, more meaningful and longer lasting – the gift of wisdom. Look the person next to you in the eye and tell them 'a truth', for example:

'Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.' - Albert Einstein

'The world will see you the way you see you, and treat you the way you treat yourself.' - Beyoncé

'Uncle Ian, that moustache makes you look like a paedophile.'

4. Instead of reading them a corny joke with a clunky Christmas pun, find a different way to make them laugh – for example: tickle them/randomly blow a loud, wet raspberry at the youngest, oldest or most pompous person seated at the table/make an extravagant and surprising claim, e.g. 'This Christmas, I've shaved the cat!'

5. Hug them briefly but firmly, then move on.



Alternative Christmas Cracker Jokes

Knock, knock

Who's there?

Cow says

Cow says who?

No, a cow says, 'Moo.' And then it says, 'Why do you continue to persecute me like this? You can get milk from rice, almonds, even coconuts – you heartless monster!'

Who's a Snowflake's favourite festive pop star?
Beyon-sleigh!

Why would Santa Claus never make demands on the
already overstretched NHS?
Because he has private elf care.

How do you know Santa came down your chimney?
Because the carpet's covered in his carbon footprints.

Why did the little polar bear cry?
Because he had his gloves and scarf, but he'd lost his ice cap.

Why did the turkey cross the road?
To get into an Uber and get the hell out of town.

What's Donald Trump's favourite Christmas confectionery?
A Chocolate Orange.





The Problem with Carol Singers

In what world would anyone think it was okay to gather together a gang, knock on a stranger's door, sing a medley of quasi-religious and outmoded songs at them, then demand money to go away again? It's like a flash mob crossed with a mugging, an orchestrated act of audio-aggression, a deliberate infringement of a person's basic space and rights, all dressed up as festive fun.

Welcome to Christmas carolling.



Bad...

Worse...



The dictionary describes a carol as *'a joyful hymn or religious song, especially one celebrating the birth of Christ'*, so tough luck if you happen to follow a different religious path, or you're not interested in/are sceptical about the true story of baby J.

Unfortunately, most carollers don't take this into account: their motto is *'You get what you get, and you don't get upset.'* If they do take requests, chances are it'll be a golden oldie – they'll be unlikely to belt out anything by Beyoncé, David Guetta or Lizzo.

So, if confronted by carollers, what should you do...?

Possible Solutions

❄️ **A large water pistol.** Greta T and the Extinction Rebellion protesters have demonstrated that actions speak louder than words, that disrupting normal practices can spark debate and ultimately effect change. The ‘Super Soaker Hydra’ is available online (priced at approx. £15), and will swiftly dampen the spirits and mock Victorian garb of even a sizeable group of earnest Yuletide yodellers. If this seems too extreme, you could replace the water with a festive-themed liquid – for example, lukewarm mulled wine might soften the blow.



❄️ **A sign on the front door** which reads: *I am deaf, please don't try to sing at me. In doing so, you merely highlight the difference between myself and those who are able-eared. Please save us both the embarrassment – and you the strain to your vocal cords – and move on. Merry Christmas.'*

❄️ **Fight fire with (musical) fire.** Open the door, smile encouragingly and listen politely as the singers progress through their Judeo-Christian/Santa-themed set list. Then, when they've finished and ask you for a small donation, say 'My turn!' and sing back at them. Sing something you enjoy – Taylor Swift's 'Shake It Off', Sia's 'Chandelier', maybe something by Korean boy-band sensation BTS... Just really give it some welly, then bid them a festive farewell and shut the door.