

All I Want for Christmas is to Cancel the Office Holiday Party

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A game for 6 characters (needs playtesting before I feel confident if it plays right without a full cast)

Fall is nearly over and the shadow of Christmas will soon be upon you. And with Christmas comes the dreaded office holiday party. Most of your peers love the event.

Everyone except you.

All of you are absolutely miserable at the party, but for different reasons. The problem is that while the party isn't mandatory, it is THE gathering of the year and missing tends to have both social and professional consequences.

The Setting: All and all you don't have a bad job. The work is easy enough; you get paid a decent salary, and nobody is too abusive in the workplace. Sure; it's not perfect, but most other places are worse. And every year the top brass "shows their appreciation" by going all out on an office party right before everyone takes off for Christmas. On the surface it sounds like a good time, everyone wears stupid sweaters, exchanges gifts, eats some free food, and drinks a whole bunch. Every year new epic stories and juicy gossip comes out of the drunken debauchery and everyone comes back after the New Year de-stressed and refreshed.

It's unimaginable that anybody in their right mind would want to miss the one night that work is fun. In fact the company puts a lot of pressure on everyone to make sure there's 100% attendance. Of course that's not the official policy; but there are plenty of rumors of coworkers who went from top performers to being forced out of the company after skipping. Nothing overt; and certainly nothing that can be proven, but there's a clear message that if you want to have a future here you will be there and be merry.

This is a problem for you six as you all find the party uncomfortable. Each of you has figured out the other people who hate the party and have decided to talk about what to do about it. You have gotten together over the next 90 minutes to discuss your experiences and what it would take for you to feel like you belong at the event. Do you feel secure in bringing your concerns to management? Are they even things that can be resolved? Is there any hope for the party? Or will you make a big enough issue of this where HR will look at shutting the whole thing down?

Each character will come from a different department, and will know the other characters but not that well. Your character will be provided with a background and experience that makes it clear why they don't enjoy the party. They will also have their own beliefs and emotions about the holiday. These will lead to an instinct; a pattern of how they generally behave, and a trigger; a behavior that they can't suppress in a given situation.

To play, first each player looks over the characters. Think very hard about who you might feel comfortable playing and if there are any concerns you would have from your fellow players. Before choosing a character, have a discussion with the other players about tone and comfort and establish any content that you or your fellow players do not feel comfortable covering. Establish agreed upon safety mechanics (there are tons of resources out there, but for this submission they are not being included here) before proceeding. Once all of the players understand and feel secure in how their and their peers' safety is being guaranteed, discuss who will play which character. When everyone has a character and is ready; start the meeting (in person or online).

[Side Note: When reading the characters it may sound that this is a toxic workplace because it is. That said, the characters don't fully recognize this because everywhere else they've ever seen has been worse]

Author's Thoughts About the Game: While on the surface this may look like a game where you complain about Christmas and corporate culture; it's really about a lot more. It's about the difference between having your minimum needs met and having them understood. It's about the difference between token representation and respect and understanding. It's about missing how the norms we take for granted could be destructive for others. It's about how we assume everyone experiences the world around us in the same way even when our very perception is shaped by our

unique histories. And more than anything it's about how easy it is to assume something in our culture is a universal experience. The point of this LARP isn't to come up with a solution to the problems with Christmas; it's to open our understanding of how something that seems so positive can turn out to be harmful in unexpected ways. In other words, feel free to Breakfast Club it up in here.

Accounting (Please let me move on)

Background: You used to love this time of year. Sure it was busy, but it was also fun. But everything changed a few years ago when; well, that still hurts and you don't feel like talking about it. But it happened after the holiday parting and that makes it a grim reminder of what happened. You tried; not the next year, but the one after that. But seeing everyone happy and free, and then seeing you, not, and the sudden realization crossing their face; that hurts too. You tried a few more times but it never got better. So you stopped going, and that was, well not fine, but better. Except then you noticed a few things after you did. First you were passed up for a promotion; you were told you just weren't the right fit. Then you got dumped with all the messy accounts. Finally your performance reviews started showing phrases like "not a team player" and "doesn't engage with company culture". You couldn't figure out what you're doing wrong so you talked with a few friends who left the company and they confirmed what you thought; attendance at the party isn't as optional as it sounds.

Instinct: Control the situation. You don't like surprises, so if there's chaos you want to see it reigned in.

Trigger: Your tragedy is tied to family; react when people talk about family

Client Support (I'm missed at home)

Background: Oh Christmas; what a magical time of year. The snow. The decorations. The presents. The holiday spirit. It's your favorite time of year. Unfortunately it's also the busiest time of year for you; clients need fast resolutions so they don't lose their own customers. That means your family doesn't get to see you much until after the party; and that's the real shame. This is supposed to be a time for family and the irony is that you don't. While the holiday party is a lot of fun, you're constantly distracted by it taking more time away from you and your family. You'd love it if it could just be rescheduled for during work hours.

Instinct: Stay positive. This is a wonderful time of year filled with love and joy. It's your responsibility to keep that moving.

Trigger: Christmas is a symbol of love, generosity, and good will; react when the holiday is under attack.

Information Technology (Don't force your beliefs on me)

Background: Ick, Christianity. I mean has a more terrible thing ever been created? It didn't take you long to recognize that religion was a scam; hateful pastors talking about Christ's love in the same breath they call gay people animals. You've been an atheist since you were a teen and you're never looking back. It's too bad though that Christianity is still sinking its claws into everything. I mean it's [insert year hear] and the office still has a nativity scene? The Christmas party would be a lot of fun if they would just take religion out of it. Last year when everyone joined into a sloppy rendition of "Oh Holy Night" you thought you might scream. Come on; they should make this a party for everyone.

Instinct: To point out religious flaws. You had a terrible experience with Christianity which makes you feel disgusted by the concept of religion.

Trigger: You are concerned with the suffering of others; listen and learn when someone reveals how they are being oppressed.

Marketing (I respect your religion, please respect mine)

Background: Christmas is the worst. Everyone assumes that this is the most important time in the world, but really it would barely register for you if it wasn't for the holiday obsession. So instead you're miserable for 2 months while watching everyone go crazy and as you get closer to the holiday the worst it gets. From harassment to join secret Santa, to insisting you decorate your cubicle, to your coworkers bypassing your objections to deck your desk out in blue and white tinsel and Stars of David. The party was the worst though. Everyone wished you a Happy Hanukkah (it ended last week and isn't even a holiday you do anything but light the candles for), but in the fall they never even thought to wish you a Happy New Year on Rosh Hashanah or a good Yom Kippur. The icing on the cake was when they drunkenly put a Menorah hat on your head; it didn't even have the right number of candles.

Instinct: To stay integrated. Your grandparents' generation worked hard to stop being a minority, and the fear of becoming an outsider is deeply ingrained into you. While you'd like your situation to improve you aren't willing to do so at the risk of being seen as 'different'.

Trigger: You know that a person's religion is an important part of their identity; react when religion is being disparaged.

[Cultural Notes: the Fall is actually the important time for Judaism. In addition to Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year celebrated with apples and honey; and Yom Kippur, the day of atonement where you're supposed to fast, there's also Sukkot, the harvest festival; and Simchat Torah, the day the Torah is rewound. On Christmas Eve some communities still observe Nittel Nacht, a gathering where everyone stays up late originally started to help avoid and protect against violence from Christian Communities.]

Procurement (Don't make me choose between my Job and my faith)

Background: Last year was your first holiday party and you hope it will be your last. When you were hired you were assured that your faith was respected and that the company would accommodate your needs. Indeed, they allow you to leave early on Friday, pray at the required times (you have the times blocked off on your calendar), give you space to clean up and face Mecca, lighten your load when fasting, and really have provided everything you need. And for the most part that's enough. Nobody really asks you about being Muslim, or really talks about it at all. That works for you as you tend to keep your religion private. But the party; that's a whole lot of stuff that you can't ignore. They said they'd have Halal options but it was just cheese pizza. You weren't even sure if the place was conscious of cross contamination with the pepperoni pizza so you decided to skip it entirely to be on the safe side. But the alcohol; that was the worst part. Being around intoxicated people is strictly forbidden, at least you believe so. After 15 minutes you snuck out, nobody really noticed since you can be pretty quiet.

Instinct: Don't bring attention to your religion. You were a teenager when 9-11 happened, and Islamophobia became very real. People seem pretty accepting now but you don't like to push it.

Trigger: Convictions are important to the character of a person; react when somebody ignores something you know they believe in.

[Cultural Notes: The month of Ramadan requires you to fast from sunrise to sunset; but you are allowed to eat early in the morning and in the evening. At the end of month is Eid al-Fitr; a holiday that both includes prayer as well as a feast involving a lot of sweets. Ideally if you are performing your pilgrimage on Eid al-Fitr. Later in the year is Eid al-Adha; a time to donate to the poor and is celebrated with salty foods.]

Sales (I need your help so I won't be tempted)

Background: The Holiday party has gotten rough. There was a time when you thought it was a great time. You'd drink and laugh, drink and tell stories, drink and brag, drink and cause a little trouble, drink and be one of the stories everyone would tell next year. Sometimes, in secret, you and your buddies would sneak off to take something a little less legal and come back to rip things up some more. At some point somebody would get you home to sober up; but that never really ever happened. Not fully at least. You're an alcoholic, and it took a long time to admit it. The company didn't

abandon you, even when it became well known that you used to be drunk at work frequently. They support you going to meetings, but they haven't taken alcohol out of the work; after all, what's better than a little social lubricant to seal the deal. You can handle it with clients having a few drinks on your company card, but when your coworkers are drunk off their asses, it's a different story.

Instinct: Be afraid of relapsing. Everyday you want to go out and buy a fifth of whiskey, but you don't. You're scared that one day you will.

Trigger: Your addiction should not get in the way of others having a good time; react when somebody tries to kill the fun.

After the 90, take a quiet moment to shed off your character and reground yourself in your own identity. When everyone is ready, take some time to talk about your experience in the larp and what questions you're leaving with. If your not sure what to reflect on here are some recommendations:

- What is something that you thought everyone would be comfortable with that you're now questioning?
- What is something that you weren't comfortable with but everyone else seemed to be?
- What would you like to learn more about?
- Is there anything you'd like to do differently in your life after playing this larp?