

## Cid's Christmas Carol

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- written by The Captain, with profuse apologies to Charles Dickens-



“Vincent Valentine was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that...”

Dead as a doornail. Pushing up daisies. Snoring through dirt. Six feet under. Taking the f-train. Making french fries in the big oven down below. Dead as a mackerel, sleeping with the fishes. Stiff as a wooden soldier, wearing pine pyjamas!

A white heavy snow blanketed the streets and shops of Merry Old Midgar. Children played in the streets, shoppers hurried home with parcels wrapped in brown paper and string. Chocobo carriages traveled through the town with haste and confidence. Christmas had found Midgar well.

A lone patron dressed in a dark blue overcoat and red scarf hustled down the snow-covered main street through the crowds of window shoppers and caroling groups gathered all around him.

“Bah.” The words formed white clouds around his unshaven chin, “Humbug.”

“Excuse me, sir,” A beautiful young girl dressed in a shabby red dress and matted shawl stopped him, “Would you like to buy a flower?” She motioned toward the large basket of flowers she carried at her side. Her bright green eyes looked upon him with hope and wonder, despite her circumstances. “Only 1 gil,” She smiled.

“Beat it!” The older man gruffly blasted, “I ain’t got time for this!” The street lamp above them highlighted the grey hairs protruding through his messy blonde hair, and flickered on the flight goggles perched atop his forehead. The man rudely pushed passed the young flower girl and continued down the street.

Aeris frowned and bit her lower lip, “What a jerk!”

The man came to a darkened building, with a sign hanging above the door. A mound of snow had fallen on the sign, covering the top half of it from view. He walked up to the steps and hit the sign a few times, to knock off the snow. A pile of the white stuff showered down on him from above, some of it going into his jacket and down his back!

“&%\$#@!!!” The man jumped up and down and shook his coat, trying to free himself from the painfully frigid sensation that assaulted him! Once he was sure he had done his best, he hurried inside the darkened building, and slammed the door. The sign above it read, in huge, black letters, “Highwind & Valentine”.

Inside the modest office space, the air temperature was not much different than the snow-covered outdoors. A single pot-belly stove was mounted in the corner of the grey brick room. A faint, yellow glow emitted from the black cage door mounted on the front of it. In the opposite corner, huddled over his desk in violent shivers, Cloud Strife sat and blew into his hands.

“Strife!” The older man growled, “Who told you to put ANOTHER lump of coal on the fire?!” He angrily removed his overcoat and scarf and hung them on the empty coat rack next to the door. “Didn’t you use a piece already this week?!”

“Y-Yes, Mr. Highwind,” The young man chattered, “That’s the same one, I swear...”

The older man eyed his employee with suspicion, and stormed into his office, slamming the door.

“Jerk.” The blonde-haired clerk grumbled.

“I heard that!” The old codger bellowed from behind the door.

“A merry Christmas, Uncle!” A boisterous, high-pitched voice boomed through the dreary offices. It was the voice of Cid’s niece, standing in the doorway with a cheery grin.

“Bah,” said Cid, “Humbug!”

She had so briskly walked through the snow and ice, her cheeks were a rosy-red. She stood about three quarters of the doorway tall, a young girl full of vigor. Mischief and life filled her

eyes, her short black hair tied in pigtails at the back of her head. A thick, white scarf dangled over her shoulder, her breath smoked in the crisp winter air.

“C’mon ya old fart,” The young girl smirked, “It’s Christmas! Shouldn’t you be out buying me a Playstation?” She happily shuffled through the papers on Cid’s desk, cluttering up the neat piles she found them in.

“&%^\$#@in’ Humbug, I said!” The young girl hopped over to the doorway, just as Cid began to get up from his chair.

“What does that even mean?!” Yuffie sneered at her agitated relation, “Did you take your brain medicine today?” She laughed out loud, slamming the door behind her. Suddenly, she stuck her head back in and amended, “With dual shock controllers!!” And slammed the door again.

Cid glared at the door then at Cloud, who simply shrugged and resumed his work. The old miser turned back into his office, when the door chime alerted him to another visitor. Cid grabbed the stapler from his desk and turned to hurl it at his niece!

He stopped when he had seen that it was not his troublesome relative, but two men, their hats now off, standing in his office. One was portly, a bright yellow bowtie the only thing diverting attention from his asinine grin. The other, a bald gent with glasses, stern and serious. The two men recoiled in surprise at the sight of Cid, holding the stapler in such a threatening manner. Slowly, the cantankerous miser lowered his makeshift weapon.

“My name is Mr. Domino,” the latter proclaimed, “This is my associate, Mr. Palmer,” and with that he motioned toward his ample partner. “We are here collecting for the poor Shinra orphans and moogles fund.” Cid’s brow furrowed at the mention of such a cause. “In this festive time of year, we feel it is important for orphans AND moogles to feel the warmth and comfort of a roof over their heads. Not to mention a Playstation under their trees.”

It was then that Cid started to raise the stapler back into the threatening position.

“Uhh,” beads of sweat formed on Domino’s head as he took up his pen. “What can we put you down for?”

Cid glared at the nervous man, his lip curled in an evil grin, “One large case of whoop-ass.”

The peaceful street corner outside the offices of Highwind & Valentine suddenly became disrupted by two men rolling onto the curb and into the snowbank.

At length, closing time finally arrived. As soon as the fifth chime rang on the old clock in Cid’s office, Cloud Strife slammed his book shut and leapt off his chair.

“I guess you want tomorrow off,” Cid spoke sarcastically, “For all that holiday crap...”

"If it's not too much trouble," His employee meekly replied.

Cid eyed the younger man with suspect, "With full pay, your majesty?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"Whatever," Cid growled, "Just be here early the next day!"

"Yes, Sir!!" Cloud happily bolted out of the office, not wanting to give Cid the chance to change his mind.

Christmas Eve at the Highwind house was pathetically similar to any other winter night. Cid found himself sitting in front of the fire, alone, in his large chair. The rest of his house was enshrouded in cold, cheap darkness. Just the way Cid liked it. No money was spent on unnecessary comforts.

His crooked forehead furrowed at the faint sound of carolers outside in the street. His eyes happened to rest on a bell that had hung over his doorway. The old miser wasn't sure what such a trinket would be used for, mounted in the room on the top floor of his brownstone.

It was then, without reason or explanation, that the bell began to ring. Without any outside assistance, slowly at first and then growing to an ear-splitting series of clangs echoing through Cid's bedroom!

"What the %\$#@&in' humbug's going on?!!!" Cid roared, his hands trying to cover his ears from the deafening noise.

Then it stopped. Just as inexplicably as it had begun. All was silent, until he heard a new noise. Thunderous footsteps pounded on the staircase outside his locked bedchamber door, accompanied by the eerie rattling of chains. The footsteps continued to get closer and closer, until they reached Cid's door and ceased.

"It's humbug still!" said Cid, "I won't believe it!"

But then it happened; Cid felt the color drain from his face. Through the locked oak door, passed some sort of phantasm. Cid was alarmed even more when he recognized who it was.

"I know you," the old fussybucket cried, "Vincent Valentine! Is it really you?" But it wasn't; it seemed to be an echo of the man Cid knew. He could see directly through this specter to the door behind him. Valentine wore his usual long, red cloak, his jet-black hair tied back. Although around his waist and arms, draped heavy chains which dragged behind him like a tail. One of

his arms was swathed in a large, metallic claw. Heavy cash boxes and keys dangled on the chains behind him, some of the heavier objects dragged along the ground.

Cid was often told that his partner had been the transparent sort, but he had never believed it until now.

“Yes,” The spirit answered slowly, “I am what remains of your old partner.”

“How can this be?” Cid slowly got up from his chair and approached. “What are you doing here?”

Vincent sighed, obviously in extreme torment, “When I was among the living, I forsook the deeds of kindness and compassion. When a fellow human being was in need, I did nothing. That is my sin.”

“Yeah,” Cid smiled, “Those were the days.”

“No!” Vincent raised his voice, “This is what I must endure for all eternity. Mine is an unending torture. If your ways do not change, the chains and weights you will have to endure will be twice the size of mine. Then you will know true agony.”

Cid remained unconvinced, his arms folded in front of him, “Is that so? Do I get one of those fancy claws, too?”

“Listen to me!” The ghost roared, “Tonight you be visited by three spirits. Listen well to them, they will be your only chance for salvation!” It was then that the phantom’s shape began to alter. It became some sort of towering demon. The beast let out a bloody roar and spread its massive wings! Cid raised his arms in defense as it lunged toward him!

Cid yelled in terror, and fell to the floor. Nothing. When he looked up, his partner had vanished. Only the soft ticking of his antique clock accompanied his flustered breath.

“Bah,” Cid finally whispered, “Humbug.”

A deep sleep overtook the weary man within minutes, a sleep vacant of dreams and wishes. Sometime around the stroke of one, there was a visitor.

Cid’s eyes sharply opened at the sudden, soft clang of his alarm bell. Surely it wouldn’t yet be the hour of morning. Carefully, the old miser reached up and parted the curtain that hung around his bed. He saw a very large man standing in his room.

“Wake up, foo!!”

Cid started at the sudden bellow of the large man standing directly in front of him! The towering visitor wore a tattered black vest, green pants and had what look like a big red glove on one of his hands.

“Hurry up an’ get outta bed, sucka!” The large man snarled.

“Wait a second!” Cid snapped, “Who the hell are you?!!”

“Dammit,” He impatiently slammed his large red fist in his other hand, “Didn’t you hear about us already?”

“Oh,” Cid mused, “You’re one of those spirits, right?” He placed his feet on the floor and slid out of bed, “Well, I appreciate the visit, but I ain’t interested.”

“Ain’t interested, my ass! I’m Barret, the spirit of Christmas past! I pity the poor foo who don’t like Christmas!!”

Cid gave the visitor a perplexed look and said, “Well that’s just dandy.”

“Now let’s get movin’!” Barret grabbed Cid by the collar of his pyjamas with his good hand and walked toward the window.

“Wait! Let me get dressed first!”

“Ain’t no time! There ain’t no getting offa this train we’re on, till we get to the end of the line!” And with that, the large spirit threw Cid out the bedroom window! The old miser howled in shock on his way to the cold, cold snow below. Barret’s big feet hit the snow directly in front of Cid.

“What are you, nuts?!!” Cid growled as he lifted himself up out of the wet, frigid snow. It was then that he realized they were no longer in his neighborhood. This was a different place altogether. Barret walked over to a large window on the side of a huge brick building, and wiped away some of the condensation. Cid followed, and looked inside.

“Hey, I know this place.” Cid felt his face redden at the sight of the merry festivities inside. People were dancing, singing and helping themselves to the large buffet feast laid out before them. “This is old man Shinra’s place, my first job.” He saw a festively-plump man in a red blazer in the center of all the partying. “There’s the old cuss there. Man, he knew how to throw a shin-dig!” Cid watched with awe at the happy people inside, and his gaze fell on a shy young man in the corner. “Hey...” He started, “That looks like me!” The young man resisted any opportunity to join in the merriment, slapping away attempts by other guests to get him to join the fun. “Heh. Damn I hated this dump.”

Cid watched as the room got dark all of a sudden, only to be replaced by the light of a dim candle in the corner of the room. The party had vanished, but the room was not empty. A young

Cid stood near the candle, packing some office supplies into a bag. The old miser outside then saw a beautiful young woman enter the room and approach the young man.

“Is that—?”

“Cid,” The young lady smiled, “You’re not really leaving the company, are you?” She took the young man by the hand.

“Dammit, Shera!” Cid pulled away. “I’m tryin’ to pack here!”

“But what about our dreams, Cid?” Shera’s eyes twinkled in the candlelight. “What about us going into outer space?”

“Bah!” Cid closed his bag and turned away. “There’s more money to be made down here on the Planet!” Cid started for the door.

“But Cid...” Shera began to whimper. Cid strolled out of the room and slammed the door behind him. The young girl fell to her knees and began to sob.

“Ah hell,” The old Cid turned away from the window, “I think I got some snow in my eye...”

“You ain’t cryin’ are ya, foo?!” Barret broke out into guffaws.

“Ahright, ahright,” Cid grumbled, “Let’s get this over with.”

“What’s the matta,” Barret sneered, “You made these memories your own damn self.”

Cid was about to argue, when he noticed he was standing in his bedroom again. Alone. The old miser dismissed the whole thing as a dream and moved to his bed, to return to slumber. But then he heard some strange noises coming from downstairs. Hastily, Cid threw on his housecoat. Carefully, he opened his bedroom door and peered outside. The noises were definitely coming from down in the living room.

Slowly, he picked up his good crowbar hanging beside the door, and tip-toed down the creaky staircase. There was a bright, flickering light coming from the living room. He cautiously approached the doorway and leapt in, his crowbar ready!

“Hey! Hey! Don’t point that thing at me! I could lose an eye!”

His livingroom was filled with presents and food, decorated so well that Martha Stewart would blush with utter jealousy! In the center of the room, a small, black and white cat sat atop a large white moog. The feline held a Dual-Shock Playstation controller in his hands, pounding the buttons with his white-gloved thumbs. The brand-new 26 inch television in front of him boomed and echoed with life, as two giant robots slugged it out in true Xenogears fashion!

“What the hell’s going on?! What’re you doin’ in my house?!” Cid raged, and then amended, “No, wait! Let me guess. You’re a magic Christmas ghost, right?”

“Well,” The cat grinned, “I’m Cait Sith, the spirit of Christmas present, actually!”

Cid frowned and rolled his eyes, “Where the hell’s Ghostbusters when you need ‘em?”

“Forget about that!” Cait hopped up on one leg and waved his arms to keep his balance, “We’ve got a busy schedule to keep! Hop on!” The cat motioned to the large white moogles he stood upon.

“That?” Cid sneered, “You want me to ride your giant marshmallow? Couldn’t we call a chocobo carriage, instead?”

Before Cid could utter any further protest, the ample cave moogles grabbed the startled miser and bounded into the air, smashing through the ceiling!

“Eeyyaaagghh!!!” Cid howled, boards and shingles flying everywhere! “I’m not gonna get in the Christmas spirit with a big %\$#@&!! hole in my roof!”

The three sailed over the city, through the night sky above Merry Old Midgar. Cid held onto the cave moogles’ arm with both hands, his teeth chattering because of both the cold and the lack of aircraft in this flight.

The moogles began to sink to the ground a few blocks away from Cid’s house, in front of a lavish pagoda. Cait’s transportation landed on its feet on the steps in front of it, not before it let go of Cid, who ended up crashing into some bushes.

“Pthah! Pwah!” Cid spit out twigs and leaves as he struggled his way to freedom from the shrubbery. “Nice landing, idiot! I guess they don’t give flying lessons at spirit school!” Cid examined his surroundings. The dwelling they had arrived at looked familiar. “Hey, I know this place,” Cid mused, “Oh yeah, this is where my niece lives.” The old miser walked up to the window and peeked inside.

Within the pagoda, there was a boisterous Christmas party in progress. Cid’s mouth watered at the sight of the huge buffet table filled with every delicacy imaginable! The room was filled with party-goers and merry-makers, each enjoying the company and the festivity of the season. Cait came up behind the old miser and peered inside.

“What a spread!” The cat whistled.

Cid saw his niece in the center of the room, standing near the crackling fire.

“Okay!” She called to the other guests, “It’s time for a toast!”

“Yes!” Young Shake piped up, “To the spirit of the season!”

“And to good will toward men!” Godo added.

“And to my uncle Cid!” Yuffie shouted. The rest of the party regarded her in shock, a silence falling over them. Cid felt a smile forming on his face. A rare, painful occurrence, but it happened. He started to feel regret over the way he treated his niece all these years, he assumed she had no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Maybe he had been wrong. “May he someday remove that large spear from his butt,” Yuffie added, “And may he never find out I stole his credit cards!” The room erupted with laughter and applause! Maybe Cid wasn’t wrong.

“Why that little-“ Cid raised his foot to kick open the window, but was grabbed by the back of his collar by the cave moogle!

“No time for that now, Cid!” Cait proclaimed, “We’ve got more to see!” The giant moogle once again leapt into the air, toting behind it a screaming and cursing Cid Highwind.

The moogle descended in a run-down section of Midgar, the infamous Seventh Street Slums. Cait’s moogle gently touched snowy ground with its massive feet, and Cid not-so-gently touched ground with his face.

“Pwah!” Cid spit snow and dirt from his mouth, “Where the hell are we now?” Cid old miser got up from the ground and brushed snow off his housecoat. “Wait, the slums.... why the hell’d you bring me here?”

Cait bounded up to a shabby little house and wiped off the window to see inside, “Here, Cid,” The little cat nodded to the window, “This is what you came to see.”

Cid approached the window and looked inside, “What a dump!” The meager dwelling was not much to look at, tattered curtains, broken furniture, a rusted old pot suspended over the fire in the end of the living room/dining area/kitchen. A slender woman with jet black hair peeled sylkis greens on a chipped old countertop near the fireplace. She turned her head slightly as two children bounded down the stairs. “What is this place?” Asked Cid, “Who lives here, spirit?”

“This is the home of your over-worked, under-paid clerk, Cloud Strife,” Cait spoke slowly, “That’s his wife, Tifa, and his kids, Zack and Priscilla.” Cait turned back to Cid, “Christmas time here is much more to speak of than the one at your place, despite their circumstances,” The cat looked again into the window and amended, “They can’t even afford a lousy N64.” The cat sniffled, took out a handkerchief, and blew his nose like a trumpet.

Just then, Cid and Cait heard two voices approaching from the street. The two travelers turned to see Cloud happily marching toward them carrying a little girl on his shoulders. The little girl

was happily singing carols in the cool night air, her melody echoing all around them. The two merry pedestrians passed right by Cid and Cait as if they couldn't even see them. They entered the modest home to be greeted by the family inside.

"Cloud! Marlene!" Tifa hugged her husband and daughter, "Where were you?!"

"Daddy took me to see the caroler people in town," Little Marlene bubbled. Cloud slowly lowered her to the ground where her brother Zack passed her a small wooden crutch. The little girl hobbled over to the table and sat down. Her parents watched her longingly before smiling at each other. But it was a sad, forced smile.

"What's wrong with the girl?" Cid asked his guide.

"Like you care," Cait said, "Once she's gone, Cloud won't mind working late anymore. You should be happy."

The Strife family took their places at the table, and Tifa placed a small plate of greens on the table.

"That's IT?" Cid queried. "That's no more food than a chocobo would get."

"WELL mister 'I-care-about-my-fellow-man-all-of-a-sudden-poopy-pants', it's a little late to be worryin' about how much you stiff Cloud all the time!"

Cid turned back to the 'meal' underway inside.

"Wait," Cloud spoke up, "First we should give thanks for this bounty. To Mr. Highwind, our generous benefactor!" The rest of the Strife family looked to Cloud in awe.

"To Mr. Highwind?" Tifa spat, "To mister Highwind slipping on the icy sidewalk..."

"Now, Tifa," Cloud pleaded, "Without Mr. Highwind's pay, we wouldn't have all that we do. We should speak well of him, especially at this time of year."

Cid felt a sharp pain deep down inside of him, his chest was not right.

"Oh," Cait nodded to the old skinflint, "That's your heart growing three sizes."

"To mister Highwind," Marlene smiled, "And Planet bless us, every one."

"Spirit," Cid grabbed the little cat and shook it hard, "You must tell me! What will happen to little Marlene?"

Cait lowered his small, furry head, "My specialty is not with the future," He wiped his eyes, "But if these shadows remain unchanged, I see an empty seat at the Strife's supper table."

"No..." Cid turned back to the window, "No, spirit," The Strife's home suddenly grew dark, and Cid felt a cold winter wind wash over him, chilling the cold-hearted miser to the bone.

Cid whirled around to find himself alone. The spirit had left him. Naught but the whistle of the cool night air answered his query. Two large footprints in the snow were the only evidence that Cait had ever been there.

"Hey!" Cid called, "Where the hell are you?!" Cid looked up and down the vacant street. "How am I supposed to get home?!"

Cid turned back and bumped into something. It was not something, more accurately, it was someone. A large, cloaked figure stood before Cid. Its jet-black garb completely enshrouded its form. The 'person' was easily over six feet tall, as the top of Cid's head met only its shoulders. The figure simply stood in silence. It said nothing, it did nothing. Cid noticed a ridiculously-long sword hung at its side. He raised his head and regarded the shape.

"Who the blazes are you?" Cid nervously asked, "Are you that future spirit?" Cid started to become annoyed. "If you're selling magazines, I don't want any."

The figure finally raised its hands, slowly. It pulled back its hood, and glared down at Cid. He had unholy green eyes, the look of which sent chills up and down Cid's spine. The figure had long, silver hair and perfect features, however, its face remained emotionless.

"Well?" Cid growled.

The spirit simply turned to face the window of Cloud's house. Cid followed his gaze to the dwelling and looked inside. Cid saw Tifa, sitting at the table in the dimly-lit home. She cried and sobbed into a dirty cloth. It was then that two of her children entered the room.

"Are you crying, again, mother?" Little Priscilla took Tifa's hand.

"No," She wiped her face, "No, it is the candle light. It is hurting my sensitive eyes." Tifa stood up from the table. "We mustn't show your father sensitive eyes." The two children immediately agreed.

"Father seems to walk home much more slowly these days," Young Zack proclaimed, "Since Marlene..."

Just then, Cloud entered the house and greeted his family.

“Cloud,” Tifa smiled, “You’re home. Children, will you set the table?” The two nodded and went to the counter to fetch the modest plates.

“You would’ve liked to see the spot, Tifa,” Cloud forced a smile, “Marlene can,” He paused, “Marlene would’ve been able to see the chocobos roaming in the valley.

Cid turned away from the window, “That’s enough of this, spirit.” He rubbed his raw eyes. “Show me no more.”

A dense fog rolled in from seemingly nowhere and enveloped the two travelers. Cid coughed and sputtered as the mist tickled his hoarse throat.

The tall spirit moved away from the house, now barely visible, to something in the street. The ghost seemed to float as it moved in its long black cloak. Cid followed to the stone object where he realized what it was. A tombstone. It was then he noticed they were no longer in the slums. They were in the cemetery.

“Who is it?” Cid nervously asked. The spirit did not answer him. It simply turned its unholy green eyes to the grave. Cid slowly looked down and read the inscription. “Marlene Wallace Strife: beloved daughter. May the lifestream embrace you.”

Cid felt his throat close, “Spirit, tell me it isn’t so…” The old miser then heard some cackling laughter. Cid turned to see two people with shovels cheerfully conversing on the other side of the cemetery.

“Gyah hah hah!” Heidegger howled, “That was the shortest funeral I ever saw.”

“Kyah hah hah,” Laughed Scarlet, “I never saw a service with no people. It’s a wonder the priest even showed up!” The two gravediggers shoveled more soil onto the pile before stabbing their shovels into the dirt. “Let’s take a break,” Scarlet grinned, “This one ain’t goin’ nowhere!” The two chuckled.

“That seems to give a lot of people a merry Christmas, though!” Heidegger chortled. “We should go see if the party is still on at the pub!” And with that, the two strode off into town.

“Spirit,” Cid turned to the tall figure, “Who is it that would deserve such a fate?” The pale phantom simply raised a figure and pointed to the neglected grave. “No,” Cid snarled, “Dammit, tell me who owns this grave!”

The cloaked figure lowered his hand and stared at the tombstone. Finally, Cid approached the worn grave and read the inscription, “Carl Highwind: whatever.”

“Carl?!” Cid roared, “What stupid piece of \*&^%\$ made this thing?! Damn this sucks!!” Cid tried to maintain his anger, but he became overcome with grief. “Tell me, spirit,” He pleaded, “Tell me

these events can be changed! There's still time, there has to be!!" Suddenly, the ground beneath their feet trembled and cracked! The fissure glowed red, the stench of brimstone filled the air around them. The gap widened violently! Cid stepped back, "Wait a second! I can change!"

Sephiroth lowered his head, "It is too late to regret the sins of the past." Cid lost his footing and plummeted into the fiery chasm below, he howled in agony! "May the Planet take your soul." Cid was blinded with terror!

"NO!!!" Utter blackness encompassed his world, Cid struggled and fought his way to freedom! His bedchamber. Cid was returned. "They spared me! Hot damn!" He quickly amended, "I mean, Holy Christmas!"

The old miser cheered and hollered with glee! "I'm as light as an airship! I'm as happy as her captain!" He rushed to the window and flung open the shutters. Cid saw a fiery-red beast trotting down the snowy street.

"You there!" Cid called.

"Me?" Red XIII returned.

"Yes, you! What day is it?"

"Why," Red reflected, "It is the apex of the Midwinter equinox!"

"What?!!"

"Um, it's also Christmas morning..." Red added.

"They did it!" Cid cried, "All in one night!! Oh thank you spirits! Thank you!!"

"Do you require medical assistance?" Red called up.

"No!" Cid grinned, "I want you to go down to the A&P and buy that giant roast chocobo they got in the window!" Cid went back into his room and returned to the window, "Here!" He threw out a sack of gil to the street below. "And keep the change!"

"Yes, sir!" Red picked up the bag with his teeth and galloped down the street.

Cid danced back into his house and got himself dressed. He hurried outside and briskly rushed down the street. On the way, he ran into Palmer and Domino standing on the avenue. Their first instinct was to turn and flee, but Cid grabbed them both by the backs of their collars.

"Hold on there!" The old miser beckoned, "I want you two to promise me you'll stop by my office on Monday!" The two nervously looked at Cid.

“Uh, sure,” Domino replied.

“I want to make a small donation. How’s twenty thousand gil sound?”

Domino’s heart almost stopped, “TWENTY THOUSAND?! Oh my!”

“Thirty!” Cid bellowed, “And not a gil less!”

“Hey-hey!” Palmer exclaimed, “Thanks Cid! Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas, lardo!” Cid resumed his pace down the street. Red caught up with Cid, he carried a large package which he held by the string with his teeth. “Follow me!” Cid flagged down a chocobo carriage and gave the driver some special instructions, followed by several bags of gil. The driver whipped the reins and raced off to his appointed task.

Red And Cid came to a lavish pagoda and walked up the steps. Cid kicked the door open, startling Yuffie and her hung-over guests!

“Uncle,” Yuffie exclaimed, “What are you doing here?!”

“That credit card you stole, do you still have it?!” Cid growled.

“Y-y-yeah,” She nervously responded.

“Well get it and follow me!” With that, she and Red pursued Cid outside.

Cloud found himself suddenly pulled away from holiday merriment by a sharp pounding on his front door. He quickly got up to answer the door only to be alarmed by who the visitor was!

“Mr. Highwind!” Cloud gasped, “What are you doing here?”

“Strife!” Cid growled, “Why didn’t you come to work this morning?!”

“Uh,” Beads of sweat formed on Cloud’s forehead, even in the cold of the winter air. “But you gave me the day off, sir.”

“Did I?” Cid snarled. “Did I indeed? So are you calling me a fool, Strife?! I’ve had enough of your pathetic excuses!!”

“No, sir, no,” Cloud trembled. It was then that Cloud’s wife Tifa pushed Cloud out of the way!

“That’s it!” She fumed, “I’ve had enough of YOU, Cid Highwind!” Without another word, she leapt into a Dolphin Kick, connecting with Cid square in the groin! Cid was launched into the air in a backward somersault, landing in the cold slush below!

“Tifa!” Cloud cried. The clerk rushed down the steps to help Cid up. “I’m sorry Mr. Highwind, she,” Cloud looked back to his wife and continued, “She didn’t mean it.” It was then Cloud realized Cid wasn’t angry, in fact, he was laughing. It was a high-pitched laugh, but still a laugh.

“Cloud,” Cid grinned, tears in his eyes, “What are you doing for Christmas?” Cloud looked up from his employer and saw the crowd of people who had gathered around his house from adjacent streets. Each of them carried food, gifts and big smiles on their faces. “Would you like to join me and my friends for Christmas dinner?”

Everyone piled into the Strife family house, setting their bundles on the table and throughout the modest dwelling. A chocobo carriage pulled up, filled with toys and other presents, Cid gleefully helped his niece unload the precious cargo and distribute it to the Strife family. Red smacked his lips at the delicious aroma that now filled the modest home.

“Cloud,” Cid slapped his clerk on the back, “Monday morning we’ll discuss your raise, and the annual ones to follow!”

Yuffie knelt down to young Zack and Priscilla, and handed them their brand-new Playstation with Dual-Shock controllers. The fireplace crackled with warmth and Glover, who had been used for kindling. Palmer and Domino helped themselves to the buffet, Godo and Shake played with the new electric train set up in the corner. All who gathered embraced the season and all its warmth. Cid himself lifted little Marlene into his arms as they sang together.

“Merry Christmas, everyone!” Cried Cid.

“And Planet bless us, every one!” Added Marlene.

The night air above the Seventh Street Slums was filled with song and joy this Christmas, and many to follow. For Cid proved to be better than his word. He became a godfather to Marlene and the other Strife children, all of whom lived long and happy lives. It was said of Cid that if any man kept Christmas in his heart all year round, it was he. For as the spirits and Vincent looked down upon Midgar that night, they knew they had done their job.

May the Planet bless us, every one!

A Rocket Town Production.

Cast:

Cid Highwind.....	Ebenezer Scrooge
Cloud Strife.....	Bob Cratchit
Marlene Wallace.....	Tiny Tim Cratchit
Vincent Valentine.....	Jacob Marley
Barret Wallace.....	Ghost of Christmas Past
Cait Sith.....	Ghost of Christmas Present
Sephiroth.....	Ghost of Christmas Future
Yuffie Kisaragi.....	Scrooge's Nephew
Tifa Lockhart.....	Mrs. Cratchit
Aeris Gainsborough.....	Flower Girl (duh!)
Young Zack.....	Cratchit Son
Priscilla.....	Cratchit Daughter
Nanaki.....	Red XIII
Shera.....	Scrooge's love
Mayor Domino.....	Charitable Man #1
Palmer.....	Charitable Man #2
President Shinra.....	Old Fizzywig
Colonel Heidegger.....	Grave Digger #1
Scarlet.....	Grave Digger #2
Mukki.....	Choco Carriage Driver
Dyne.....	Best Boy Grip
Tseng.....	Turk
Reno.....	Turk
Rude.....	Turk
Elena.....	Turk

Assistant to Mr. Highwind:

Shera

Assistant to Mr. Sith:

No one.

Yuffie's Parole Officer:

Bar Brady

Barret's Makeup:

Elmyra Gainsborough

Directed by Rufus Shinra