

EXT. THE NORTH POLE - MORNING

A winter wonderland. The top of the Northern Hemisphere and the truest point north. More importantly, this is Santa Claus' hometown.

It's a quaint village. Signs of Christmas everywhere.

A NEON sign blinks "Christmas -- just days away". Holiday lights twinkle in festive store windows. ELF villagers are abuzz with pre-holiday activity.

The elves commute by bus, rail and snowmobile. Some ice skate to destinations.

Kid Elves wait for the yellow school snowmobile.

KID ELF #1  
Christmas is coming! Yay!

KID ELF #2  
I want gifts! Tons of gifts!

KID ELF #1  
You won't get any if you land on Santa's Naughty List again... like last year.

INT. NORTH POLE WAREHOUSE - MORNING

Two enormous warehouse doors open. A black luxury snowmobile zips through the entrance. The Elf chauffeur/lackey stops and jumps out. He assists MELVIN MELHORN, a VIP, from a government-issued snowmobile.

ELF LACKEY  
Watch your step -- Mr. Mayor.

Melhorn stands, mesmerized by something before him. His eyes light up like a kid's on Christmas morning. His lackey sees what his boss sees -- now his mouth falls open.

ELF LACKEY (CONT'D)  
Is that... is that... what I think it is, Mr. Mayor?

MELHORN  
Yes. Do not tell a soul.

ELF LACKEY  
It's absolutely... spectacular.

MELHORN  
My E-phone please.

The lackey stares, mouth still agape. Melhorn slaps him over the head with his leather glove.

MELHORN (CONT'D)  
Sometime before Christmas.

The lackey hands Melhorn his E-Smart phone.

In the warehouse, a group of Elves throw a giant RED and GREEN velvet cover over something grand, something colorful, something shiny, something...

... **TOP SECRET**. Those words are branded on the cover.

The team of elves fasten gold ropes around it, securing it. There are festive signs and billboards stored nearby.

One reads "**PUBLIC UNVEILING TOMORROW at 2:22 PM.**" Another sign reads "**SANTA'S NEW SLEIGH version 3.0.**" A sign above the prized possession reads "**SANTA'S SUPER SONIC SLEIGH COMING SOON TO A PLANET NEAR YOU**"... the sign is quickly covered up.

An Elf on the sleigh-team gives Melhorn the thumbs-up.

Melhorn hits #1 on his Speed Dial.

MELHORN (CONT'D)  
Good morning, S.C. Mayor Melhorn here. We're ready for tomorrow's unveiling. Yes, sir. This is going to be the most memorable Christmas on record -- well, besides the first one, of course.

INT. HAROLD MELHORN'S BEDROOM - SAME MORNING

HAROLD, 20s, a good-natured Elf, sleeps alone. His alarm clock RINGS. His bed is filled with DVDs, video games, electric toys, empty junk food bags. He turns over and puts the pillow over his head.

INT. HARK MORRISON'S BEDROOM - SAME MORNING

HARK, 30s, an elf, sleeps beside his wife, NICOLE. The alarm clock RINGS. Hark's eyes shoot open in a panic. He's already stressed. His wife kisses him.

NICOLE  
Good morning, Harky, time for work.

Hark sits up, puts his slippers on and robe.

HARK

Is it Friday?

NICOLE

No, honey, it's only Tuesday. Cheer up though. You have the company Christmas party tonight.

HARK

I'm not going, Nicole.

NICOLE

Oh now. You used to love Christmas parties... and singing carols. Where is that Christmas spirit?

HARK

Melhorn crushed it years ago.

NICOLE

Don't be a grumpy elf. Come on. The kids are up.

HARK

Another holiday season to endure. Who *really* cares about Christmas anymore? Haven't we done it enough already... year after year?

NICOLE

I care. The children care. Your parents still care. I'll fix you some double dark chocolate chip pancakes put a smile on that long face.

EXT. NORTH POLE POSTAL OFFICE - DAY

Gigantic post office. Wings and tunnels branch off. It's like the Pentagon for Christmas mail.

INT. NORTH POLE POSTAL OFFICE - DAY

Hark arrives at work. He carries a brief case and wears a suit and tie. His coworkers greet him cheerfully. Hark dutifully heads toward -- **THE NAUGHTY VAULT.**

Hark punches in a code -- **0222** into the keypad. A glass case opens. He removes the **BLACK** key. On a chain. Hark hangs it around his neck like a noose.

Now Harold arrives. Coworkers greet him with fake smiles and grunts. Harold barely notices in his rush.

HAROLD  
Sorry.... I'm late... again.

Harold spills his coffee. Harold wears a bright red turtleneck sweater. No suit for him. He dashes for the other room marked -- **THE NICE VAULT**.

His glass case is beside the one Hark just opened. Harold types in his code -- he scratches his head, stomps his foot.

HAROLD (CONT'D)  
What in the fudge... is that number again? Passwords... too many...

Hark notices his counterpart trying various incorrect codes.

HAROLD (CONT'D)  
Oops... nope. Not that one either.

HARK  
Harold, learn your code. Without that key, the plant shuts down and Christmas shuts down.

HAROLD  
Makes us indispensable, huh, Hark?

HARK  
Like you ever have to worry about losing your job.

Harold types in a code. The case OPENS -- and out spits a big shiny RED key. Harold hangs the key around his neck like a medal of honor.

HAROLD  
Hey Harkster, how jazzed are you about the Christmas *par-tay* tonight?

HARK  
(deadpan)  
Too bad you came to work late again, Harold, you just missed my cartwheels.

INT. POSTAL OFFICE MAIN HUB - NORTH POLE - SAME MORNING

High-tech post office. This is where naughty and nice letters to Santa get sorted. Letters zip through giant tubes. A sorter chooses where to send each kid's letter...

ELF SORTER

Naughty list, nice list, naughty,  
nice, extra naughty, nice little  
girl, bad little boy, sweet girl,  
bratty boy...

Grumpy elves read letters to Santa from around the world. They stamp them "Naughty - Reject". The letters travel through dusty old tubes.

Happy elves stamp the Nice Letters with bright, colorful stickers. They draw happy faces on the envelopes and drop it in a chute: To Santa.

Santa's Naughty Social Media Elf reads Tweets on Santa's Twitter Page and posts from Santa's Big Board Facebook Fan page.

SOCIAL MEDIA ELF

Santa's never gonna friend you, ya  
naughty kid. Not the way you talk  
back to your mother all year.  
*Blocked! Delete! De-friend!*

INT. NICE TOY FACTORY - SAME MORNING

We move to the next big phase of this hub at the North Pole. The factory where Christmas toys get made.

Harold turns the key. Activates the big conveyor belts filled with new toys. WHISTLES and BELLS ring and jingle.

A sign reads -- Santa's Nice Toys Here.

Cheerful Elves make new bikes, dolls and electronics: iPads, laptops and video games come down the belt. Elves wrap them in colorful paper. Harold supervises -- checks out toys.

HAROLD

(picks up a video game)  
Ah, cool. This video game is out  
already?! Put it aside for me,  
will ya, Bud?

ELF BUD

It's for a kid in Nebraska.

HAROLD

Send him a pogo stick.

Harold moves on. He plays with the toys. He notices a pretty, female Elf... Harold smiles at her. She turns her nose up and walks away. Harold looks hurt.

Another pretty elf, JILL, walks by carrying gift boxes.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Hi, Jill, would you like to go to the party with me?

JILL

Will we sit at your uncle's VIP table? Can I meet him? Then, yes. Otherwise, no.

Harold's shoulders sag. He soon forgets about Jill because the Nice Vault is the coolest place on earth. It's like working at Google or Apple. It's cutting edge for geeks and gadgets.

Elves work at ultra hip work stations with treadmill desks, no cubicles, lots of open space, motivational posters everywhere. Workers eat candy and try out new toys.

A manufacturing Elf rides a bike down the curvy ramp, hits the brakes, skids out and... CRASHES into the wall.

MANUFACTURING ELF

Defective two-wheeler!

HAROLD

You know where it goes.

The elf stands the twisted bike up and another elf stamps "defective" on its seat. They toss the broken bike on a conveyor belt with other busted toys heading for a chute that reads...

**... Busted Naughty Toys Go Here.**

INT. NAUGHTY TOY FACTORY - SAME MORNING

The broken bicycle comes down the conveyor belt. An elf punctures the tires for the fun of it.

Hark walks around, supervising his gloomy team of elves. He stands on a chair to address them:

HARK

Chins up, Team Naughty. Even bad kids deserve something for Christmas.

ANGRY ELF

Who says? What ever happened to stuffin' their stockin's with coal?

HARK

It's not environmentally safe. We've evolved.

Hark walks around the sooty factory. The toys here are missing parts. No kid in their right mind would play with any of these toys. A sinister elf yanks batteries out of the back of toys.

SINISTER ELF

Batteries NOT included.

An elf gift-wraps the naughty toys using black tissue paper.

One gift says "**For Naughty Tommy in Chicago**"... another for "**Bad Boy Johnny in New York**"... and "**Time-Out Sally in Ohio**".

This factory is the end of the line for toys, workers and... management. Hark retreats to his bleak office. He looks at a faded poster on his office wall that shows Santa and his happy team of elves. It reads "Team Santa -- Dare to Dream Jolly".

EXT. POST OFFICE/FACTORY

Horn BUZZES. Shift over. The doors to the factory burst open and out pour elves. Harold comes outside.

HAROLD

Anybody need a lift? Hey, Joe, wanna meet up before the party?

ELF JOE

Uh no, Harold, I gotta walk my cat.

HAROLD

Walk your cat? How about you, Ronny?

ELF RONALD

Sorry, Harold, gotta get home to feed my... bird.

Harold stands alone. The other elves pal around and head to snowmobiles in the parking lot. Hark comes out, covered in soot, exhausted.

HAROLD  
Harkmeister!

HARK  
Another suit ruined.

HAROLD  
Why won't any elves hang out with me after work?

HARK  
You're the boss. You can't be one of the guys, Harold. Besides, they're afraid of you --

HAROLD  
Afraid of me? Why?

HARK  
Guess.

HAROLD  
Because of my Uncle Melvin?

HARK  
Bingo. Your name comes with advantages and disadvantages.

HAROLD  
But you're a manager. So can we pal around? You and me?

HARK  
I have a family waiting at home. See you at the party.

Hark walks toward his snowmobile with his brief case.

HAROLD  
Okie Dokie. Say hi to the tribe. I'll save you a seat. Wear something festive, Hark-a-dude. Leave the brief case home.

EXT. HARK'S RESIDENCE - EVENING

Hark drives up to a two-level home. He parks his snowmobile, picks up the newspaper and goes inside. Lights twinkle.

INT. HARK'S HOME - EVENING

Hark enters. Family pictures adorn the walls. The pictures chronicle the lives of his children. He removes his dusty coat -- hears the sounds of cooking and laughter inside.

INT. HARK'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Hark is greeted by Nicole and his three kids. We see now his wife is pregnant. Hark's retired parents live here. The home is cozy and filled with chatter, love and laughter.

NICOLE

Welcome home, sweetheart.

Hark enters, sees the fireplace roaring. A Christmas tree twinkles in the corner. Gifts under the tree.

BARRY, 9, sits in front of the TV. Daughter, GRACE, 7, does homework at a table and the third, BABY SUE, 2 years old, sits on Grandma's lap. Grandpa reads the newspaper in his rocker.

GRANDPA

Welcome home, son. How was work?

HARK

The usual, Pop... the usual.

Hark sees Nicole cooking in the kitchen.

GRANDMA

Hark, I have a good feeling about you winning Employee of the Season.

GRANDPA

The North Pole Tribune says Santa is revamping his team. They're hiring. You should apply, son.

HARK

Pop, they want young elves for that kind of work... not someone like me.

GRANDPA

Be bold. Apply. I know a guy down at Reindeer Management. I'll call him tomorrow. Team Santa was your dream job since you were a child.

HARK

Kid dreams. Before reality kicked me in the head.

GRANDPA

Oh. Dreams don't come with an expiration date, son.

EXT. HAROLD'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Harold climbs the steps, slips and slides on the stoop.

INT. HAROLD' APARTMENT - EVENING

Harold enters his empty apartment. Nobody greets him. No pets. No meal waiting. Framed photos of Harold with his Uncle Melhorn and other North Pole VIPs fill his walls, shelves and desk.

Harold opens the ice box. It's empty, except for candy. He takes a bottle of chocolate milk out and gulps it. He notices a picture on the fridge of himself as a child... a boy... sitting on Santa's lap.

HAROLD

What's so bad about having connections?

Harold kicks off his elf shoes. Flips on the TV. He plops in a recliner. He munches candy and sings:

HAROLD (CONT'D)

"Oh by gosh, by golly, it's time for mistletoe and holly..."

TV NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

All around town elves are out buying gifts, attending parties and getting ready for the launch of Santa's new Super Sonic Sleigh!

Harold picks up the invitation to the Christmas party. It says "Harold J. Melhorn -- Plus One".

HAROLD

No plus one for me. This is gettin' as bad as New Year's Eve.

The invitation reads "Employee of the Season Awards Ceremony". Harold devours cookies. He gets up and the invitation slides under the sofa. He reaches for it... but can't get it. He gives up.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

I don't need a dumb invitation or date. I'm Harold Melhorn -- I'm connected. I'm a big shot.

He heads to the bathroom. His trophy case stops him in his tracks -- he sees company awards, ribbons, trophies. He sees his reflection in the glass... he winks at himself.

EXT. HARK'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Hark and Nicole leave for the party. The family waves goodbye.

GRANDPA

Go get 'em, son. Remember. Bold.

GRANDMA

Bring back party goodies.

GRANDPA

Oh Ethel, what happened to your pre-holiday diet?

GRANDMA

Same thing that happened to your pre-holiday exercise routine.

They giggle and kiss.

EXT. HAROLD' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Harold wears his most festive suit. His hair combed, but it quickly gets wind blown and mussed. He slips on the ice, but recovers. He hops on his snowmobile and zips off...

EXT. CHRISTMAS PARTY - NIGHT

Hollywood-style lights shoot Christmas-colored beams of light back and forth across the banquet hotel hosting the North Pole Christmas Party.

MELHORN (V.O.)

Before we pop the champagne, let's recap year-end business.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

The elves sit at tables, eager to party. Mayor Melhorn stands at the podium overlooking tables.

MELHORN

As you can see from this graphic,  
we're on time for production  
despite an unprecedented demand in  
mail and toys at the North Pole.  
The Nice Team, headed by my nephew  
Harold Melhorn, is ahead of  
production schedule. Good job.

Modest applause. Harold sits at a table at the front of the  
banquet hall -- *a card says VIP table* -- there are three  
empty seats.

MELHORN (CONT'D)

Stand up, Harold, my boy.

Harold stands -- a big spotlight hits him. His subordinates  
clap half-hearted and roll their eyes.

MELHORN (CONT'D)

Harold, sit down.

Hark and Nicole enter the banquet hall. Harold spots them  
and waves them over to his VIP table.

HAROLD

I thought you bailed.

HARK

We couldn't find parking.

HAROLD

The entire company's here. Hi,  
Nicky. Hey, I saved you guys prime  
seats... here at my uncle's VIP  
table.

HARK

Oh um... no thanks, Harold. I'll  
sit with my team... in the back...  
by the bathrooms.

HAROLD

Nonsense, Harkstar, you need  
visibility if you want recognition  
from my Uncle. Sit beside me. It's  
the best seat in the house.

Hark looks at his wife. She nods. Hark and Nicole sit at  
the VIP table. They're immediately served and fussed over.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Try the shrimp cocktail, dude.  
It'll knock your striped-socks off.  
Yummy yum.

Melhorn shows fancy charts and graphics on screen. Nice team's graphic arrow is pointed UP. Naughty Team arrow is pointed DOWN... in the red.

MELHORN

The North Pole Postal Office is breaking records. We've received over 1.6 million letters to Santa Claus from all over the world, including 500,000 Tweets and 2.6 Million Facebook likes.

More applause.

MELHORN (CONT'D)

The Naughty List team is another story. Naughty is plummeting. Who is in charge of this unit?

Hark swallows a jumbo shrimp and raises his hand. A spotlight hits him. Melhorn and everyone watch him.

HARK

That's um... my unit... sir.

MELHORN

What's your name?

HARK

Hark... Hark Morrison. Naughty Operations Manager.

MELHORN

Never heard of you.

HARK

I started as an intern in Shipping. I've worked for you for over... seven years now, Mr. Melhorn.

MELHORN

Seven years too many from these results. Ask my nephew sitting... beside you?.... for tips. You have a week to shine, Morrison, or you get the boot -- Harold, why is he sitting at my table?

Hark sinks in his seat. His wife grips his hand. Hark's team shout to Hark from the back of the room... "What does he know, Hark?!" "You're the best manager ever!" and "Don't listen to that Grumpy Grinch."

HARK

Thanks for the visibility, Harold.

Harold signals for the Spotlight Elf to kill the light. He does. Hark slumps in the shadow of Harold.

MELHORN

That Naughty team is an example of poor management...

Harold jumps up -- cuts off his Uncle.

HAROLD

Hey Uncle Melhorn, what do you expect? They don't call it the *Naughty Team* for nothing. They're just livin' up to their reps.

Laughter breaks out. Melhorn chuckles. Harold sits down. He looks over at Hark.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Sorry, Hark-a-buddy, it was the only way to shut him up. Don't you get it? Uncle Melvin likes more kids on the Naughty list... means less toys to make. There's only two things my uncle loves -- profits and media.

LATER - PARTY UNDERWAY

The North Pole holiday party. Christmas desserts galore, ice cream and egg nog consumed by the elves. Hark dances with Nicole to "Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer".

MELHORN (V.O.)

Take your seats please.

Hark and Nicole return to their VIP table. Melhorn is on stage. Harold stuffs his face with goodies.

MELHORN (CONT'D)

It's time to award... Employee of the Season. And this year's award goes to...

Elf drum rolls. Elves listen up. Nicole squeezes Hark's hand.

MELHORN (CONT'D)

My nephew... **Harold Melhorn.**

Hark is crushed but applauds. Harold wipes off an egg nog moustache and makes his way up to the podium. His uncle hands him the Trophy.

MELHORN (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Harold, five-time winner!

TABLE OF ELVES

They roll their eyes.

ELF RONALD

He's like the Meryl Streep of elves.

ELF MINDY

I hate nepotism... when the nepotizin' ain't in my family.

STAGE - HAROLD

Shiny award in hand. Harold looks out at the tables of Elves.

HAROLD

I share this award with my Uncle Melvin, our great Mayor, soon-up-for-reelection... and with all of my fellow elves.

EXT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Hark and Nicole leave the party.

NICOLE

I love you, Harky, with or without that silly award.

HARK

Employee of the Season comes with a raise, Nicole. Something we could use with the baby coming.

NICOLE

There's always next year.

HARK

That's what you said last year. And the year before that.

Harold rushes outside clutching his trophy. He has a few VIP elves with him now.

HAROLD

Hark, we're skating over to the Elf Club to slam down some eggnogs. My Uncle will be there and these big-wigs with Team Santa.

Nicole sees Hark's eyes brighten. She kisses him.

NICOLE

Go out with Harold. I'll get a ride home with one of the wives. This is your chance to make new connections.

Nicole leaves Hark and joins a group of elf wives chatting. Harold slaps Hark on the back.

HAROLD

Let's make it a night to remember, colleague.

EXT. ELF PUB - SAME NIGHT

Lights twinkle outside. Holiday party inside.

INT. ELF PUB - SAME NIGHT

Harold pours sugar cane into his glass of eggnog. Hark sits beside him, nursing a glass of milk.

HAROLD

I'm sorry you didn't win Employee of the Season, Harkmeister.

HARK

Forget about it, will ya?

HAROLD

You work darn hard every day down at the factory... you motivate the unmotivated. Now me, I just slide by on my good looks and name.

HARK

You're not that good looking, Harold.

HAROLD

I *am* cute as a button though.

HARK

Look, for your information, I'm done seeking awards at some dead end job. I'm moving on to bigger things -- come tomorrow.

HAROLD

Moving on? To *where*?

HARK

Reindeer Management Facility.

HAROLD

(spits eggnog)  
You mean like in... Team Santa? Working for the Big Jolly Guy in the Sky? Whoa, aimin' a little high there, Hark-a-dreamer?

HARK

That's right. I'm sure Santa will be a better boss than your uncle.

HAROLD

Fine, so who do you know down there to help you get a foot in the door? It's very competitive.

HARK

Well, uh... my Pop knows a guy... who knows a guy... who knows a guy.

HAROLD

Wow. Sounds like a shoe-in.

HARK

I have to get home. It's late.

Hark readies to go. Harold stops him --

HAROLD

Hark, wait up, I don't have anyone waiting for me at home tonight or... ever. Stay and have one "special" eggnog. The bartender knows me and puts extra nutmeg in it. Get closer, pal -- I know inside info -- that could help you land your dream job.

Harold points to the corner table where the "Team Santa" managers celebrate. A couple of elves wave at Harold.

Hark hesitates.

HALF HOUR LATER - SAME BAR

The place is hopping with Christmas music, jam packed. Hark & Harold eat burgers and drink spiked eggnog.

HARK

In exchange for this Top Secret information, you expect me to do WHAT?

HAROLD

Help me find my true love.

HARK

Did you say love?!

HAROLD

Yes. L-O-V-E. Love. Romance. Passion. I know when you look at me you think Romeo... lady's man... PLAY-ER.

HARK

I don't think of any of those.

HAROLD

Harkaroonie, look into my lonely, intoxicating eyes...

HARK

That's it. No more nutmeg for you. Bartender, cut this elf off.

HAROLD

I'm tired of flyin' solo, Hark. A lone elf in a cold endless-winter world... especially during the holidays. It's such a drag. Look at me, Hark, I want love.

HARK

Sorry, Harold, but I'm already taken. Good night.

HAROLD

Not you, silly, I want an elf-friend. Or if I'm lucky -- a wife - - like your Nicole.

HARK

You think... I'm... lucky?

HAROLD

Heck yeah. You got it all, bub.  
Look, I can SHOW you what you need  
to KNOW to get on Team Santa... if  
you SHOW me... what I need to  
know... to find my better half.

Harold smiles, putting on the charm.

HARK

If you ask me, my end of the deal  
sounds much harder.

Hark looks over at the Team Santa guys -- then, at Harold.

HARK (CONT'D)

Okay, fine -- what do I have to  
lose? It's a deal.

Harold fills their mugs with more eggnog.

HAROLD

Hold on to your pointy hat -- this  
batch has a cinnamon bomb in it.  
Let's toast to our new partnership --  
- to Hark and Harold -- and to all  
our dreams coming true. May our  
lives from this night forward...  
never be the same.

They CLICK mugs, spilling the eggnog all over.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Door BURSTS open. Hark and Harold stumble outside, singing  
from the top of their lungs.

HARK/HAROLD

*Hark! The herald angels singggg,  
Glory to the newborn King!*

HAROLD

Whoa... wait... how about this?  
(singing)

***HARK!** The **HAROLD** angels singggggg,  
Glory to the newborn Kinggggg!*

HARK

Clever. Stop leaning on me.

They sing as they make their way down the street.

HARK/HAROLD

***HARK!** The **HAROLD** angels singgggg,  
Glory to the newborn Kinggggg!*

INT. HARK'S HOME - NIGHT

Clock strikes midnight. Grandpa reads a book in a chair by the fireplace. He notices the hour and removes his glasses.

Nicole comes into the living room, ties her robe.

NICOLE

Hark's still not home?

GRANDPA

I'll wait up for him, dear.

EXT. OUTER VILLAGE - WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Hark and Harold walk by a fenced, secure area. A big clock nearby rings through the village.

HARK

What time is it? It's midnight?! I have work in the morning. I gotta go.

HAROLD

Hold your reindeers. This is the Top Secret thinga-ma-jiggy my uncle told me about today.

Hark looks at the warehouse. Harold punches in a security code but the gate doesn't open.

HARK

The sign says "Off Limits to All Elves".

HAROLD

Yeah. Off Limits to "ordinary, no-name elves". I'm Harold Melhorn. I'm connected. Wait until you see what's hidden inside.

HARK

Hidden?

Harold types in another code. Nothing happens.

HAROLD

Darn -- what's that secret code?