The Glitch Who Stole Christmas
by Hollenka99

Summary

After Jack loses a game of hide and seek, his friends and neighbours lose a lot more.

Based on Marsupials of Mars' Hide and Seek AMV and Liv me Entertain U's This Christmas animatic.

Notes

Back in June, I came across two videos. One (by Marsupials of Mars) had Jack endure the most tense game of hide and seek ever. The other (by LIV me Entertain U) made Anti go into Grinch mode. Pretty much from the get go, I pictured how I could combine the two videos into one story.

This would have been up yesterday but I was preparing for and celebrating Wigilia (Polish Christmas Eve), plus this cold I've had since the first day of my school holidays hasn't been helping productivity. And I totally wasn't editing it last night to the point of falling asleep at the keyboard. At least I was finally sensible enough to leave it until the morning when I woke up after 1am.

It's been cool how I've begun noticing small details in the videos that I'd usually miss when watching them without constantly pausing and rewinding every few seconds.

Just a disclaimer: Signe is Jack's girlfriend here. A) She's in the This Christmas video and B) this is supposed to be set in 2017 so they would still be together anyway.
Both videos are great and I hope I've done them justice. Please watch them yourself.

Hide and Seek: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfrKn4RW4oQ&t=2s&list=WL&index=3
This Christmas (I'll Burn It To The Ground): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT97M6kLx88&list=WL&index=3

Jack gazed out from his recording room's window. A couple of his neighbours stood on the island in the middle of their cul-de-sac. Probably ensuring the tree was secure for the night. Every December they would stick an unstably large evergreen on that island. Most towns and cities had gatherings to switch lights on. His neighbourhood had a tree. The one last year nearly collapsed on someone's car.

He used to enjoy the holiday. Back when he was a kid, he would rush down on December 25th to see if Father Christmas had visited. As the youngest, he'd always been the most excitable. His parents and siblings used to tease him about it. However, it was all in good humour.

His neighbours had a habit of asking him if his loved ones had bought him cheap clothes again. That didn't feel like it was quite as innocent. Sure, the first time, he'd rolled his eyes. The first Christmas after moving here, his mother had sent over a jumper that had unfortunately ripped within a few uses. The joke got old quick. It soon became an inside joke that he was expected to be a part of despite not wanting to participate. It didn't help that they tended to boast about their own gifts from friends and family.

Forget that, he was still friends with them. It was only one joke that rubbed him the wrong way. They were decent guys during the other 11 months of the year. The whole reason he moved to this cul-de-sac in the first place was to make it easier to hang out with them. He just wished he could get them to stop the K-Mart gag without being told he 'couldn't take a joke'. Besides, K-Mart didn't even exist in Ireland.

He left the window. Why worry about others when there was The Grinch? He could snuggle up with Signe and do Christmas his way. Except no, she left to do some last minute shopping an hour ago. Never mind, he could still watch a film without her.

Jack's doorbell rings as he scans the shelves for a DVD. He's surprised anyone would want to visit him after dark, especially on Christmas Eve. Signe never forgot her key, door-to-door salesmen wouldn't bother at this time and his neighbourhood didn't get many carollers. He glances at the window to check.

A pair of green eyes glow on the over side of the glass. Not as if a light source has caught the eyes of an animal. No, these eyes were generating their own light. They shared the same eye line as his too. In fact, if Jack dared to study the figure closer, he'd likely notice slight glitching affecting their body.

Nothing about this was good. What was Anti doing here? Not only that, what was Anti doing in December? Jack and his group of egos would spend the entirety of October on edge because of the demon. October, particularly Halloween, was at Anti's mercy. They all had to navigate the tenth month's perils to survive the glitch's antics. At least they knew to expect it.

He presses against the front door. His body is pretty weak as far as physical defences go. He can't
hold off intruders with only himself. A query appears. If he runs to find a chair to act as a wedge, would the demon take advantage of his absence to break the door down? Perhaps if that plan miraculously went in his favour, he could warn his girlfriend not to come home. God knows she doesn't deserve to be caught up in this mess.

"I know you can hear me. Open up the door." Anti spoke with a melodic tone. "Fuck off, fuck off, fuck off." He begs under his breath. The door sounds again. "You can't keep me waiting." Was that nails scraping against wood?

It turns out his deliberating costs him a chance to act. In seconds, green light builds to the point it illuminates the entire living room. The glass audibly cracks, shards presumably scattering across the floor with soft clinks. The glitch doesn't need to harass his front door now. The window can be his entry point. Jack has to get as far away as possible. Their eyes lock. Anti stays standing right outside the house. Could he not glitch through the wall? Wait, no. Glitching through walls would be terrible.

The thing with the egos was that they weren't completely corporeal, not the way that Jack himself was. At one point, he had total control over them. That was fine, those were the good old days. Their relationships were mutually respectful. Jack allowed them to develop their personalities until they were able to practise independence. They were still tied to him whether fully developed or not. Their connection to him could never be tampered with.

Unlike the others, Anti could get away with being wayward. He was the most different in terms of creation to Marvin. Whereas the magician had come to exist through a video the subscribers enjoyed, Anti was their product. Jack had built Anti using aspects of their image. The undeniable tie was frayed between himself and the glitchy demon. If he wished to murder Jack, the consequences wouldn't affect him as much as the other four.

Who would he want here instead? If it was Henrik, that would be nearly as unnerving as Anti. He was supposed celebrating with his family tonight. Heiliger Abend, was that what he'd called it? He had no business here. Neither did Marvin and Jameson, really. Marvin's had some holiday special he's performing and Jack doesn't know Jameson well enough for surprise visits. Then there was Chase. Jack could deal with Chase. Him drunkenly showing up to ask if he could crash over the holidays? That would be slightly problematic but not completely unexpected.

Jack can't let Anti harm him once more. If he sustained irreversible damage, who knows how badly the other egos would be affected. Chase and Henrik collapsing suddenly in front of their families wasn't something to be desired. Until Jameson's arrival a few weeks ago, Marvin had lived alone. He'd hate for the apartment to be devoid of life again.

He's freaking out. There's no way the demon can't tell. It in no way helps that Anti has begun climbing through the broken window. Jack stops standing in the corridor, peeping frequently at his living room by the doorframe. He's been watching Anti this way for the past minute.

The layout of the ground floor is odd. The kitchen is connected to not only the corridor but to the living room also. He considers himself a little lucky that he can trick Anti. If he can get the demon to follow him into the kitchen, he'll hopefully be able to sneak back to the living room while he's still out of his eyeline.

Like an idiot, he falters as he bursts into the living room from his kitchen. He simply cannot allow the glitch to spot him, not even a glimpse. He finds himself wedging his body between an armchair and the wall. It's uncomfortable, too small for him to fit unless his legs are practically pressing into his ribcage and possibly the worst place for him to hide. He swears Anti is right behind him, leaning over the armchair. While he wants to dismiss it as paranoia, he can't risk staying in one
"It's already too late for you to try and run away." That damned, unmistakable giggle travels through the air. "Here I come to find you. Hurry up and run."

He doesn't need to be told twice. Getting out from behind the chair is awkward and honestly, it may be a Christmas miracle Anti doesn't become alerted. Or perhaps he has been but is allowing Jack to get a head start. He sprints upstairs to the first room he can enter. It's his bedroom. Jack instinctively attempts to lock the door, only to find it futile. It's not even lockable as such. There's no chain like the front door or something he can turn like in his old apartment. It will only buy him the few seconds it takes to turn the handle and push.

He needs to find himself a better safe place within the house. There must be a room somewhere with a lock. One of these days he should get a bomb shelter or panic room. Somewhere with guaranteed security where he can stay indefinitely until threats like Anti leave him be. If he could set up his recording equipment so the glitch never had access to the subscribers again, even better.

The best place to keep him safe right now though is likely his closet. There's more space than under the bed. Not to mention less dusty. Jack's never noticed just how full of clothes it is. When he uses it previously, he didn't stop to imagine how he'd one day be ignoring a jacket sleeve tickle his ear while he sat on stacked jumpers and hoodies.

It doesn't matter. What's more important is controlling his breathing. It's too sharp. He may be imagining it as louder than reality out of panic. However, the less sound he made, the better his chances of getting out of this alive were.

"I can hear your footsteps. You're not very good at hiding, are you? You can't hide from me. I'm coming."

Anti has the audacity to knock. As if that will somehow excuse the breaking in, window destruction and general terrorising he's committed while in this house. What's worse is that Anti is clearly taunting him. The asshole wants Jack as terrified as he can make him.

It's fine. It was only a glitching demon hunting him down in his own home. He should focus on slow and silent breathing. He should certainly ignore Anti eliminating the bed from potential places Jack was hiding.

"You're not here. I wonder, could you be inside your closet?"

No. No no no. Oh God, no. Fuck, he's trapped in here. There's absolutely no way he can just race past Anti as soon as those doors are opened. Now would be a great time for Narnia to not only magically come into existence but do so in this very wardrobe. He could beg Mr Tumnus to hide him. Except, doesn't Tumnus get killed or something along those lines after helping the kids? He's probably only seen the film once, that time years ago when he was bored and there was nothing better to watch.

Anti swings open the closet doors, looming over Jack with the widest grin he's ever seen Anti wear. He fools himself into thinking he could bolt to the kitchen before the glitch caught him. All it took was some superior reflexes and agility to catch him unawares. Except, it's already too late.

Anti's won the 'game'.

Same as ever, things begin numbing. Jack can't remember the last time he blinked as he maintains eye contact with Anti. The merge is fluid despite his efforts to fight it. Anti's taken control enough
times for Jack to know his senses will cease being dulled by green haze at any second. And there it is. He can't scream out as his own neck severs in a straight bloodied line.

Jack's officially not himself as he steps out the closet.

"Better luck next time." Anti mocks. There's still people outside. "How about... we sew their lips clear shut with fear?"

What the hell? No! It's one bad joke. I don't care that much.

"Don't you?" He's heading to the kitchen now.

No. Why do you care anyways? It has nothing to do with you.

"Because October is great. You're all looking for the next scare. I'm able to do whatever I want, have as much fun as I can in 31 days. They don't even care. They love it." He's searching through the knife rack, inspecting every one. "Then it's over. Then you all focus on the next holiday. You all stop paying attention. There's just... So. Many. Distractions."

The glitch strides into the living room. It lifts up the snow globe that was brought out with Jack and Signe's Christmas decorations.

"But this Christmas, everything will change."

Jack is helpless as the demon tosses the snow globe in the direction of their fireplace. He doubts the glass will burn but the tiny house and tree inside will. The glass certainly shatters from the impact. How is he going explain this to Signe? She gave him that snow globe for their first Christmas together. It was one of his favourite holiday decorations. Now it was gone forever.

The malicious entity sat on Jack's bed, conniving. Tonight would be the best night for the job. After all, it was Christmas Eve. By tomorrow, the level of celebrations would be at its peak. They wouldn't care about anything other than their presents and food by then. However, if they had no gifts to get joy from, their attention would free to go elsewhere.

There was some commotion outside, attracting the demon's attention. A crowd had gathered outside Mark's house. Oh, was it already time for his obnoxiously bright lights to come on? Jack could never work out why Mark and Amy bothered to invite the entire neighbourhood for a five second activity. There was all the hype, he supposed. At least they only turned their light on the evening of the 24th. It was meant to 'show Santa where he could land'. God knows the damned things kept him up the entire night, twinkling away. Why did he have to live opposite Mark again?

He spotted Signe mingling with Ethan. Jack wasn't surprised to see her here. After all, it was Signe who usually tried and failed to convince him to attend Mark's light party. He tended to argue they could watch the dumb lights be turned on from their bedroom, sparing themselves the cold.

Anti didn't appear to find dressing as Santa Claus too difficult. Jack couldn't even recall when he'd bought the outfit. He had certainly worn it for the charity stream earlier this month. Regardless, the red jacket and trousers with white frills slipped on easily. He questioned the inclusion of black gloves but it wasn't his revenge plot so... whatever. He was only coming along for the ride because he was physically forced to.

Mark's party lasted longer than he'd expected. It was well past midnight before everyone in the cul-de-sac was sound asleep. Ethan's was the first home the demon targeted. His friend was completely oblivious to the theft when they left. He had even stolen some gasoline from Ethan, stating he would 'need it for later'.

With every house, Anti gathered every last present from under the tree into the Bag-For-Life he had stolen from Jack's home. Yeah, the demon wasn't too pleased by its 'sack'. But who actually
had a sack like Santa's simply lying around the house? On the rooftop, he would chuck the contents of the bag towards the cul-de-sac's island. How he was able to haul all those fir trees up chimneys was beyond Jack's understanding. Thanks to all the chimney travel, the costume was filthy by the time Robin became a victim.

Once again, the demon took an interest in something other than a present. Robin's box of matches were confiscated with the repeated excuse of their later use. Moments later, he is rummaging through his presents.

I don't have any Yuletide grudge against Robin. Could you at least leave him alone?
"I'm not leaving any spares."

Look, Robin is my editor. You want to be noticed year-round? I can ask him to add stuff into videos that will help with that. I doubt he'll be too co-operative if I steal from him though. So what do you say?
"I say... we'll show them what true misery feels like. Tonight, every-thing-burns."

"Jack?"

He notices Robin himself cowering at the demon's outburst. He is clearly traumatised by the sight of his possessed friend. Jack wants nothing more than to reassure him it will be okay, that this isn't really him performing criminal acts and his regular self will be back before long. Then again, he doesn't even know if he'll ever come back. Jack hasn't had the best experiences with Anti possessing him. He's been saved by Henrik before, even if it was touch and go. If it happens to him again, how will his friends react? What on earth is Signe going to think? She must have returned from the party to find him missing without any explanation, broken glass everywhere. Not to mention tomorrow when people discover Jack re-enacted The Grinch Who Stole Christmas before dropping dead out of nowhere.

"Don't be stupid." The demon scolds him as they escape through Robin's chimney. "You won't die unless I kill you. Keep telling me what to do. Maybe more than presents will burn."

When every house had been hit, Anti got to work. For the rest of the night, he piled presents upon presents and the occasional tree until they all precariously lay in one giant heap, circling the community's tree. Jack is sure Anti would climb to the peak to pour the gasoline everywhere. Instead, so as to avoid ruining half the night's work, the demon splashed the flammable liquid as high as he could fling it. The flames could work their way up to the top.

"Hey everyone, look outside your window! I have a su-per-tree for you!"

God knows how many presents were in that pile. And was Jack really counting 16 trees? They definitely hadn't stolen from 16 houses. Which asshole had multiple full-sized fir trees in their home?

Jack feels the disbelieving stares from numerous windows all direct themselves at him and the heap. Anti strikes a single match from Robin's box. With little wind, all it takes is for him to let go and the tiny flame meets flammable liquid. The gasoline gives it a boost. However, it can only race so high. That doesn't stop the fire from climbing, albeit at a reduced pace. It refuses to stop until there is physically nothing else to burn.

Externally, it seems as if he's loving the sight of colourful paper, boxes and what was once part of a natural landscape become blackened. Internally, he is mortified by how mesmerising he found the flames. Why did fire have to be so charming?

"I'm not ending this game. This is only the beginning." Anti announced to everyone. He continued
to mock the neighbourhood. "What's that? Christmas is ruined? Isn't that a crying shame."

This is too much. Anti is just standing there, revelling in the destructive heat of the fire. A few residents have ventured out into the cold to witness the events unfolding.

Congratulations, you've ruined everyone's fun. You must be so pleased with yourself. "And you'll get all the blame. After all, who's the one with the matches?"

You. You are. And you need to go. Right now.

"Weren't we having fun? Visiting your friends, playing hide and seek... Maybe next time you can try harder to hide."

Stop taunting me. Jesus, can't you just fucking leave already?

"Sure. We can do this all over again at Easter." Jack collapses onto his hands and knees as the demon departs.

"Jack!"

Shit, that was Signe launching herself into a sprint towards him. What would she think of him, after all that Anti's made him do? He's sure she must have been worried this whole time. Before he knows it, her arms are encompassing him. He wants to be comforted but he can't yet. Instead, tears start to leak.

"That wasn't me. I swear, that wasn't me. I didn't-" "Jack, it's okay. You're fine now. It's okay." She mutters in his ear.

"No, it's not." Still sitting on his legs, he announces his plans to fix this. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'll buy everything you've lost. You can get it back." It's not an impossible task. It will involve a lot of contacting people and asking what they got his friends. Though inevitably time consuming, it could be done. He can rectify Anti's actions tonight. He only hopes none of the presents in that fire were hand-made or had sentimental value. There is some muttering and nodding amongst his neighbours. If they can think of a better solution, he'll take it.

"Come on, let's get you inside."

He doesn't argue as she ushers him back home. He refuses to admit to anyone, least of all himself, it's much warmer by this massive bonfire than what their central heating could provide. He sits uneasily in the armchair he'd hidden behind hours beforehand. The glass in the living room is all gone. She must have swept it up.

"I'm-"

"Sorry, I know. You weren't in control. Nobody is going to blame you for what happened." "They should." It finally comes to his attention that her eyes are bloodshot. Although, she doesn't appear to have been crying recently. "Are you alright? I know I disappeared without warning."

"Yeah, I've been up for most of the night. It's fine. At first, I thought this was all Jackieboyman's doing. I was prepared to have a talk with you about him. I figured I might as well ask Marvin and Chase to keep an eye out for you. We all know you have a tendency to be reckless when you wear that suit. Then I found his costume was still here. And your Father Christmas outfit was missing instead. You would have told me if you were out cheering people up. Plus, that didn't explain why our window was smashed. The three of us have been looking for you around town."

"And I was here the whole time."

"I'm guessing this was Anti."

"Yeah."

"I can warn the others for you, if you want." She picks up her phone.

"There's no point." The flames are still going strong. Phil from three doors down is running with a bucket, shortly followed by his roommate Dan who's carrying a cooking pot. It will be a while
before their method of haphazardly throwing water at the bonfire will yield major results. "He's already got what he came for. I'll just have to be better prepared for him next time."

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