

# Confessions of a Session Amnesiac

Jonny Nexus

I'm guessing that most of you guys will have seen the film *Memento*, directed and written by Christopher Nolan and starring Guy Pierce. If you haven't, then stop reading this, right now, and go out and watch it!

Anyway...

Those of you still reading will no doubt recall the brilliant scene where the hero Leonard Shelby (an amnesiac who at any given time can remember only the previous thirty seconds) is running through a trailer park, experiencing a line of thought that goes something like this:

*Okay, what am I doing?*

[SPOTS A MAN RUNNING ON A PARALLEL COURSE TO HIM]

*I'm chasing this guy.*

[WATCHES, AS THE MAN POINTS A GUN AT HIM AND FIRES]

*Nope. He's chasing me. Remember that scene? Well that's me at the start of every single roleplaying session.*

'Ladies and Gentlemen, my name's Jonny, and I'm a session amnesiac!'

This condition afflicted me again last night, during our ongoing d20 game.

I'd started the session by forgetting that Mark's character was a woman (something that I'd forget a further

Quat something of a 'Crying Game' moment. Guess it was the long hair and the girlie profession that confused him.

Anyway, it was at that point - in an alleyway, in a port town, at an undefined time of day that turned out to be sometime after latish - that we (except for Quat, who was still vomiting in the gutter) were asked to make Spot rolls. Those of us who succeeded noticed two 'children' (they turned out to be halflings - and by the time I'd finished with them they were damned lucky that they weren't quarterlings - running off down an alleyway, one of them holding a goblet with a distinctive<sup>2</sup> design. The GM (Mark<sup>3</sup>) noticed I was looking a bit blank, so he pointed out: 'It's just like the one that [insert name of bad guy<sup>4</sup>] gave you last week.'

As it happens, my character, 'Noorl', has a wisdom of 6, so it was

only after several seconds of thinking, 'So they've got a goblet just like the one we have... how could that be?' that he managed to get to, 'the little gits have just stolen ours!' This was very easy to roleplay, because it took me the same period of several seconds to work it out myself. So we set off after them in hot pursuit and ran headlong into a bunch of muggers led by some woman.

'Give us the torcs<sup>5</sup>!' she shouted. 'Take them, please!' joked Bog Boy. 'Torcs?' I asked.



'LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,  
MY NAME'S JONNY, AND I'M  
A SESSION AMNESIAC.'

two times during the evening). Further confusion was caused all around when, in the process of

clearing up that misunderstanding, it was revealed that Bog Boy's bard character - unlike practically every character that he's ever played

- was in fact a man. As it happens, it was Bubba who was surprised by this revelation, giving his monk character

‘You’re all wearing torcs around your necks...’ Mark pointed out.  
 ‘And that’s because...?’  
 ‘[Insert name of bad guy] put them on you last week. They can’t be removed and, if you don’t do the job he told you to do, he’ll set them off and you’ll die.’

At that point I did begin to have a vague recollection of some geezer doing something pretty nasty to us the previous session, somewhere in-between us arriving at a ruined castle, and us deciding to take a boat halfway round the world to do something for some reason<sup>6</sup>.

‘Oh, right, yeah.’

So that’s my problem. Session amnesia. Most things I can remember:

- † The plot of a book I’ve just read – pretty damned good recall.
- † What happened in a film I’ve just watched – pretty good recall.
- † A session I’ve GM’ed – perfect recall.
- † A session I played in last week – goldfish.

This sometimes causes me quite a bit of embarrassment, like at Ubercon last month. In the morning, I’d played a really good session of a not-yet released game called a/state, GM’ed

by Malcolm, one of the game’s authors. We played through a really tense, gripping storyline that began

**I REPLIED WITH MY  
STANDARD CONFUSED,  
BLANK EXPRESSION.**

with our leader (an NPC) being stabbed through the brain with a pair of scissors by a gangland boss and culminated in us breaking into a woman’s house and torturing her in an attempt to establish the location of the money she owed us. (And I honestly think we’d have been successful if it wasn’t for the fact that we’d broken into the wrong house.) It was a great game, I absolutely loved it, and by that afternoon I’d totally forgotten everything about it.<sup>7</sup> Every single detail had been archived away – unindexed – in the dusty basement of my long-term memory. So when one of my Irish friends made a joke about people getting stabbed with scissors, I replied with my standard confused, blank expression, producing a response from him along the lines of: ‘Scissors? Stabbed? Head? Hell, I wasn’t in the game, and I remember what happened!’

It was at this point, as I was desperately trying to work out what the hell he was going on about, that Malcolm (the GM) happened to walk by. There was obviously no way my friend was going to miss the opportunity to humiliate me.

‘Hey Malcolm! Your game was so great he can’t remember a single thing about it!’

I had to grovel quite a bit. I’m not sure Malcolm believed me, although he was very nice about it. (To be fair, a statement along the lines of: ‘I can’t remember a single detail about your game, but I seem to recall it was great!’ does lack a certain credibility.)

What can I say? I’m a session amnesiac. Always have been. Always will be.

So I guess I’ll continue to experience session starts like:

GM: ‘Okay, the ship is gently rocking in the morning breeze as it sails eastward toward the rising sun.’

Me: [Thinking] ‘I seem to be on ship. Why am I on a ship?’

<sup>1</sup>Except, bizarrely, when something happens that makes me think, ‘I could write an article about that!’ – because then I seem to be able to remember every detail. Go figure.

<sup>2</sup>The GM did describe it, but I can’t remember now what he said.

<sup>3</sup>Yes, he does also have a character, and yes it is a bit weird, but that’s how him and Bog Boy like it (they take it in turns to GM, so their character is an ‘NPC’ when they’re GMing).

<sup>4</sup>Again, I can’t remember it. What part of ‘session amnesia’ do you not understand?

<sup>5</sup>A Celtic ornamental band worn around the neck.

<sup>6</sup>I can’t remember exactly what it is, but it’s got something to do with a sword and a ruined kingdom. I think we’ve got to do something with the sword. The goblet might have something to do with it too.

<sup>7</sup>As is always the case, I can remember it **now**, now that I’m writing about it. I just couldn’t remember it **then**.

Many people have asked me just who Jonny Nexus is. Some people even think it’s just me incognito. Well, I can assure you that he’s a real person. If you don’t believe me try popping in to the Signs & Portents forum at [WWW.MONGOOSEPUBLISHING.COM](http://WWW.MONGOOSEPUBLISHING.COM) where you can discuss important topics, like the exact meaning of the term ‘numpty’. . . we know how to live.



# Taking Santa Down

Jonny Nexus



When I was a kid I was terrified of Father Christmas (a.k.a. Santa Claus). I was convinced that if I were still awake when he arrived, he would bear down upon me with righteous anger and furious vengeance.

I very much believed in the Old Testament Father Christmas.

All in all, I was never one of his biggest fans. I didn't mind the presents. It was the breaking into my house in the middle of the night I had a problem with<sup>1</sup>.

So who is this Santa bloke and, more importantly, what's in it for you?

Well his history is a bit confused, but the available evidence suggests that he was born in what is now modern-day Turkey sometime between 260 and 280 AD, and named Nicholas. Overcoming the death by disease of his wealthy parents, he became Bishop of Myra, where he gained a reputation for generosity and skilled administration. However, under the later rule of the Emperor Diocletian, he was imprisoned for several years in an attempt to break his Christian faith. The attempt failed, but the savage facial beatings to which his captors daily subjected him burst all the blood vessels in his face, leaving him with the permanently red cheeks that he is still known for today<sup>2</sup>.

Today – in addition to his proper title of Saint Nicholas, by which he is known through much of Europe – he goes by a variety of aliases, including Father Christmas in Britain and Grandfather Frost in the former Soviet Union. However, it is now thought that he is trying to consolidate around a single, world-wide 'Santa Claus' brand. He used to



dress predominantly in furs, but since a groundbreaking 1930s sponsorship deal with a soft-drinks company, he's sported a predominantly red costume, with white trim.

Though Santa is still a huge cultural icon, his image has started to slip of late. There have always been allegations of elven slave labour at his polar production complex, but questions are now being asked about his unauthorised copying of trademarked brands such as Lego, and his repeated, gross violations of computer games software copyright. Questions are also being asked about

his habit of 'drink-driving' a sleigh on Christmas night<sup>3</sup>. In addition, many observers are starting to question the motivations behind his gift giving, to the extent that when he makes personal appearances, he is now usually prohibited from encouraging children to sit on his lap<sup>5</sup>. In 1968, in a clear sign of changing attitudes, the Catholic Church's Vatican II council – citing a need to free-up time for 'local customs' – removed St Nicholas's Day from its universal liturgical calendar, a move which close friends said left him feeling 'angry' and 'betrayed'.

That has covered a little of the question of who he is. What about my second question: What's in it for you?

Well consider this: In a typical year, Santa will visit 2,462,097,519 children in nearly 200 countries delivering presents with a total value in excess of 20 billion dollars<sup>6</sup>, much of it highly 'fenceable' electronic goods.

I think that covers the 'why?' and we've already done the 'who?' which just leaves us with 'when?', 'where?' and 'how?'.

It's a little known fact that Santa actually makes three 'present runs' a year: To continental Europe on December 6<sup>th</sup>; to North America and the British Commonwealth on December 25<sup>th</sup>; and to Eastern Europe and Russia on January 7<sup>th</sup> (the Orthodox Christmas). So you have three opportunities to get him. (Or if you're especially vicious, you can think of this as giving you the opportunity to do him three times over – how funny would it be when he sees you guys for the **third** time, and thinks: 'Not them again!').

When considering the question of when to do him, we also have to consider what time of night to take him down. We have already discussed his considerable intake of alcohol, so it's clear that we should intercept him towards the middle of his run, when he's pretty tanked up, and as a result will suffer penalties to both his Dexterity and his Base Attack Bonus, but will still have a good load of presents. However, while this is a fine theoretical objective, it is hard to achieve, since so little is known about the route Santa takes on Christmas night. Many people have theorised that he visits North America first, because they have the most presents and he wants to lighten his load. However, the most popularly accepted theory is that he follows the sunset, starting first in New Zealand, then working his way through Australia, Europe and finally the Americas, moving

from the East Coast to the West. The answer therefore is clear: Ambush him in New England, when he's pretty drunk and tired after a long Trans-Atlantic flight, but is still carrying the presents destined for the entire North American continent.

We now have a rough geographical location, but we must still answer the question as to how to intercept him, given that he's moving at inhuman speeds, and delivering to millions of households in our chosen area. The answer is obvious: Wait for him at a house where he'll be making a delivery. The morally challenged could just break into a house where sleeping children (someone else's presumably) are waiting for presents, and then attack him when he arrives. Alternatively, if you're worried about the risk to innocent bystanders, then you should pick a child-free house (preferably not your own, in case he comes back after you) and then:

1. Leave a 'present list' here around the middle of December. Apparently, he can pick that up in the middle of the night<sup>7</sup>.
2. Visit him when he is making a personal appearance at a department store, and give him your present list verbally. (Though unless you're exceptionally youthful looking, this might come across as a tad suspicious, and you'll look damn stupid if you try to sit on his knee.)
3. Send him an email via [www.santa.com](http://www.santa.com)

So now we get to the final question: Having got the old geezer cornered, how precisely are you going to separate him from his gifts and, having done that, precisely how do you propose to make your getaway? The first thing we have to consider is what powers and abilities Santa possesses. No definitive list exists, but they are thought to include:

**Super Speed:** Given that Santa delivers to around half a billion households in a single night – a

record which embarrasses the hell out of the Post Office, and holds up pretty well against private organisations such as UPS and Federal Express – he is clearly capable of operating at speeds far in excess of human norm.

**Multiple Selves:** It's well known that Santa is capable of spawning multiple versions of himself, thus enabling him to exist simultaneously in tacky department store grottoes located all across the developed world<sup>8</sup>. What isn't known is whether or not he also uses this power for delivery, although many people have pointed out that this would explain the apparent conundrum of one man delivering parcels to hundreds of millions of homes in a single night. If he is indeed using this power, then there is both a good and bad side for you. On the bad side, the value of the goods he's carrying will be far less, since it's only a fraction of the total haul. However, on the good side, if he's already 'split' himself, then it's far less likely that he can do it again, and it indicates that his Super Speed powers might not be so great. But the point is this: When you engage him in combat, be aware that he might suddenly split into multiple selves, all with at least one attack.

**Longevity:** Santa has lived for more than seventeen hundred years. But then he's probably never had the misfortune to encounter gits like you, has he?

**Magical Sleigh:** We know the sleigh has at least two major powers. Firstly, it is capable of at least hypersonic speeds. Secondly, it ignores encumbrance limits. This means that you have two main points to bear in mind:

If you let him get to the sleigh, you'll never catch up with him. Given that encumbrance rules do apply to you, the sleigh is the only hope you have of getting away with his entire haul of gifts. I have no idea how you get the sleigh to fly, but whipping the hell out of the reindeer until they get the general idea is probably the way to go.



So, the final attack plan is this: Wait until he has entered the house, preferably ambushing him just as he's drinking the booze. Always keep between him and the sleigh. Go in hard and fast, and be prepared for him to spawn multiple clones. When he's down, get in the sleigh and get the hell out of there.

Good luck. I suspect you'll need it and, in the words of the immortal Billy Butlin: 'Book early for Christmas.'<sup>9</sup>



*'Have a merry Christmas. . . or I send the elves round!'*

<sup>1</sup>Then again, I was also terrified of clowns, so maybe it's just me.

<sup>2</sup>I always find this fact (the answer to the question: 'Why has Santa got a red face?') a useful conversational piece to toss into any Christmas gathering which is in danger of turning overly sentimental.

<sup>3</sup>Santa can visit as many as 1 billion homes in a single night. Since practically everyone except the Methodists<sup>4</sup> leaves him a glass of wine or beer, we can speculate that Santa is drinking in excess of 500 million units of alcohol in a single night. Although laws on blood-alcohol levels vary across the world, I'm pretty sure 500 million units will be illegal everywhere, except possibly Russia. . . (It's around 125 million times the legal limit in the UK for example).

<sup>4</sup>Methodists don't drink alcohol. I was brought up in a Methodist family, and we just used to leave him a biscuit and a glass of milk. All the other kids at school seemed to get better presents. It's all starting to make sense now.

<sup>5</sup>Much like Catholic priests, as it happens, although in the interests of fairness I should stress that unlike the Catholic Church, Santa has never been successfully sued.

<sup>6</sup>Some of the facts in this article have been researched from sources such as the CIA World Factbook, some have been extrapolated from known information and the rest I just made up.

<sup>7</sup>Well that's what my mum told me, although I haven't been able to independently verify it.

<sup>8</sup>If ever you find yourself feeling guilty about mugging Santa, consider how much cash he's raking in from shamelessly prostituting himself to every single capitalist store chain going.

<sup>9</sup>The interfering editor added this bit. He has always wanted to see this in print and finally got the chance.

JONNY NEXUS

# I Think My Games Master Hates Me

My Sunday group has been playing our Call of Cthulhu campaign for a couple of months now, and it has become apparent that John, the Games Master, is pretty strict. I first became concerned when he forced my character Ralph<sup>1</sup> to make a driving skill check just to drive home from his Buckinghamshire Estate to his London home. Apparently, the task was made 'non-trivial' because: It was dark; the road was unlit and unsurfaced; I was driving a 1920s sports car with a super-charged six litre engine but only bicycle wheels and brakes; I was doing ninety miles an hour; and I'd been drinking heavily all afternoon<sup>3</sup>.

To really rub salt into the wounds, when I successfully made the roll he said I couldn't tick the experience box<sup>4</sup> because, in his opinion, the task had not been essential to the adventure. (I felt that me not crashing and dying *was* essential to the adventure, actually, but perhaps dancing around him after I'd made the roll gesticulating in his face and shouting, 'Suck on this!' might not have been the wisest move.)

When he started being difficult about our choice of travel arrangements. After our initial excursion to an asylum on a remote Scottish island (\*\*MAJOR SPOILER\*\* - for God's sake don't go near the place!) we had moved onto the Horror on the Orient Express campaign, and John had consequently developed something of a train fixation. The campaign starts in London, and then involves the player characters following the route of the Orient Express, from Paris, to Milan, Venice and Belgrade, eventually ending up in Istanbul. We spent about three weeks in London, researching, breaking into places, drinking and generally procrastinating, but our eventual decision that, perhaps, moving onto Paris might be a good move triggered John into producing a whole torrent of information about Boat Train times from London Waterloo to Paris.

Clearly though, this would be a stupid travel option to take. Why take the train when my character was, firstly, a pilot, and, secondly, rich and could therefore hire a private plane and get the whole party there in half of the time? Well, as you can no doubt imagine, John was somewhat unimpressed by this plan, but eventually grudgingly conceded and so, that afternoon, we sallied forth in our hired plane for Paris via Calais, crossing the channel coast at Ostend and then following the railway to Brussels.

It is just possible that I might have shagged up my navigation roll.

As an aside, I had recently read in a travel guide that Brussels is a horribly boring city, with absolutely nothing to do or see, and our campaign proved this to be the case. In every other place we have been to on the Orient Express campaign (London, Paris, Milan and Venice) John has had lists of hotels we could stay in, restaurants we could eat in, museums and churches that we could visit, together with a whole host of cultural and historical information. But when we (faced with the prospect of a night in Brussels before setting off for Paris the next morning) asked him what there was to do in the city, he just shrugged.

We ended up spending the night in an unnamed bar somewhere<sup>5</sup>.

In the sessions since, John's harsh behaviour has continued. He let me make a Listen roll during a house break-in and then – when I made the roll – told me that I could hear myself making noise and no, I couldn't tick the experience box. He had an evil Non-Player Character cut a little finger off each one of us<sup>6</sup>, when a blundered and foolhardy attack (by us on him, in case you were wondering) resulted in us being overpowered by his henchmen and delivered unconscious to his secret lair.

We have also been beaten up by black-shirts (how was I supposed to know