

Christmas at Ambrosia

by "Santa Cajun"

The following story is mostly true.

The holidays are usually a joyous time around the country and around the world. However, I always seem to have problems with Christmas - buying gifts, wrapping, sending, retuning, the misery just doesn't end. While the rest of the Ambrosia crew was off enjoying some well deserved time off, I stayed to watch over things here -- with The Bird.

The holiday season, for me, usually starts off early. Since my entire family is spread across the US, I need to get their gifts early, wrap them, package them, and send them off using some major parcel carrier. This doesn't work for me. Why? Well, I work best under pressure. I seem to do things more completely when it's crunch time. For some reason, I never forget anything when I'm in a hurry. So, shopping for my girlfriend on Christmas Eve with about an hour of shopping time left worked out great. I bought, wrapped, and delivered her gifts to her in time to be early to her parents house.

Oh, but it just doesn't work when I plan ahead. I don't know what to get, and then I get things for people right before I find the perfect gift. This year, I was lucky to be able to do a "Gift Switch." A "Gift Switch" is when you switch a gift that you have bought for a person to another person. This allows you to buy the "perfect" gift for someone who you have already bought a gift for. The first gift goes to someone else. Yes, it is confusing, but a valuable tactic to have.

Another major dilemma I had was with one of the "major parcel carriers." After getting wrong information from their 800 info line, I arrived just after closing. At the door, I had a delightful conversation with the guy who had the key (he was standing behind a locked door). He, after talking with his boss, let me into the office where I could mail my packages. However, I didn't have my packages in the proper corrugated cardboard boxes (it was only some clothes, did I really need them?). No, I didn't really need them because the US Postal Service (my hero) delivers anything with a stamp on it.

Regardless of the setbacks I was having, I was still in a giving spirit. I managed to get a gift for just about everyone. But there was one creature that I hadn't gotten anything for, our beloved Hector. After all of that hassle with the family's presents, you know that I was feeling quite good about the holidays - I was offering that bird a gift. If I had only known what I know now.

So, what to get Hector? Hmmm... He's a bird who has everything: he works for peanuts, he's got a cage with a mirror (for those bad feather days), he's got manufactured branches to simulate his natural habitat, he's got a 5 inch tall stalagmite of bird droppings underneath where he sleeps... Hey! That's it, I'll give his cage a good cleaning! He'll like that.

Now, as far as the stalagmite is concerned, you'll just have to use your imagination. We don't

have a picture of it, and it no longer exists, but man, it was huge! It was the biggest pile of... well, like I said, you'll just have to use your imagination.

So, one sunny Saturday, I hit the local grocery store and bought some cleaning supplies, some green scrubbies, and most importantly, some rubber gloves. I wasn't going to grab hold of that thing with my bare hands, not to mention the several inches of used seeds and corn meal or whatever that stuff is that we place on the bottom of his cage. Nope, for this job, I needed a shovel.

Hector is pretty temperamental. He doesn't like to be bothered in his cage. It's like his domain, his "happy place," and you can't trespass or you might find yourself one finger short. So, as you can imagine, getting him out of his cage is quite the task. Boy, did I make him mad. Poking, prodding, coaxing, nothing worked! I went as far as to place a peanut at the end of his free-standing perch to see if he would climb out and get it. Nope, didn't work.

So I decided, after many futile attempts, to just start cleaning. After removing the giant stalagmite of dookie, I used the dustpan as a shovel and scooped the bottom of the cage. By this point, Hector is absolutely freaking out. All this action is his "pad" had him confused. You see, Hector doesn't understand the concept of "clean" and being the messiest pet in the world, he never will.

Well, I couldn't scrub the cage with him in there. I didn't know how African Gray's take to Fantastik All Purpose Cleaner, so the inevitable was eventually going to happen, it was me, or him. Chasing him around his cage with cardboard around my finger (beak-proof), I managed to get him to jump out of the cage. It's kinda funny to watch Hector fly. Well, I can't say it's actually flying, it's kinda like floating downward. You feel bad for the little beast, until you turn your attention to the task at hand - the cage.

I placed Hector on his perch while I cleaned the cage. I wanted him to watch what I was doing so that maybe, just maybe, he might just pick up some good habits from this experience. But, no, he just sat there (stood there?) munching on almonds and uttering an occasional insult.

I finished the cage and put it all back together. Placed a nice layer of corn stuff on the bottom and attached the well crafted pseudo-branches to the sides of the cage. I cleaned the water and food bowls, filled them up and placed them in their respective places, and hung the mirror (he likes to swing from the mirror making this awful screeching sound. You've got to hear it). Then, I picked Hector up off of the perch and placed him inside the cage. "Merry Christmas, Bird," I said with a hint of disappointment.

"You're Welcome," said Hector. Well, I guess that's close enough.