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Reindeer games

iPad apps let you pilot Santa's sleigh

This is the final column in a series on Christmas-themed apps for the iPad.

Just because Rudolph wasn't allowed to play with the other reindeer doesn't mean you can't. The App Store has a wide variety of Christmas-themed games that appeal to a wide range of ages.

If you've ever wanted to drive Santa's sleigh, then you might want to



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try **Santa in the City 3D Christmas Game + Countdown**. The game from Useless Creations allows you to steer Santa's reindeer team through a virtual 3D maze of skyscrapers.

Using the iPad's awareness of its spatial orientation, you steer the team and control its elevation by tipping and turning the device. It takes some practice since reindeer are not known for their responsive steering.

Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer!

There are several modes in the game. You can just watch as the sleigh weaves in and out of the skyline with snow falling and Christmas music playing in the background. A countdown is displayed showing how many days, hours, minutes, seconds and sleeps are left until Christmas.

If you want to do more than just watch, the game lets you take the reins and pilot the sleigh through the cityscape on your own. This is just a pleasure cruise with no goals or time limit.

For a greater challenge you can

try to pick up letters to Santa by steering into beams of light. You can do this at your leisure, or you can choose to see how many letters you can get in a set time.

The game is entertaining and has good graphics, but it crashed a lot (the game, not the sleigh) while I was playing it.

Now, Prancer and Vixen!

Useless Creations has another sleigh-flying game, although this one has a dark twist. **Angry Santa's Christmas Revenge!** starts out merrily enough. As Santa flies over a sleepy village to the strains of Christmas classics, you tap a button to drop presents on the houses marked as the residences of nice children. How lovely.

But what do you do when you come across a house where a naughty child lives? You drop a bomb on it and blow it to bits, of course. For some perverse reason, it's much more satisfying dropping a bomb down the chimney and watching the house explode than it is delivering gifts for points.

The game gets progressively harder as you play. Besides the addition of the naughty houses, you will have to select the correct colored present for each house. The homes start coming quicker and closer together, and then you have to fly over taller structures. All the gifts must be delivered before sunrise, so the whole game is played racing against the clock.

It's a silly and fun game with nice graphics and a simple, intuitive interface. It might be a little too edgy for youngsters who don't think Santa should be blowing kids up, even if they are naughty.

On, Comet! On, Cupid!

Another virtual 3D app from Useless Creations featuring Santa's sleigh is **3D Christmas Aquarium: My Fish Special Edition**. This isn't really a game with an objective, it's more an interactive environment.

Santa's sleigh and an assortment of clown fish and long-beaked butterfly fish, swim around an underwater Christmas village. You can view the village from any angle by dragging your finger around the screen. You can also feed the fish by tapping a button and shaking your iPad. The fish will get bigger if you keep feeding them.

Additional fish, buildings and props can be purchased from within the app. You can also change the position of buildings and props to customize your town.

On, Donner and Blitzen!

This app is kind of like a real aquarium in that it's interesting, even soothing, to watch and explore, but it's not terribly exciting. It has a clock you can turn on to use the app as a screen saver. Young kids will probably enjoy naming and feeding the fish and watching them grow.

All of the apps I reviewed were the free versions. Each of them can be upgraded to paid versions that have extra features and no annoying ads.

There are many more Christmas-themed apps out there, but there's not enough time to review them all. Search the app store if you want to find some more. Merry Christmas!

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