

AND SO CHRISTMAS BEGINS!

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It is 1:47 a.m. October 1st. The countdown to Halloween.

It's the time of year when you should be out and about, enjoying fall festivities in the brisk autumn air. Festivities like going on hay rides with your significant other. Traversing pumpkin patches and bobbing for apples with your family. Drinking pumpkin spice lattes and eating apple cider donuts at Starbucks. Getting lost in corn mazes and navigating Haunted Houses with your besties. Carving pumpkins and turning your pad into a cobweb-infested graveyard with the help of Pinterest.

Oh, yeah—and you should be stocking up on treats for the little tykes who'll be coming your way in a few weeks' time. Not to mention costume-shopping for an eye-popping outfit, or better yet—getting a group together to plot which *Inside Out* character each of you will dress up as.

Right? Wrong.

Instead, you're standing in line at Macy's because the brand new flat screen TV's are releasing at 4 a.m. There are only a few hundred available—the first glimpse of limited-edition electronics before they go mainstream. It's better than anything HD or 4K has to offer, or so the ads claim. Regardless, you're willing to fork up the

dough if it means beating your friends to the latest and greatest technological advancement.

You check your watch for the umpteenth time. Only five minutes have passed. Behind you, the line has been snaking down Main Street for hours. You've been here since 7 p.m. yesterday to secure this space in line. It's prime real estate. Your new waiting buddies console you that it could be worse: you could be one of the people standing outside the Apple store across the street, waiting for the latest iOS device—they've been there an entire 24 hours already. They're convinced the iPhone 8 has reinstated the headphone jack. It apparently also touts a new feature that separates call and text volumes. The ad plastered against the building reads, "You'll never miss an important phone call again when messages are muted!"

A little farther down the street in front of Barnes & Noble, the Harry Potter fans have literally set up Book Nerd camp—sleeping bags, tents, you name it. Each devotee sports a colorful scarf, proudly touting the house Pottermore has sorted him or her into. It's been three days and counting, though J.K. Rowling's new fantasy series set in the wizarding world isn't scheduled to release until next week.



Each fan cheerily pulls a luggage bursting with 100-pound novels and recites Shakespearean sonnets to pass the time.

Bereft of reading material, you fantasize about the stories you'll tell your children someday. You can imagine them saying things like, "You celebrated Black Friday in the fall? And Granny did in the winter? Man, you guys are old-fashioned! It's sooo much nicer to wait outside for sales to start in 90-degree weather in swim trunks and sunglasses."

Old-fashioned, huh? That's a comforting thought. It means you're making history. One day students will read about you on their tablets and study the horrible era that was the Holiday Sale Revolution.

For now, this is reality. Christmas has been moving up on the calendar since the dawn of time. Curse those holiday sales! Stores hold them earlier each year, coaxing customers into sacrificing sleep, health, and entire lives for good pickings. Is it the stores to blame? Or the insatiable demand for stuff? No one knows.

You shudder. You'd hate to see what your grandchildren have to deal with. Life in 2056 sounds disturbing.

You can see it now. As soon as the new year hits—bam! The next year's holiday sales begin immediately. People become so obsessed that they spend the entire year preparing for Christmas. Their lives are consumed with holiday shopping, so no one has time to go to work or school. Parents lose their jobs, and youth grow up uneducated. Families squander their entire life savings on sale-hopping, so everyone is bankrupt, and the economy collapses because there's no more money left to buy all the *stuff* for sale! (Or, all stores simply go out of business. Whatever happens first.)

Suddenly, spending nine hours shivering in the freezing cold on a Sunday night is all worth it. You exhale rapidly onto your hands and rub them together while stoically resuming your place in line.