I suppose everyone over the age of about eight or ten knows that the stories about all the different Santas are fantasy. Isn’t it fun, though, to use your imagination and indulge in fantasy sometimes? Just look at his beard—now that’s fantasy!

The hair and beard will be handled differently on this project than on the kneespirit. We’ll be burning the hair to get a more realistic look. We will also be carving the entire figure as opposed to only the face.

Materials List

Wood
Cypress knee or wood of choice

Supplies
Pencil and permanent marker
Rotary tool with circular saw bit, a large pear-shaped diamond or ruby bit, and a flame- or tear-shaped bit
Power chisel
Knife of choice
U-gouge
Cloth-backed sandpaper, 220–400 grit
Eye punch
Dividers
Drum sander with fine sandpaper, xxxx grit
Woodburner with a tight round tip
Paintbrushes: round, sizes #1, #3, and #5
flat, sizes #2, #4, and #6
Motor oil or linseed oil
Hair dryer
Mineral spirits
Defl semi-gloss clear spray

Acrylic Paints
Metallic gold
Deep green
Red
White
Dusk blue
Light blue
Black

Oil Paints
Vermilion
Burnt sienna
Titanium white
Naples yellow
Ivory black
Burnt umber
Rose madder
Chapter Six

After studying the knee to see where I want to put the face, I start to draw. Once I get the pattern laid out in pencil and I’m pleased with what I have, I use a permanent marker to go over the pencil lines so I won’t lose the pattern.

Be sure to get the hood even on both sides when you draw the layers of hair. Also make sure that the bottom layers are even across from each other; otherwise the shoulders won’t be even.

This knee has enough bulk to hang Father Christmas’s toy bag over one shoulder and put a teddy bear in a pocket on the other side. I think he needs a walking stick too, don’t you?

Father Christmas is going to have a very long beard and a tassel on the back of his hood. Notice that I have not drawn the face. Try to learn to see the face in your mind. Also, if you use pencil or ink to draw the face, it will smear on the wood and ruin your flesh color.
I have chosen a knee with an A shape. This shape ensures that I’ll have enough width to carve the shoulders. Make a stop cut all the way around the hood and the tassel using the circular saw bit. Don’t stop cut the hair yet.

Start by carving the knot on the tassel with the power chisel.

Then, using a knife, carve all the way around the hood. You can see here about how deep you should carve around the hood. You can also see that I’m beginning to shape the profile.

You should be able to see the hood on both sides as you look at it from the front. Redraw the layers of hair that were removed as you carved. When you are redrawing, use pencil. Once the skin is removed, the wood will absorb the ink of a marker.
Stop cut the top layer of hair with a circular saw bit and carve it with a knife. Then carve the bottom layer. Carve straight up the side of the hair to start blocking in the face. You should be able to see the hair on both sides of the face as you look at it from the front. Carve straight in across the top of the shoulder. As you carve under the bottom layer of hair, start to round over the front part of the shoulder. You can use your power chisel or your knife for this step—choose whichever you are more comfortable using.

Redraw the beard where you carved it off. You will probably need to move it in closer, under the face. Keep in mind that the beard comes straight down from the face, not way out on the shoulders. As you carve the curls, tuck the tops of them under themselves. These curls will eventually become the ends of the moustache.

Continue to carve the beard one layer at a time, all the way down to the tip. Be sure to carve deeply so that the beard will lie nice and high on top of his coat.
Here you can see how I’ve carved straight in across the top of the shoulders. It’s important to think about this when you are laying out the design. You have to plan for enough width for the shoulders.

Here you can see how deep I’ve carved into the knee. Notice how I’ve rounded over the shoulders. This is the beginning of how you will shape the arms.

To carve Father Christmas’s face, follow Steps 9 through 86 of Chapter Five: Carving a Knee Spirit Step-by-Step. You will follow exactly the same steps, except that between Steps 22 and 23, you will bring the moustache all the way down to meet the curls that you see in Step 13. They will form the ends of the moustache. To finish the piece up, give the face a few wrinkles across the forehead. Your thumbnail should do the job nicely.

Here I’ve numbered the order in which you’ll carve each part; it’s just like doing a relief carving. Start by carving the teddy bear’s head using the circular saw bit.
After you carve the head, carve the ears. Next, carve Father Christmas’s arm.

Father Christmas’s hand is next. Notice that his hand overlaps the teddy bear’s arm. Little things like this make a difference in the appearance of your carving.

The teddy bear’s arm and Father Christmas’s walking stick should be at the same depth since his hand overlaps them both.

In order for the walking stick to be straight and not angle out at the bottom (see Step 4), you must carve the stick deep into the wood at the bottom. This will make the bottom of the coat flare out on both sides of the stick, as seen in Step 45, and his walking stick will be straight.
Now carve the pocket. Here you can see how I’ve drawn the teddy bear’s nose. Lay your pear-shaped bit on its side and carve a groove above that line.

Then carve away everything above that groove. Round over and smooth the area. Hollow out the ears.

Using the circular saw bit, stop cut around the sleeve on the other side, and use the power chisel to carve in deep around the sleeve. Then, carve the hand.
At the top of the shoulder, carve straight in under the strap that goes to the toy bag. The strap lies on top of the shoulder. Carve deeply down the side of the arm, especially in the bend of the arm. Carve deeply under the bottom of the bag but not too deeply under the flap of the bag.

There are many different ways to sand. If you carve clean (which means that you have left no fuzzies) and you don’t want to sand, then don’t. I personally like the look and feel of the piece when it’s sanded smooth.

Here I’m using a little rubber-covered drum sander that is covered with fine sandpaper. It does a nice job, but there is still a lot of hand sanding to do. Sometimes I use a flap wheel.

Carve all of the skin off. If you have any interesting little ripples, leave that area intact, but be sure when you sand that you blend that part into the rest so you won’t have a set line that will show when you paint. (See the project on page 38 in the Gallery and notice how the skin in the back blends in with the rest of the carving.)

Now it’s time to get ready to burn the beard. I start by hollowing out the middle of the curls. I draw my flame-shaped bit down under the nose to make a little depression in the moustache and make another depression where the moustache leaves the corner of the mouth.
Where I’ve hollowed out the middle of the curls, I lay my flame-shaped bit on its side and pull up from the curl following the shape of the moustache.

Make a few lines down from the moustache. Hair always grows down first (except for eyebrows). Once you have moved a little way out from the face, you can begin to twist and curl the hair. Make a few breaks in the hair. Start down first on every layer of hair.

Remember, no straight lines. Even straight hair bends. Make just a few long, curving lines.

You don’t want to make too many lines here because we are going to burn the hair on this piece.

Study this picture to give you an idea of how many lines to carve. Generally speaking, you’ll need just enough to break the hair up.
Here you can see the overall breaks I have made in the hair and beard. If you don’t want to burn the beard, go ahead and continue to carve the whole beard. Just remember, make long, flowing lines.

Using a tight round tip, I begin the burning process by making guidelines all over the beard and hair. This gives me the feel for the flow. You want to make sure all your lines bend and flow smoothly away from and into each other. You never want to cross one line with another because this can cause breakage.

Notice that where I’ve carved the breaks in the beard, I make a part there by burning away from the break to each side of the break and let that flow right into the next break.

Gradually let the lines flow back alongside of and into each other. Keep all your lines long and flowing. I use a tight round tip on my burner for most everything.

Don’t forget to burn in the face of the teddy bear. As you can see from the photograph, I use very simple lines for this.

As you are burning the hair, keep in mind how fine hair is. Make your lines as close together as you can. On the other hand, when you are burning in the strings for the tassel, make them wider apart than the lines for the hair because the strings are much thicker than the hair.
Here you can see the teddy bear’s face. I burned a border around Father Christmas’s hood and sleeves and added some holly leaves. Once the burning is finished, we’re ready to paint. When I want something to be opaque, I use acrylic paint, and everything acrylic paint is used on has to be done first, before going on to oil paints. I began by painting the gold trim.

I also use acrylic paint for the tassel. When you are painting the tassel, paint across the burn. You want the burn to show between each string. Choose a pretty, soft gold metallic for this.

Here I’m using a deep green acrylic paint for the leaves and for the rim inside the gold trim. Later, we’ll paint some bright red berries between the leaves.

Next, I paint the hood with motor oil. Let it soak up as much as it will, then wipe it off and do it again, until it won’t soak up any more. You can use linseed oil if you prefer it to motor oil; I just don’t like the smell. The motor oil or the linseed oil lets the natural color of the skin show.

Paint the eyes with acrylic paint. Thin white paint and paint the whole eyeball. Try to keep it off the eyelids. Allow the paint to dry. (Refer to the Painting Blue Eyes section on page 7 for more information.)

Paint the whole iris a nice, dark blue. Remember, no little round balls. Part of the iris is under the eyelid (see Figure 2.3 on page 8).
Put some light blue on the left side of each eye, staying inside of the dark blue. Allow the paint to dry, and then paint the pupil black (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5 on page 8).

Just one tiny little dot of white paint in the one o'clock or two o'clock position of the pupil will make Father Christmas look wide-awake and alert (see Figure 2.6 on page 8). Now put your acrylic paints away.

Wet the cheeks with mineral spirits, making sure to stay out of the high part of his cheek since this is the highlight area and should not get any color (see Figure 2.2 on page 6 and Figure 2.7 on page 9).

Mix a little vermilion and a tiny bit of burnt sienna with mineral spirits. Thin this mix like a wash. Lightly brush this on Father Christmas’s cheeks in a U shape and blend it with your finger. Brush a little of this mix on the lips.

Put a little of the same color mix in the eyelid creases and in all the wrinkles. Be careful not to have too much color on your brush. You can always add more color, but it’s hard to take off.
Put just a little color down the sides of the nose and between the eyebrows. Do this cautiously—too little is better than too much.

Don’t forget to add color to the forehead wrinkles and inside the nostrils.

I mix titanium white, a tiny amount of Naples yellow, and just a smidge of ivory black for the hair and beard. Using a dry brush with very little paint, I paint across the burn lines.

Continue to dry brush this color until you’ve covered all the hair. There are some spots where you will have to paint with the burn, but be careful to use only a small amount of paint. You don’t want to fill up the burn lines.
Use burnt umber, thinned with mineral spirits and mixed with a little motor oil, for Father Christmas’s mittens.

For Father Christmas’s bag, the teddy bear, and the walking stick, use several coats of motor oil for a rich honey color.

There are many beautiful colors of red that you can use for Father Christmas’s coat, or you can mix your own. For this piece, I chose rose madder. Mix a couple of fingernail-length strings out of the tube with three or four times that much mineral spirits (sometimes more) and a couple of tablespoonfuls of motor oil. You want it to be thin—it is just a wash.

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Paint the hard-to-reach, closed-in areas first: between the bag and the beard, the sleeves, around the beard and around the bag.

If the area starts to look splotchy, give it another coat of paint while it is still wet, and maybe even a third coat.

Painting between the beard and the walking stick is easier to do before the back is painted so that you can hold on to the piece.

Dry the paint with a hair dryer for 10 to 15 minutes. Then let the piece cool for another 10 to 15 minutes. The paint will still be tacky to the touch. Next, spray the carving lightly with several coats of Deft semi-gloss spray. If you have time, let the piece dry overnight and then spray it with Deft. Once you’ve sprayed the piece, do not dry it with the hair dryer because the paint will bubble. Now didn’t he come out grand?