

## Hausgeister! A Comprehensive Guide to the Household Spirits of German Folklore

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With its beguiling blend of evocative images, summaries of historical research, and wide-ranging literary quotes, *Hausgeister!* is an appealing “supernatural bestiary” of German house spirits.

Hausgeisters are unique—different from other European trolls, elves, and gnomes. They reflect ancient nature worship and customs grounded in rural communities’ dependence on natural cycles and search for answers when crops failed, farmsteads burned down, or illnesses struck. Early accounts of these beings considered them protective guardians of hearth and home, only bothering humans who were lazy or surly—representative of a society where nobles sought control over the peasantry.

The legends and fairy tales featuring these mythical beings changed over time, however. As Christian churches sought to eradicate superstitious beliefs, hausgeisters took on more demonic aspects. Even today, a notable percentage of people believe in the supernatural and mythical creatures, which have a renewed presence in popular culture, fantasy literature, films, and role-playing games.

*Hausgeister!* examines certain types of spirits in greater detail and in field-guide fashion. There are kobolds, the solitary, invisible creatures who haunt homes and castles in a protective manner, though they sometimes can be pesty tricksters. Gnome-like wichtels, fire-loving draks, lucky mandrake-like geldmannlein, and a delightful variety of holzfraulein, or moss women, are all discussed in terms of their narrative and historical development. All of these various species are further identified with Hannah Gritsch’s moody, atmospheric photographs of Florian Schäfer’s brilliant clay sculptures that nail the personality and appearances of these unique German spirits. A behind-the-scenes look at his “mythatelier” shows how he researches, assembles, and clothes these creative figures that add so much vivid detail to the text.

Playful, yet founded in wide-ranging archaeological, folkloric, linguistic, and historic scholarship, *Hausgeister!* peeps into “the dark corners of our houses” and shows why fascination with fantastic creatures continues even in contemporary culture.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2023)

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