



The Fright Before Christmas: Surviving Krampus and Other Yuletide Monsters

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Krampus and Saint Nicholas star in *The Fright Before Christmas*, a book of criticism that pulls back the mistletoe curtain to reveal myriad winter holiday creatures and traditions that serve serious social functions.

Christmas, Yule, Saturnalia, and other winter solstice holidays have more in common than not: messages of hope and redemption, along with the threat of punishment for bad or antisocial behavior. Krampus is one of the better-known punitive figures in this history: there's been a recent resurgence of Krampus Runs worldwide. But lesser-known figures, including the cannibalistic witch Gryla and her Yule Lads, also populate the dark and cold nights. Even festive-seeming traditions like wassailing and mumming conceal a darker history of social inequalities that required redress, with alcohol and masks and merriment to propel groups into the New Year.

Showcasing extensive research ranging from historical sources to interviews, this book also contains macabre and funny illustrations and historical images, as well as numerous pop culture tie-ins to films and even the 1931 Coca-Cola advertisement that first solidified Santa Claus's jolly appearance.

The Fright Before Christmas is an informative romp through holiday history, revealing not only the whens but also the whys of cherished winter celebrations.

JEANA JORGENSEN (September / October 2023)

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