

Thesis Assignment

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Thesis Proposal and Research

Abstract

This thesis is a ninety-page screenplay in the fantasy-horror genre titled *Spirits of the Yule*. The plot is set in Medieval England. The plot is about an abbey of monks that is being terrorized by a species of demons called the Krampus. Their motivation is to revert the abbey to its pagan roots so that the old gods can regain their power. The monks are aided by two supernatural figures—Nora, the queen of the elves, and Saint Nicholas, an immortal saint.

The most prominent monk in the screenplay is Eli. He begins as the story's protagonist. Eli is a former priest who has fled from his church after a scandalous affair. Eli lives with hidden guilt, having had his illegitimate son die a few days after birth. Eli comes to White Rose Abbey to hide from the world, but soon finds himself being named the Father Abbot out of necessity. Eli is killed by Krampus midway through the script. After his death, Nora and Saint Nicholas replace him as the story's main heroes.

Nora and Saint Nicholas represent the two opposing forces of the Christmas Season—the pagan and the Christian. Nora is initially resentful of Christianity for robbing her of her power, but she comes to accept that humanity has moved on from her culture. At the end of the story, Christianity becomes the dominant religion of Europe, and Nora and Krampus disappear into humanity's subconscious. As she passes away, she gives Saint Nicholas her signet ring, giving him power over her sleeping servants.

Cole Hamilton

May 15, 2024

Dr. Durrell Nelson

Thesis Proposal and Research

Artist Statement

Introduction

For my thesis, I am writing a ninety-page screenplay titled *Spirits of the Yule*. It revolves around a group of seventeenth-century English monks who are being hunted down by the demon Krampus. Their only hope lies in the hands of an elf named Nora and Saint Nicholas. My purpose for wiring this screenplay is to produce and direct it in about a year's time; summer 2025. I am not writing anything into the screenplay that I cannot film. I am committed to following this creative limitation. This class gives me the chance to perfect the script.

My Background in Film

After college, I filmed eleven short films over a five-year timespan. Three of them played in Kingdomwood, a Christian film festival in Atlanta. One of my shorts, *Finding Divinity*, won second place as a mini-film in 2017.

It took me over a year to plan my seventy-five minute feature film. I wrote the script and hired the cast and crew myself. It was a fantasy about the doomed relationship between Merlin the wizard and Morgan Le Fay. I saved up my money so that I could produce it myself.

My only goal was to complete a feature film project that was fully watchable. I read somewhere that 99.9 percent of people who set out to make a feature film never complete it. I did not want this this be me. I knew that in all likelihood, it would never make me any money or win

any awards. I was going into this without any real experience. My crew and actors filmed it in the woods over the course of eight days. Everyone worked for a hundred dollars a day.

It took me a year and a half to edit this, and that was mostly because I trusted in my Director of Photography too much. I have never written anything negative about him before until now. I have written about the filming process a few times, but now I will be completely truthful.

I met him on the first day of filming. He told me that we needed to shoot in RAW. My computer at the time was not equipped to edit this. He promised to help me edit the movie. I complied. This put me entirely in his mercy. After filming, I made at least twelve trips to his office about three hours away to watch him color grade and edit. He made my movie so much more beautiful and professional-looking than I imagined. I am grateful for this, but I paid a heavy price for it. He turned out to be a perfectionist who could never bring himself to part with the footage. He was a freelance musician and editor, and he many long periods of unemployment. He was desperate to make this movie his calling card, even if it took him a decade to do it. I had put myself in the unwise position of having only one copy of the movie, and it was in his office. I was wary of him tampering with it if I demanded it back.

When a year passed and the movie was still leagues away from being completed, I had to ask him for the footage back. He took it personally, even when I tried to console him. He exported all of the footage in RAW. Either that, or he did something else with the footage that made it impossible for anyone else to edit it on their own computers—even a man who used to work for Disney. I ended up having to go back crawling to him, work with him a little longer, wait for him to get sick of the project, and then firmly demand the footage back with the finalized color grade. He complied, with a few passive aggressive comments. My outdated

computer was still not able to edit this. I had about ten more months' worth of drama ahead of me as I paid different editors to work their magic. By the time the movie was completed, I was too tired to be excited.

Beyond the White Veil played in a few film festivals. It was a semi-finalist for the Lift-Off Online Film Festival. One thing held my movie back: It was too amateur. Its one location—the woods—betrayed its low-budget. But even worse than this was the sound quality. During those eight days of filming, every lawnmower, motorcycle, airplane, and helicopter came out—none of which existed during the time of Merlin.

My DP told me on the first of filming that I would need to use ADR. This was easy for him to say. This was my money, not his. I ended up paying different recording artist to record new takes of my actors' dialogue. My lead actress lives in California. I live in Georgia. Finding a recording artist in Orange County and working out the details remotely was chaotic, but it was not anything I was not used to at this point. Even after paying for this, the sound quality of the film leaves a lot to be desired. It is not garbage, but neither is it perfect. Its quality fluctuates.

The last editor that I ended up working with had the unglamorous job of fixing all of the audio—all for a price that is peanuts in the film world but was just in my grasp. One night, he emailed me, saying that in order to perfect the audio, it would take him more time than anticipated, and he needed more money.

I debated this in my head for a few seconds before I got down on my knees and asked the Ultimate Artist what to do. The Holy Spirit said the phrase, "Diminishing returns."

I emailed this new editor back and thanked him for his offer. I politely told him to just do what he could do with the price and time that we had initially agreed upon. He called me the next

morning and said that he wanted to give the audience the best show possible. He would do everything he could do—he was just asking me for a little more time. I was relieved.

There is a line in the song “Irony” by Alanis Morissette. Irony is “...the good advice that you just didn’t take!” I am happy to say that I took the Lord’s good advice here, and I immediately received a very clear and tangible reward for it. God saved me 2K.

There is an old saying that art is never completed; only abandoned. The final version of the movie still has a few sound glitches in the dialogue that are not worth the money or effort of trying to remove. A couple a months ago, I uploaded *Beyond the White Veil* on YouTube, along with a separate video that contains my audio commentary. What’s done is done.

My Experience with Christianity

Most of the characters in *Spirits of the Yule* are monks. I am familiar enough with organized religion to write devout characters. I was raised Methodist. I quickly fell in love with the Bible. I studied it on my own. When I was in Middle School, I discovered the existence of other religions. My best friend at the time was my pastor’s niece—and she was an atheist. I took it upon myself to study Christianity on my own until I was satisfied that I could defend my own faith. By the time I graduated from high school I was well-versed in theological arguments.

In my college years I taught Sunday School to both children and adults. I pursued ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church. I graduated from Georgia Gwinnett College with an English Degree. I then attended Candler School of Theology. I interned at a small start-up church operating out of a warehouse. I assembled the tables and chairs each week.

I only lasted a few months in seminary before I realized that this career path was not for me. During this time I was trying to make a short film about Joan of Arc. I learned bitterly that

men who work for God full time do not have the time to make movies. Even if they did, my movies deal with fantasy and horror. This is a peculiar hobby for a minister to have. The Methodist hierarchy would not have approved.

One day I walked into the basement of the seminary chapel. I looked up and said, “It’s not fair, God. You got to make everything You ever wanted to make.” God was silent—as He often is. If He had spoken, I think He would have said something about how the act of creation leads to sacrifice. Maybe He wanted me to learn this for myself.

There were a few other reasons why I left the ministry. The Methodist Church has recently suffered a three-way divorce between the liberals, the conservatives, and the people too cowardly to pick a side. The controversies that led to this separation were just beginning during my brief Seminary visit. I was afraid that I might be forced to preform a gay marriage. Staying Methodist felt like staying on the Titanic. I pursued teaching and have not regretted it.

I currently attend a Messianic Jewish synagogue. Here, we refer to Jesus by his Hebrew name Yeshua, which means salvation. One of the central beliefs of Messianic Judaism is that the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah are still in full effect for the Jewish people. Christ’s coming has not changed this. It makes sense to me that God did not send the King of the Jews to tell the Jews to stop being Jewish.

Yeshua was a rabbi. His loyalty to the Torah can be seen throughout the Gospels. In the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua says, “Now, do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to complete...” In the Gospel of Mark, Yeshua says that the greatest commandment of them all is the Shema—the most sacred prayer in

Judaism; “Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord is One.” Religious history is fascinating to me. The script will give me the chance to explore it.

My Experience with Medieval Fantasy

I have been in love with medieval fantasy since the third grade. On my bookshelf now, I have English translations of medieval works. Most of them about the Arthurian Legend. Some are about Norse Mythology. My books include *Beowulf*, *The Volsung Saga*, *The Islandic Sagas*, *The Nibelungenlied*, *History of the Kings of Britain*, *Le Morte de Arthur*, *The Life of Merlin*, *Parsifal*, and *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (the serious version—not the Monty Python parody). I believe that I am familiar enough with this genre to write a satisfying entry in it.

Spirits of the Yule

I am labeling *Spirits of the Yule* as horror, since that has always been the easiest genre to break into. Horror fans will watch just about anything in the genre, and they crave experimentation. Horror need not be vulgar or extreme. This movie will be in the tradition of the Universal horror movies. The *Frankenstein* movies are my biggest inspirations. They explore the existentialists themes of creation, destruction, and the search for the soul. I consider these movies to be high art. This my script’s place in literature—a classy, elegant horror story—rich in folklore.

I will be employing four-act structure as I write this. I know that the three act structure is more traditional, I am such a firm believer in the necessity of the Act Two Midpoint. It makes more sense for me to make them two separate acts.

Act One will establish the lives of the monks of White Rose Abbey. My protagonist will be a monk named Eli. He becomes his abbey’s new Father Abbot. Act One will show how how

how he is elected to this position. At the end of Act One, Eli will discover that one of his monks has been mysteriously murdered. He realizes that an evil presence has infiltrated his abbey.

In Act Two, Krampus will creep around the abbey, killing monks. Eli becomes aware of Krampus' identity. One of this movie's themes is the burden of leadership. Eli becomes the leader of his abbey just in time for it to face its biggest threat.

Act Three will begin with the elf Nora entering the abbey. She has come on behalf of Saint Nicholas, whom she serves. Nora is also a figure from Europe's pagan past, but she is Krampus' sworn enemy. She contains some piece of information that will help the monks defend themselves against Krampus. She is wise, fierce, and cheeky.

In all likelihood, Nora will be the most dynamic character. The reason why I am not starting with her on page one as the protagonist is because she needs to have an air of mystery about her. The focus should not always be on her. She does not have any moral failings or misbeliefs that a protagonist should have. Her character arc will consist of making peace with the fact that humans have embraced Christianity and have moved on from her.

In this script, faeries are manifestations of nature. Without the power of human belief to fuel them, most of the fay folk are fading into nature. The only reason why Nora has not faded away yet is because she has placed herself in the service of a Catholic saint.

As Act Three Draws to a close, Krampus gets the upper hand on Nora. Act Four will feature Saint Nicholas himself entering the abbey. In this story, he is an immortal Catholic saint endowed with divine powers. He will be larger than life; bombastic, yet wise. Saint Nicholas contains the missing key to defeating Krampus. Saint Nicholas and Nora have the final

showdown with Krampus. The movie will end on a triumphant note, but the characters will understand that Krampus can return in any era.

A story set in a medieval abbey allows dynamic costumes. Brown monk robes are easy to acquire. I will rip and stain them for authenticity. Saint Nicholas' costume will be more elegant. He should look like a cross between a bishop and a wizard. I have not yet decided what Nora's costume should be, but I think that she should wear animal skins with warlike faceprint. She is a nature spirit. She should not look peaceful.

The two best scenes in *Beyond the White Veil* took place at night, where we used giant lights to illuminate the trees. I have the opportunity to make every scene look like this. Just about every scene of *Spirits of the Yule* is set in the abbey. I will show flickering candles illuminating medieval tapestries. I love the aesthetics of old churches. Catholic icons developed from the need to teach Bible stories to illiterate peasants. I admire Catholic artwork for its beauty.

Since I will be filming on a set, I will have complete control over the audio. I will also be able to have a proper score. *Beyond the White Veil* was almost shot documentary-style. It did not allow for non-diegetic music. With *Spirits of the Yule*, I will be able to budget for a musician. I have never written a screenplay on this scale before. It feels daunting, but exciting.

The World of the Film

I want the world of my screenplay to feel completely authentic. I am including this information to keep my story from feeling like a ready-made product. Everything that I type here is factual, unless it relates to White Rose Abbey, and even then, it is based upon actual abbeys.

The story is set during the time of Oliver Cromwell. England is fiercely puritanical. Protestantism spreads through Europe like wildfire. The Catholic Church's authority has already been challenged by the rise of secular education, Islam, and the Black Death.

In Cromwell's England, Christmas has been outlawed as a gluttonous celebration. Soldiers patrol the streets, confiscating turkeys and other food items that might be consumed in a Christmas feast. There is a literal war on Christmas, and Puritan Christianity is waging it.

Catholics and Puritans both believe in the existence of the fay folk. They have different explanations for them: The fay are the souls of unbaptized children, or the souls that have escaped from Purgatory, or the angels who never picked a side during Lucifer's rebellion. Christians fear the fay. They avoid walking alone at night, or through the forest alone.

In this story, the fay folk exist as the sentient manifestations of nature. Human imagination is what gives them their personalities and shapes. They are resentful of Christianity for having robbed them of their power. Before Christ, they were worshipped as gods.

There are small secluded communities across Europe that do not practice Christianity, such as the Jews. They are periodically banished from different countries. At any moment, Christians could ride into their villages and slaughter them. Rabbis are beheaded—and then their severed heads are “baptized” in water.

Besides the Jews, there are Cathars and the Bogomils. Their beliefs fall under the umbrella of gnosticism—an ancient Christian heresy that dates back to the second century. These sects believe in the existence of two different gods; an evil god who created the world, and a perfect god who exists in a non-corporeal realm. They seek enlightenment so that they may escape the material world and enter the nonphysical realm after death.

This movie is mostly set in White Rose Abbey—a fictitious Abby nestled on the border between Scotland and England. Ten years after the events of this movie, Scotland will become protestant, and White Rose Abby will be vacated. The only reason why White Rose Abbey remains in operation as a Catholic establishment is because of its seclusion in the forest, and because of its nearness to Scotland. Scotland still has a decade more of being Catholic.

White Rose Abbey was originally a pagan temple dedicated to the Morrigan—the Celtic goddess of war, death, and fate. It was built by Queen Boudicca in 60 AD. Queen Boudicca was the greatest of all Celtic Queens. She launched a failed uprising against the Romans when they invaded Britain. The pagan temple was by hoisted by Christians in 600 AD. It was given the name “White Rose” because in the Middle Ages, white roses were symbolic of the Virgin Mary’s purity. The monks spend their days farming, praying, and copying the Bible. It is a self-sustaining community. The monks earns a little bit of money from the Bibles that they produce. None of the monks own anything. Everything they produce is for the common good. Krampus’s motivation for killing all of the monks is to return the abbey to its pagan roots.

Father Abbots are elected by a secret vote of the monks. It is a lay position. In most abbeys, monks attend the local church in order to receive the sacraments. White Rose Abbey is so secluded in the forest that this is not practical. It is a requirement that any monk seeking to become an the White Rose Father Abbot must already be an ordained priest.

This is where Eli comes in. Prior to joining White Rose, he was an ordained priest. The events of this movie will challenge his leadership in ways that he could never foresee. He is inclined to trust pagan spirits, but he realizes that he has no other choice. When he befriends

Nora, he will tell the monks, “She is not evil. She is pre-Christian, not un-Christian.”

Cole Hamilton

Dr. Durrell Nelson

Thesis Research

May 22, 2024

Critical Paper: The Shadows of Silent Cinema

Introduction

Spirits of the Yule is a screenplay in progress that combines medieval fantasy with the horror genre. It deals with themes of religion and folklore. One of the most useful things to do in the planning stage is to scrutinize movies that touch upon similar subjects. While many movies take inspiration from their most recent predecessors, *Spirits of the Yule* will best be served by drawing upon foundational works from silent cinema.

Of the entire canon of silent films, four German films are especially beneficial. These are *Nosferatu* (1922), *Faust* (1926), *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* (1924), and *Kriemhild's Revenge* (1924). These four films contain the elements of storytelling that *Spirits of the Yule* will most benefit from. The goal of this critical paper is to analyze the evocative settings, horrifying antagonists, and doomed protagonists of these four films—*Nosferatu*, *Faust*, *Siegfried*, and *Kriemhild's Revenge*—and discuss how these different elements will influence the development of *Spirits of the Yule*.

Looking Back

First, tribute should be paid to films of the sound and color era. Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* (2001–2003) is epic in scope. The writer of the novels, Professor J. R. R. Tolkien, is considered by many to be the father of the modern fantasy genre. *The Witch* (2015), *Dracula* (1992), and *Constantine* (2005) are worthy options for the study of horror. *The Witch*, in particular, has much to offer as an atmospheric period piece set in Puritanical New England.

Going back a few decades, *Alien* (1979) excels in its gritty depiction of futuristic spacecrafts. Its script marries the haunted house genre with science fiction.

The Golden Age of Horror has *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). The crumbling architecture and the rocky terrain cement their gothic setting. Doctor Frankenstein's wish to play God and the Monster's search for a soul give the duology a sense of existentialism that propels it into the realm of high art.

All of these filmmakers were inspired by earlier works. The themes of *The Lord of the Rings*, while rooted in Tolkien's writing, are present in *Excalibur* (1981), *Willow* (1988), and Jim Henson's Muppet-filled *The Black Crystal* (1982). *The Lord of the Rings* is not even the first trilogy to feature a hero's journey in a fantasy realm. *Star Wars* precedes it by twenty years.

Spirits of the Yule is another in a long line of fantasy-horror movies. Every tradition has its roots. The filmmakers who worked in the 1920s did not have the advantage of working within pre-established genres. They created the prototypes that subsequent movies would follow. By today's standards, these films may seem antiquated and primitive. Nonetheless, for the creation of *Spirits of the Yule*, there is much to glean. As Martin Scorsese wrote, "The silent era has never ceased to amaze me. Just when I felt I've seen everything, a film comes from left field that upsets all my assumptions . . ." (Kobel 2007).

Nosferatu

Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* was published in 1897. *Nosferatu* premiered twenty-five years later. Audiences had no idea that they were to witness what film critic Kim Newman calls ". . . the template for the genre of horror film" (2018). *Nosferatu* is the best-known creation of its director, F. W. Murneau. Acclaimed director Guillermo Del Toro calls *Nosferatu*, ". . . a symphony of perfect visual storytelling" (2023).

The Setting

Director F. W. Murneau served in the German military during World War I. He was both a commander in East Prussia on the Eastern Front and a combat pilot over France—where he survived eight plane crashes. This may have given Murneau a sense of adventure that led him to seek out authentic shooting locations for *Nosferatu*.

According to the documentary *The Language of Shadows*, no exterior sets were built for the film. For Hutter and Ellen's village, Murneau used four salt storehouses built in the sixteenth century. For the Count's castle, Murneau used Orava Castle in Slovakia, which was built in the thirteenth century. For the ending of the movie, when the castle crumbles, Murneau uses the remains of Starhrad, another Slovakian castle. Both castles sit on similar-looking hills. The *Language of Shadows* shows these locations in good standing decades later.

Audiences may not be able to identify a painted backdrop, but they can certainly tell when something feels more authentic. Murneau reveals a truth about the cinema here—for the supernatural to be believable, it needs to be firmly grounded in something tangible. Murneau does not show the audience a flimsy film set; he guides them through reality. No suspension of disbelief is required. As Del Toro states, "Murneau's film has a tangible, physical component of corruption that makes evil immediate and real" (2023).

The Antagonist

Although most versions of *Dracula* depict him as a dapper aristocrat, the constraints of silent film do not allow Orlok to exude subtle charm or witty dialogue. The film takes its time

building up to his appearance. He first appears at the twenty-minute mark in the form of a weathered old man—emerging from the darkness of an archway at night.

As the film progresses, his ears grow larger, and his teeth turn ratlike. He creeps slowly from one side of the frame to the other. He moves through doorways that are built to fit his shape exactly. The camera does not just focus on him, but on his looming shadow. The film uses primitive special effects to have him move with inhuman speed and rise supernaturally from his coffin. By the time he meets his end, he is more animal than man.

Professor Josh Foley writes, “As an ambivalent figure, the vampire reflects the merging of past within present, myth within science . . . Count Orlok, or Nosferatu, lives outside of the city, in the country, which connotes backwardness” (2019). Orlok is completely other. He is ancient, beyond rationality, and belongs to humankind’s primordial past.

Orlok is not a man with monstrous desires; he is a monster in rough human shape—a precursor to *Alien* and *The Thing From Another World*. Murnau adds a detail that is not present in the novel; Orlok’s presence in the town brings an infestation of diseased rats. The film shows lines of coffins being rolled down the street. Orlok does not need to bite his victims to kill them. He is a dealer of death in various forms.

Orlok taps into humanity’s primal fears in a way that Satan in *Faust* does not. His backstory is never given. He has little personality besides his desire for human blood. He is not intellectual. He is unconcerned with the afterlife. He is not waging war with God. He is too small a figure to be part of a heavenly battle. He is a single-minded predator. Man, with all his modern advancements, has only one way to fight against him: sacrifice.

The Doomed Protagonist

No film adaptation is faithful to its plot, and *Nosferatu* is no exception. Murnau appears to have taken the particular liberties he took for three reasons. First, this was an unlicensed, illegal production. Director F. W. Murnau failed to secure the film rights before filming. Murnau

believed that by changing all of the names, he would remove all associations with *Dracula*. Johnathan Harper became Thomas Hutter. Mina became Ellen. Dracula became Count Orlok. This proved futile. Stoker's widow sued after the film's release and, consequently, nearly all copies of the film were destroyed. Only a few film prints survived.

Murneau's second reason for his liberties was practicality. *Dracula* is four hundred pages long. Alternations were required to keep the story within its hour-and-twenty-minute runtime.

Murneau's third reason for his liberties appears to be ideological. Bram Stoker's novel is full of male heroes and submissive women. His fiercest females are Dracula's brides. Murneau exchanges these traditional gender roles with a foppish husband and a reserved wife.

In Stoker's novel, Johnathan Harker has a character arc that ends with him becoming a hero. He begins the novel as an idealistic but naive realtor. He soon becomes a prisoner in Dracula's castle and is traumatized after his escape. At the end of the novel, he decapitates Dracula, while another character stabs him in the heart.

Hutter maintains Harker's idealism and trauma. The first scene depicts him bringing flowers to his wife—a scene not found in Stoker's novel. His grin is cartoonish. He runs to Ellen—practically skipping. It would be a mistake to assume that this performance was merely a product of silent film acting.

Hutter is contrasted with Ellen, who maintains a blank expression. She asks, "Why have you killed them—the beautiful flowers?" Already, the movie is concerned with death. Ellen does not appear to have much affection for her husband. The only male that she shows interest in is Orlok—and this is when she is under his hypnotic spell.

As Hutter rushes to work, a doctor tells him, "Do not hurry, my young friend! Nobody can escape his destiny." Very few of Nosferatu's title cards contain Bram Stoker's text. Most of them contain dialogue specifically written for the film. A few scenes later, Hutter bursts into his

living room to tell Ellen, "I am going to travel far away to the country of thieves and ghosts." He hugs her and scampers around the room. Ellen barely moves. She looks off forebodingly. The makeup around her eyes accentuates her gaze.

Hutter never develops the heroism that Johnathan Harker exhibits. He has nothing to do with Orlok's death. Ellen, on the other hand, makes the ultimate sacrifice. She feigns illness so that her husband can run out of the house to find the doctor. Orlok creeps into the house and up the steps. Ellen allows Orlok to drink her blood until the sun rises.

When Orlok looks up and sees the sun as it rises, he vanishes. Ellen's dying look is one of astonishment. Hutter weeps over her body, displaying much more emotion than she ever did. In Stoker's novel, sunlight merely weakens Dracula. *Nosferatu* is the first story of killing a vampire via sunlight.

Murneau's interest in feminine power may have come from within. Friedrich Wilhelm Murneau had a relationship with his fourteen-year-old Pilipino driver, Garcia Stevenson. Murneau apparently hired Stevenson for his beauty rather than his driving ability. Murneau was killed in 1931 at age forty-two when Stevenson had an accident while driving his car (King 2021). Murneau was flung from the car and cracked his head on a pole. Murneau's closeted desires may have led to him prioritizing the feminine over the masculine.

Professor Scott Poole of the College of Charleston writes this of Ellen's character: "Some may read Ellen's sacrifice through the lens of Christian models of devotion . . . However, it's notable that the male figures we meet in the film are incredibly passive victims of the vampire or are simply ineffectual . . ." (2018).

When *Nosferatu* begins, it seems that Hutter is the protagonist. He is the one who meets Orlok in his castle. However, it is Ellen who makes the greatest decision. Though it is Hutter who receives the warning of a fate that is inescapable, it is Ellen, to whom it applies—her fate is

sealed in the film's first few minutes. The phrase "final girl" refers to female characters in the horror genre who survive to face the story's threat alone at the end. Ellen might very well be the first.

In his analysis of *Nosferatu*, Professor Poole draws attention to the scenes in which Ellen is hypnotically attracted to Orlok. He writes, "Ellen feels drawn to the vampire throughout the film. The narrative allows a woman not only to show desire but also to direct it toward an image of alterity, the inhuman face and form of *Nosferatu*" (2018).

Whatever the level of attraction she feels for Orlok, Ellen's sacrifice provides a sense of gravitas that a purely triumphant ending would lack. *Nosferatu* is more than Gothic entertainment; it is a tale of death, sacrifice, and veiled sexuality. All the movies explored here will involve the sacrifice of the main characters—and they will all be inevitable.

Why It Matters

The setting of *Spirits of the Yule* is White Rose Abbey—a fictional abbey nestled in the wilderness of medieval England. The monks who live there are the movie's protagonists. The location and characters must feel as realistic as possible to make the threat look convincing. *Spirits of the Yule*, like *Nosferatu*, is about how the supernatural invades the mundane.

The villain of *Spirits of the Yule* is Krampus. Krampus is a goat demon of Germanic folklore who punishes naughty children at Christmastime. Krampus has been featured as a villain in a couple of movies and television shows, but these portrayals lack substance. Krampus-related media only seemed interested in exploiting the kitsch of a Christmas-themed demon. These few movies are so one-dimensional that they are hardly worth mentioning in this critical paper.

Unlike Dracula, Krampus has no defined personality in mainstream consciousness. *Spirits of the Yule* has the opportunity to do for Krampus what *Nosferatu* did for Dracula—give him shape. Krampus does not need to be a hairy demon with horns. This would be effective if Krampus were to make only brief appearances. The current script features him heavily, with

many lines of dialogue. A purely horrific appearance would lose its effectiveness quickly and banish *Spirits of the Yule* to the ranks of B-movies.

Nosferatu contains the secret for giving Krampus his gravitas: He must be slightly pitiable. If Krampus were to have a weathered appearance, it could speak to his ancientness. He must move slowly and lack omnipotence. His survival must be dependent upon something that he fears losing. Krampus will be just as threatening as Orlok and just as vulnerable.

Nosferatu is also useful for demonstrating the dramatic value of sacrifice. *Spirits of the Yule* is meant to be a classic, elegant type of horror film. Its ending has yet to be written, but it should not end on a note of total destruction. Krampus cannot be victorious, but neither should the monks come out of their ordeal unscathed. Having one of the monks die could make for a poignant ending, especially if it can be part of a redemption plot. This is where *Faust* comes in.

Faust

The figure of Doctor Faustus is based upon a seventeenth-century chemist who lived in Wittenberg, Germany—during the time of the Protestant Reformation. He was possibly an itinerant charlatan who read people's fortunes. After his death, he was denounced as a sorcerer. His legend grew. Many said that he had sold his soul to the Devil for his knowledge and power.

Faust's legend inspired many writers. The first was William Shakespeare's contemporary Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe wrote his play *Doctor Faustus* in 1593. He depicts Faust in much the same way that John Milton depicts Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* as a tragic, romantic figure who rebels gloriously against God. Christopher Marlowe seems to have had no religious motive for writing it; reputedly, he was a gay atheist (Meyers 2003).

The eighteenth-century poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe does not seem to have been religiously motivated, either. He adapted the legend into a two-part epic poem. Goethe changed many details. His first change was turning the deal into a wager. Faust tells the Devil that he can

never feel one moment of pure happiness—and should he ever, he will forfeit his soul. Another change is the character of Mephistopheles.

In earlier versions of the legend, Mephistopheles is a demon who serves Faust on Satan's behalf. Goethe makes him the Devil himself. Unlike the earlier writers, Goethe seems unconcerned with depicting the hierarchy of Hell. He combines them all in a single character.

In the first scene of his poem, Goethe depicts Mephisto standing before God to make a wager over Faust's soul. This is nearly identical to the second chapter of the Book of Job. Goethe's Mephisto is much closer to the Jewish idea of Satan than the Christian one, an adversary who tests humans on God's behalf.

Goethe makes another adjustment to the Faust legend, and it is one that Murneau takes full advantage of: the inclusion of a tragic love story. In Part One of his poem, Faust meets a virtuous maiden named Gretchen. Faust uses Mephisto's powers to seduce her, but he abandons her soon after taking her virginity.

Gretchen gives birth to Faust's illegitimate child, but due to her poverty—having no husband to care for her—the child soon dies. Gretchen is assumed to have killed her child, and she is thrown into prison. Faust becomes aware of this all too late. By the time he gets to Gretchen's cell, she has already died. He watches her soul ascend to Heaven, while his own salvation at this point remains uncertain.

Goethe chooses to redeem Faust. Toward the end of his life, Faust has a vision of people living and working happily in a field. At the end of Part Two, Act Five, Faust cries, "Green fertile fields, where men and herds / May gain swift comfort from the new-made earth . . . Quickly settled in those hills' embrace, Piled high by a brave, industrious race. And in the centre here, a Paradise . . ." (Goethe 1832).

Faust realizes that true happiness can only come from living in harmony with nature. In this moment, he achieves pure happiness. Mephisto attempts to take his soul, but female saints

overpower him. He bemoans, “My head and heart are burnt: my liver’s burnt, by a devilish element! Sharper than the fires of Hell!” (Goethe 1832).

Goethe’s poem is not about Christian theology regarding salvation and damnation. It is about seeking out the meaning of life. Goethe transforms Faust from an Icarus to an Everyman-type figure. There is very little Christian theology present in his poem, if any, at all.

Murneau’s *Faust* claims to be based on Goethe’s version. In truth, Murneau borrows just as many elements from Marlowe. Murneau takes from Marlowe the nature of Faust’s agreement with Mephisto and the emphasis on traditional Christian theology. From Goethe, Murneau takes the wager in Heaven, the love story, and the happy ending.

The Setting

Unlike *Nosferatu*, none of *Faust*’s scenes were filmed on location. All of its sets were built on an indoor stage. *Nosferatu* is a low-budget production. *Faust* is one of the most expensive silent films ever made. Professor Melville writes, “If we boil the cinema down to its essentials, a film is little more than an interplay of light and shadow. Few if any directors understood that more thrillingly than Friedrich Wilhelm Murneau in his 1926 film of *Faust* . . .” (2022).

Murneau begins his film with a nightmarish glimpse into the spiritual realm. Undead horsemen fly through the clouds. The clouds are crafted from smoke and glass wool. This shot of the ghostly riders inspired the images of the ghostly horse riders in Disney’s *Fantasia* (Melville 2022). Mephisto materializes and argues with the Archangel, who guards the gate of Heaven. Light emanates from the Archangel, while dark clouds rise up from behind the Devil. As they argue, scenes are shown of Faust teaching students at school. The two spirits make a deal: If the Devil can corrupt Faust’s soul, he will win world domination.

There are a myriad of locations seen on Earth—Faust’s village, his private study, a church, a bucolic countryside, a cottage, and the snowy wasteland where Faust’s baby dies of exposure. The village is a product of German Expressionism—complete with slanted buildings. The pathways below are slanted and uneven, perhaps suggesting Faust’s tumultuous journey.

As Mephistopheles states in Marlowe’s play, “Why, this is Hell. Where we are is Hell . . . Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed in one self place, for where we are is Hell, And where Hell is there must we ever be” (Marlowe; Act 2, Scene 2).

Realism is not the goal here. Murneau creates an environment in which the Devil walks among men, and where one man’s soul hangs in the balance. Murneau employs realism with the snowy wasteland toward the end. Snowflakes are not just blown down, but across the screen. The specs are just big enough to be visible on camera, but not so big that they look unrealistic. The painted backdrop depicts mountainous terrain that goes on for miles.

At the end of the movie, Faust manages to redeem himself. The last scene is at the gate of Heaven. The Archangel has won the wager. He banishes the Devil from his presence. Murneau is perhaps the first director to craft a film that depicts both a spiritual and a physical world. It is one thing for a movie to show multiple locations. It is quite another to show the relationship between Heaven and Earth. One realm affects the other. This places the movie on a grand cosmic scale, with which not even *Nosferatu* can compete.

The Antagonist

Satan is the ultimate villain. The media have depicted him in almost every way imaginable. Lucifer has been a beautiful woman (*Bedazzled* 2000), an attorney (*The Devil’s Advocate* 1997), a little girl (*The Last Temptation of Christ* 1988), and a hound (*The Omen* 1976). Murneau’s Mephisto takes three different forms in Murneau’s *Faust*. They can be identified as the Demon, the Pauper, and the Courtier. Actor Emil Jennings plays all three.

The Demon is the most sinister of them all. Jannings' body is painted black. He wears claws and horns. Mephisto takes this form when he stands at Heaven's gate and when he first enters Faust's village. This leads to one of the film's most striking images when Mephisto sports a pair of raven-like wings bigger than his own body. He towers over the village and smothers it in his shadow. According to Professor Melville, this image inspired the character Chernabog in Disney's *Fantasia*.

Mephisto unleashes the Black Death among the hapless villagers. Mephisto is not just concerned with spiritual death. Like Count Orlok, he is a dealer of physical death. It is unsurprising that Murneau reuses the motif of disease. Germany suffered many outbreaks of disease in the wake of the Great War.

Mephisto takes the form of the Pauper when Faust first summons him. He is an old man in battered rustic clothes. Faust runs from him, but wherever he flies to, the Pauper is always there, taking off his cap to greet him. Mephisto maintains this form as he offers his services and presents the contract. He restores Faust's long-lost youth. His smile is both gleeful and wicked. His movements are slow and genteel—at least in front of Faust. When Faust lies sleeping, the Pauper's smiles and movements grow wilder.

He seduces Faust through kindness. His purpose for appearing as a Pauper might be for Faust to unconsciously look down upon him or to underestimate him. Faust himself is a wealthy scholar. He would be wise enough to flee the sight of the Demon. He might even flee a Devil who looked more refined. The form of the Pauper is designed to lower his guard.

Mephisto's third form is the Courtier. He is human in shape, with long, sinister eyebrows. He wears a black robe, cape, and cap.

His movements are grandiose. He is evil, but almost foppishly so. He only appears once Faust has agreed to test the Devil's powers, so he has no more need for subtlety. He does not need to hide behind the kindly exterior of the Pauper, but neither is he as intense as the Demon.

He is in human shape, so he can walk openly with Faust. He is richly dressed, so no human would mistake him for a vagabond.

Murnau employs a split-screen effect for the Courtier's first appearance. He appears beside the Pauper, then shoos him off. Then, the Pauper fades away. This moment does more than provide an advanced special effect; it reveals the prim and proper nature of the Courtier.

Later, when Faust gets in bed with a foreign princess, it is the Courtier who draws the curtain to grant them privacy from the audience. The Courier is a prude. He is also a source of comic relief. When Faust is wooing Gretchen, her grandmother finds herself wildly attracted to him. She chases him around the house to kiss him in a scene reminiscent of a Warner Brothers cartoon. This scene reveals a secret about Mephisto—he is fallible.

The Courtier is still capable of destruction. At the film's end, when Faust tries to save Gretchen from being burned at the stake, he reverts Faust to his elderly form. The lovers burn together. Faust's desire to save Gretchen to the point of his own death is enough to save him. The Courtier is under the impression that he has won his wager, until he returns to Heaven in his Demon form. Only then is his grand defeat revealed—and all in the name of love.

By giving his antagonist three distinct forms, Murnau paints a complex image of Satan. When the audience first sees him, he is seemingly all-powerful—a match for God Himself. When he takes human form, he chooses a form that best ensnares his victim. His powers are vast, but as Gretchen's grandmother proves, he is easily made a fool of.

This speaks to Christian values. The New Testament teaches, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Ultimately, Satan has no way to escape his eternal defeat. The Scriptures state, "And the Devil who had deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Count Orlok speaks to man's primal fears of natural predators. Mephisto speaks to man's fears of supernatural terror. Both monsters play off man's fear of the unknown. At the start of the film, Mephisto is horrifying. He takes a demonic shape, flies through the sky, and brings plague. The film's conclusion proves him to be Heaven's greatest loser. In both the Scriptures and the film, genuine repentance is enough to banish him.

The Doomed Protagonist

Murneau turns the tale of Faust into an allegory for mankind itself. Even if this was not Murnau's conscious decision, his work is doubtlessly allegorical. As Professor Clive Staples Lewis wrote, "No story can be devised by the wit of man which cannot be interpreted allegorically by the wit of some other man" (Lewis 1961).

Murneau first shows Faust as an elderly professor with a long white beard. He tells his students, "All things in Heaven and on Earth are wonderful! But the greatest wonder is man's freedom to choose between good and evil!"

These words were written specifically for the film; neither Marlowe nor Goethe wrote them. By using them, Murneau chooses to explicitly state his story's theme. It is a theme that applies to all of humanity.

Murneau depicts Faust sympathetically. Faust strives to heal his fellow villagers of the plague. He summons Mephisto out of desperation. He sells his soul out of his desire to have a cure. It is only after he signs the deed that he becomes corrupted.

This is reminiscent of what C. S. Lewis writes in *The Screwtape Letters*, "Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts" (Lewis 1942).

Murneau and Lewis both understand that corruption is a gradual process. Murneau depicts Faust experiencing an escalation of temptation. Mephisto restores Faust's youth and

surrounds him with luxury. Faust becomes a fornicator and glutton. Mephisto is happy to act as his slave. At no point does he demand worship. But neither does Faust worship God.

As Marlowe states, “The God Thou servest is thine own appetite, wherein is fixed the love of Beelzebub” (Act 1, Scene 3). In the words of Screwtape, “All extremes, except extreme devotion to the Enemy, are to be encouraged” (Lewis 1942).

Naturally, Faust grows bored. The scene of him sitting alone in a desolate wasteland comes forty-four minutes in, right after the scene of Faust taking a princess to bed. This scene marks the film’s transition from a fast-paced spectacle to a slower-paced drama. Faust falls in love with the simple but virtuous Gretchen. Much to Mephisto’s frustration, he pursues her—even though he could have any other woman of his choosing. Faust’s actions speak to the universal truth that pleasure without spirituality is meaningless.

Murneau keeps Faust sympathetic even as he abandons Gretchen. Gretchen’s brother, Valentin, discovers that he is in league with the Devil and challenges him to a duel. Valentine slashes at Faust, even though Faust refuses to fight back. Mephisto stabs him and kills him, then runs through the street screaming, “Murder!” Faust flees from Gretchen, not out of boredom but self-preservation.

Romans 11:29 states, “The gifts of God are unrepentant.” When God gives a gift, He does not take it away, even when it is misused. The punishment for misusing God’s gifts is to suffer the repercussions. According to Faust, the greatest gift of all is free will.

As C. S. Lewis writes in *The Screwtape Letters*, “Humans are amphibians . . . half spirit and half animal . . . as spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time” (1942). As a mortal man, Faust is bound by the constraints of time. He is unable to reach Gretchen in time to save her, but in the eyes of Heaven, this is irrelevant. Faust’s acceptance of responsibility is enough to spare his spirit from the eternal fire.

Murneau sacrifices Gretchen's life for Faust's salvation. As she burns, she displays no anger for Faust—only love. She dies as a paragon of submissive Christian virtue. Their dying kiss portrays them as lovers, not unlike Romeo and Juliet or Tristan and Isolde. These classic love stories paint their male leads in heroic lights—and Murneau does the same. But the men in these stories never made decisions that singlehandedly killed their lovers. It is doubtful whether modern audiences would appreciate Faust's ending. Using women as plot devices for male growth is a trope that has been called into question in the modern era.

On the character of Gretchen, Professor David Melville writes as follows:

When the focus shifts to Gretchen in the second half, she takes on the aura of a feminized Christ figure (“crucified” in the stocks and jeered at by the mob) and later—once she gives birth to her fatherless child—of a sacrificial and eternally sorrowing Madonna of the Snow. She seems less a love interest for Faust than his tacit female alter ego, one who must suffer in expiation of his sins. (2022)

This morality tale has its roots in the Middle Ages. It can hardly be expected to conform to feminist ideals. Modern sensibilities aside, Faust's death points to another Christian truth: To reach Paradise, one does not need to be victorious; one only need be repentant.

As a hero, Faust fails to save his lover and live a righteous life. He is humble enough to acknowledge this. This humility makes all the difference. His dying moments act as a sort of unspoken confession to Gretchen. His purifying flames act as a sort of Purgatory. If *Faust* is the story of all mankind, then the message is simple—repent and be saved.

Why It Matters

Like Mephisto, Krampus is waging war with the Biblical God. He is a spirit from Europe's pagan past. He invades White Rose Abbey so that he can kill the resident monks and revert it to the pagan temple that it once was. Unlike Mephisto, his powers are not on a grand

cosmic scale. *Faust* reveals its villain immediately. *Spirits of the Yule* will take its time to establish the status quo of White Rose Abbey first.

Faust's greatest contribution to *Spirits of the Yule* comes in its presentation of its protagonist. Faust's greatest conflict comes from within. He wants to live a righteous life, but he gives in to far too many temptations to do so. He ends the story broken and fallen.

The protagonist of *Spirits of the Yule* is the monk Eli. He begins the story fallen and broken. Prior to the movie's events, he was an ordained Catholic priest. He fled his church in the middle of the night due to a scandal involving another man's wife.

Eli joins White Rose Abbey so that he can hide from his adultery. When the father abbot dies, Eli is forced to take up the role himself, since he is the only monk in the abbey who is ordained to administer the sacraments. He goes from one leadership role to another. It is up to him to defend the abbey against Krampus. Eli's inner conflict leads him from being a coward to a hero. The nature of heroism is further explored in *Die Nibelungen*.

Die Nibelungen: (Part One) Siegfried and (Part Two) Kriemhild's Revenge

The story of Siegfried predates those of Dracula and Faust. Its mythical origins are as murky as those of the Arthurian legend. Its most complete version is found in *The Volsung Saga*, a Norse Saga written by an unknown author.

Sigurd is a sixth-century Nordic prince who performs a series of heroic deeds. The most notable of these is the killing of the fire-serpent Fafnir. Sigurd bathes in Fafnir's blood so that he becomes immune to all weapons. As Sigurd bathes, a single leaf falls from a tree and lands in the middle of one of his shoulder blades. As with Achilles, this is his only vulnerability.

Sigurd places himself in the service of King Gunther of Burgundy. He scorns one of Odin's daughters, Brunhild, by rejecting her after a brief romance. He assists King Gunther in his quest to have her married. Sigurd's reward for this is the hand of Kriemhild, Gunther's sister, in

marriage. Brunhild's love for Sigurd turns to hatred. She goads her husband into arranging her revenge. Sigurd sends his right-hand man, Hagen von Tronje, to murder Sigurd.

Brunhild climbs onto Sigurd's funeral pyre and immolates herself. Kriemhild is married off to different husbands, the most notable of whom is Attila the Hun. Kriemhild arranges a war between the Huns and the Burgundians. Gunther and Hagen are both killed.

Siegfried's life was rewritten in the thirteenth century. *The Nibelungenleid* is a Christian reworking of the tale. Most of the magical elements are removed or diminished. It was written in two equal parts: *Siegfried* and *Kriemhild's Revenge*. German director Fritz Lang adapted the saga into a duology that premiered in 1924.

The Setting

Fritz Lang takes his audience throughout medieval Germany, throughout the lands of "Middle-Earth." Tolkien did not invent the name Middle-Earth, he borrowed it. The name Middle-Earth is an English translation of the Norse word "Midgard," which is the part of the world-tree that humans inhabit. Technically speaking, Fritz Lang is the first director to put Middle-Earth onscreen, beating Peter Jackson by seventy-five years.

The forest that Siegfried travels through is full of thick, beautiful trees. When danger draws near, mist shrouds the air, and the trees develop claw-like branches. The two largest sets are Burgundy Castle and Attila's Hall. According to the documentary, it took two years for these sets to be built before filming began.

Gunther's Castle is Gothic and geometrical. Its walls are smooth, stark, and symmetrical. Author Peter Kobel writes how the different sets ". . . all create a universe of mystery, myth, and wonder against which the tragic passions of the actors play out" (Kobel 2007).

King Gunther's castle is starkly contrasted with the magical forest. This lends itself well to the movie's themes. Siegfried begins the movie in the chaos of nature, and he rides into the rigid order of human society. This proves to be his doom.

The hall of Attila dominates *Kriemhild's Revenge*. It is not historically accurate. Lang either did no research or ignored it entirely. It is an uneven structure adorned with torches and strange symbols. Its doorways are asymmetrical holes. Its rooms resemble caves.

Modern audiences might find this depiction insulting, but it works on an emotional level. To achieve her revenge, Kriemhild is forced to leave her homeland and join a kingdom for which she has no affinity. Lang ends *Kriemhild's Revenge* with a battle between the Huns and the Burgundians. All of the major characters are killed, and the hall is burned to the ground.

Lang called the fire department to stand close by as he torched his set. It was the last thing that he had shot before production ended. Naturally, Lang was only able to film this scene in one take. This scene would not have had the same effect had Lang just torched a model. The spectacle comes from seeing an actual building burn. Lang understood what Murneau did: for the fantasy to be believable, there needs to be some form of reality.

The Antagonist

Die Nibelungen does not have a singular antagonist. Fafnir is only in the movie for a few minutes, and Siegfried attacks him first. He is an impressive puppet with over twenty men inside of him. A flamethrower in his mouth is used to create his fire-breath. When he dies, a single tear falls from his eyes. Fafnir is more victim than villain.

Hagen and King Gunther come closest to antagonists for Siegfried. Hagen is the one who spears Siegfried in the back. Prior to this, he saw Siegfried as a potential rival. His chief flaw is jealousy. Hagen is indeed a villain, but compared to Orlok and Mephisto, he is small.

King Gunther is a tragic figure in his own right. The movie emasculates him at every turn. He requires Siegfried's help to force Brunhild to marry him. Siegfried uses a magic helmet to turn himself invisible so that he can help Gunther win a boulder-throwing contest. Later, after the royal wedding, it is Siegfried who wrestles a magic belt off Brunhild so that she will be too weak to resist Gunther when he sleeps with her. Gunther is goaded by his domineering wife to

kill Siegfried. By being so weak-willed, Gunther proves himself to be the worst thing that a Norseman can be: A coward.

Kriemhild and Brunhild are both women scorned. Their Lady Macbeth-like actions are somewhat justified. They can hardly be considered villains in the purest sense of the word. The true villain of *Die Nibelungen* is human society—the only villain that can reach the same level of complexity as Lucifer. Siegfried goes from hero to victim. He overpowers a dragon, the king of the dwarves, and different warriors in battle. But in Burgundy, he finds himself trapped in a web of courtly politics that the forest has not prepared him for.

In Part Two, Kriemhild convinces her husband to strike the Burgundians. This trope of the vengeful woman dates back to antiquity. Some might view it as old-fashioned. In context, it is an extension of the themes of Part One. In reality, it is not the bravest people who stand victorious; it is the wisest. The most cunning people know how to stay quiet in public so that they can enact their schemes in private. When innocent people are caught in the crossfire, they do not feel remorse. Middle-Earth's beauty is only matched by its level of danger.

The Doomed Protagonist

Paul Richter plays Siegfried with all the over-acting of Thomas Hunter in *Nosferatu*. Richter frequently makes heroic poses that might be mistaken for parody. On the subject of silent film acting, Martin Scorsese writes, “Yes, there was overacting—players responded to the story, and if it was melodrama, they would act in the style demanded” (Kobel, 2007).

Siegfried is the great hero who never existed—only in Germany's mythical past. In an interview with *Focus on Film*, Fritz Lang discussed his purpose for filming *Die Nibelungen*. “. . . I wanted to film the epic legend of Siegfried so that Germany could draw inspiration from her past, and not . . . as a looking forward to the rise of a political figure like Hitler or some such stupid thing as that” (*Focus on Film* 1974).

Audiences adored *Die Nibelungen* for its glorification of Germany. As noted, “. . . its grandiosity prefigured Nazi propaganda (it was one of Hitler’s favorites). . .” (Kobel, 2007). Fritz Lang despised *Die Nibelungen*’s association with the Third Reich. In a letter to a close friend, he speaks critically of the original epic text. “I saw the Burgundian kings as a decadent social class which was already on the decline and determined to achieve its ends by any means . . .” (Lang 1968).

Lang urges his audience to be highly critical of Siegfried. When Siegfried first marches into Gunther’s Castle, he demands the hand of Kriemhild in marriage simply because he has heard tales of her beauty. When he is initially refused, he is immediately ready to start a fight.

Siegfried is the greatest of warriors, but he lacks tactfulness, which makes him inherently dangerous. Siegfried almost needs to be eliminated out of necessity. In Middle-Earth, as in reality, naivety is deadly. *Die Nibelungen* is driven by human psychology. It is the first sword-and-sorcery saga put on the screen, laying the groundwork for *Excalibur*, *Conan the Barbarian*, and *The Lord of the Rings*—and what a bar it sets.

Why It Matters

Die Nibelungen’s contribution to *Spirits of the Yule* is more subtle compared to those of *Nosferatu* and *Faust*. However, thematically, it is the most important. In the first forty minutes of *Die Nibelungen*, Siegfried fights and kills both the dragon Fafnir and the king of the dwarves. Siegfried slays Alberich in his underground kingdom, and when he does, all the other dwarves turn to stone.

From this point onward, the magical elements of the movie start to fade. By the time Siegfried is murdered, all hint of the supernatural has long since vanished. *Kriemhild’s Revenge* has no magic in it whatsoever. Human treachery now drives the narrative.

Siegfried’s tale evolved from paganism. By the time it reached Fritz Lang, it had been Christianized. The decline of magic within the narrative seems like a commentary on this. *Spirits*

of the Yule features an elf named Nora, who serves Saint Nicholas. She enters the abbey halfway through the movie to save the monks.

Like Krampus, Nora is a pagan spirit. Her powers have been greatly diminished by the Christianization of Europe. The only thing that keeps her from vanishing completely is the fact that she is in service to an immortal Catholic bishop. She has no love for Christianity, but she happily fights against Krampus. As Eli tells the other monks, “She is pre-Christian, not un-Christian.” Nora is stuck in a world that no longer honors her.

The fay folk do not have souls. This is a common belief in European folklore. Nora will never be rewarded for aiding the monks—not eternally. At some point, she is doomed to fade away into the Earth’s natural elements. Perhaps this is the sacrifice that the movie needs. Nora’s memory will linger in humankind’s imagination—the same imagination that sparked the tales of Dracula, Faust, and Siegfried.

By accepting Christ, humanity loses some of the luster of the old world. *Spirits of the Yule* acts as a commentary on changing beliefs. The modern celebration of Christmas itself is a mixture of Christianity and paganism. So is this movie.

Conclusion

Spirits of the Yule has a lot to reflect upon. Color and music have advanced the art of cinema tremendously since its inception. Dialogue and special effects are now taken for granted. Despite all of this, *Spirits of the Yule*’s greatest allies lie in the 1920s. The greatest craftsmen of the cinema would agree that there is much to be gleaned from silent cinema.

Martin Scorsese said in an interview with *Film4*, “For me, it’s pure cinema. We don’t know what that is. It’s storytelling that happens to be done in the silent film style. And that is another language and it takes another way of concentrating . . .” (2020).

Christopher Nolan states, “I spent a lot of time reviewing the silent films for crowd scenes—the way extras move, evolve, how the space is staged and how the cameras capture it,

the views used” (Pearce 2017). Nolan is not alone. Editor Lee Smith stated, “The editing was more complicated because there is little dialogue” (Pearce 2017).

Spirits of the Yule is in need of three things: A realistic setting, a formidable villain, and a flawed, doomed protagonist. The German films of yesteryear provide the blueprints for all of these. In the vast lands of the cinema, the cornerstones for *Spirit of the Yule*'s screenplay can be found on the shoulders of a vampire, a scholar who sold his soul, a dragon slayer, and a princess who waged war between nations.

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(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

Spirits of the Yule

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(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

INT. PARCHMENT - DAY

A brown piece of parchment envelops the screen.

Ink strokes fly together, creating the outline of the mighty Tree of Life. Its roots and branches stretch out beautifully.

Stars twinkle around it.

INT. ICY CAVE - NIGHT

A GROUP OF BEARDED DWARVES stand solemnly in a circle. Their queen, NORA, stands among them. A small female dragon named EMBER with golden scales stands at her side.

Slowly, the Dwarves lay down on the icy floor and close their eyes. They drift to sleep.

Nora plays a musical instrument. She sings a little...

NORA

(singing)

Veistu, hvé rísta skal?

Veistu, hvé ráða skal?

Veistu, hvé fár skal finna?

Veistu, hvé skal á freista?

Veistu, hvé beita skal?

Veistu, hvé blóta skal?

Veistu, hvé senda skal?

Veistu, hvé sóa skal?

She takes her signet ring off, looks it over, then puts it back on...

She pets Ember. Ember lovingly rubs her head against her.

Nora closes her eyes.

EXT. PARCHMENT - DAY

We see the World Tree.

INT. SNOWY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora keeps concentrating.

EXT. PARCHMENT - DAY

A mist hangs over the roots of the Tree.

INT. SNOWY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora strains herself to keep looking with closed eyes.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

Three inhuman ladies, THE NORNS, stare back at Nora.

INT. SNOWY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora keeps her eyes closed.

NORA

Sisters... When shall this pestilence
cease?

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns look at her, but say nothing.

INT. SNOWY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora grows anxious.

NORA

Speak to me!

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns look away from her.

INT. SNOWY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora opens her eyes, defeated and deflated.

She pets Ember and stands up. The two of them walk off.

INT. PARCHMENT - DAY

The World Tree is clearly seen once again.

After a few moments, the ink strokes separate and form the
following words:

"A FILM BY COLE WYATT HAMILTON."

After a while, the words separate. New words form:

"Spirits of the Yule."

After a while, the words separate. New words form:

"A Sad tale's best for winter; I have one of sprites and goblins." --WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

After a while, the words separate.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

SAINT NICHOLAS OF MYRA sits in the forest; a larger than life giant of a man; bearded and robed. He reads from a thick book and hums to himself.

The pages are full of sheet music.

SAINT NICHOLAS

(singing)

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, has come
to ransom Yisrael...

SELMA

(off-screen)

Nicholas...

He looks up and sees SELMA facing him. She is a pale looking lady; sickly looking. A piece of cloth is tied around her eyes. She bears a staff.

He jumps up.

SELMA (cont'd)

Leave us.

Saint Nicholas holds up his crucifix necklace. She flinches.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Do you know this?

He takes a step forward. She takes a step back.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Come at me, and I'll rip your tongue
out.

Selma flees into the darkness.

Saint Nicholas sits back down and, after taking a moment to recollect his thoughts, keeps reading.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - THICKET - NIGHT

Selma slowly treads the snowy forest. She stops and kneels down.

Silence.

SELMA

Sisters...

More silence...

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns gaze upon Selma.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - THICKET - NIGHT

Selma hurls her voice at them.

SELMA

Answer me!

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns look down at a tapestry at their feet, then to each other, then to the First.

FIRST NORN

Do not be too eager to regain your
sight, for the day you do, is the day
you die.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - THICKET - NIGHT

Selma waits.

No more visions.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

Nora sits in the forest, playing with Ember. There is a strong hint of sadness in Nora's face.

SELMA
(off-screen)
Nora...

Nora looks up. Selma stand before her. Nora grows angry.

NORA
I can put you to sleep as well, if
you so wish.

SELMA
Do you know what they call it now?

NORA
White Rose.

SELMA
White Rose Abbey... What would the
All-Father think of it?

NORA
Fate goes ever as she will, and she
must. Give them a little time. They
will return.

Pause between the two women.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas sits, reading his book, until he is
interrupted.

NORA
(off-screen)
Bishop.

Saint Nicholas looks up at Nora with annoyance. Ember is
beside her.

SAINT NICHOLAS
I am losing my patience for your
kind.

NORA
Be silent. This is the season of
Yule, when this planet draws closest
with the Other-World. The unseen
becomes seen. She has her sights set
on White Rose.

SAINT NICHOLAS

I never interfere in the lives of
mortals, not unless they call me by
name.

NORA

You may need to.

SAINT NICHOLAS

I cannot.

NORA

Then call upon my masters.

Saint Nicholas holds up his crucifix. Nor flinches.

Saint Nicholas stands firm. Nora shuffles off.

Saint Nicholas goes back to reading.

SAINT NICHOLAS

(singing)

Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus,
Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus...

NORNS

(voice-over)

Nicholas...

He looks up.

EXT. PARCHMENT - DAY

We see the World Tree.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas jumps to his feet.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns face Saint Nicholas.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas musters all of his vigor.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Leave me in peace.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

FIRST NORN

With you, there is no peace.

SECOND NORN

We have a message to give to you,
Father Christmas.

THIRD NORN

A message that you cannot live
without.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas holds up his cross at them.

SAINT NICHOLAS

In the name of Adoni, I cast you out!
Speak to me no more!

He waits. No more visions come to him. He drops the cross.

Slowly, he sits back down.

INT. FOREST - THICKET - NIGHT

Selma holds up some squirrel carcasses. She tosses them to
some dark figures laying in the ground--THE KRAMPUS. They
gnaw on them greedily.

Only their silhouettes are visible.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas sits with his knife, carving a figure from
wood. The blade of his ax is stuck in a stump.

ELI walks up from behind him, a young man wearing scraps.

ELI

...Sir...

Saint Nicholas turns to face him. Eli holds up his hands.

ELI (cont'd)

Forgive me... I am trying to find
White Rose Abbey.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Why?

ELI
My business is my own.

SAINT NICHOLAS
Are you alone?

Eli nods.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
Are you armed?

Eli holds up his dagger.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
Go back the way you came, boy. These woods are no match for you.

ELI
You are alone as well.

Saint Nicholas holds up an ax.

ELI
Just tell me the way.

SAINT NICHOLAS
It will take you two days by foot, if the fay folk choose to spare you.

ELI
The fay folk are no match for a friend of Jehovah.

Upon hearing the name of God, Saint Nicholas suddenly softens. He takes a kinder tone.

SAINT NICHOLAS
What do you know of Jehovah?

ELI
I know He is faithful.

SAINT NICHOLAS
Who are you?

ELI
Father Eli.

SAINT NICHOLAS
Father Eli... Where is your church?

ELI
Greylock.

SAINT NICHOLAS
If you truly walk with Christ, he
will lead you...
 (points off)
...that way.

 ELI
Thank thee!

 SAINT NICHOLAS
The patron saint of White Rose
Abbey... Know you his name?

Eli shakes his head no.

 SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
Nicholas of Myra. Do you know of him?

 ELI
A little.

 SAINT NICHOLAS
If you have any trouble, call on him.
He will come.

Eli nods.

 SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
Saints... Saints are like monks. They
keep to themselves. They live on the
edges of society. They find solace in
the space between the spaces.

 ELI
Who are you?

 SAINT NICHOLAS
My name... I am...a friend.

Saint Nicholas takes his ax and walks off.

Eli gives a quizzical look. He is on the verge of suspecting
his identity. He crosses himself and goes on his way.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Eli walks through the forest.

INT. SNOWY FOREST - GROVE - NIGHT

A JEWISH COUPLE sit together: RABBI NATHANIEL and his wife,
LEONA. A small campfire flickers before them.

LEONA

This is no good.

NATHANIEL

I'm sure it will last us the night.

LEONA

How is your back?

NATHANIEL

Still hurting.

LEONA

You need a hot bath, first thing.

NATHANIEL

That would be nice.

LEONA

And a long sleep in a real bed.

NATHANIEL

From your lips to God's ears.

Eli walks up on them from a distance. They do not see him until he speaks.

ELI

Hello.

In a flash, Nathaniel and Leona stand up and pull out their daggers. Eli holds up his hands in the air.

ELI (cont'd)

I am harmless.

NATHANIEL

Who are you?

ELI

My name is Eli, son of Philip.

NATHANIEL

Who else is with you?

ELI

No one.

Nathaniel and Leona glance around, not believing him.

NATHANIEL

Why are out here alone?

ELI

I was about to ask you the same.

NATHANIEL

You first.

ELI

I am on a personal quest.

LEONA

Are you armed?

Eli holds up his own dagger.

ELI

I have nothing worth stealing.

LEONA

Neither do we.

ELI

I saw your fire.

Nathaniel motions to the space across from them. Eli sits between them and the fire.

Everyone lowers their daggers, but they keep a hold of them.

Eli reaches into his satchel and pulls out some pieces of dried meat. He offers it to him.

ELI (cont'd)

Here.

They hold up their hands.

NATHANIEL

Nay.

ELI

Salted pork. Nothing wrong with it.

LEONA

We just ate some mutton.

Eli nods. He takes a bite of his pork.

ELI

I am on my way to White Rose.

LEONA

The are none out here. Not in winter.

ELI

White Rose *Abbey*. It should be near.

NATHANIEL

We know nothing of these parts.

ELI

Where are you going?

NATHANIEL

Greylock.

ELI

I just came from Greylock. You could be there tomorrow evening.

NATHANIEL

Splendid.

ELI

Greylock is huge. What are your plans?

LEONA

We will not stay there long. There is another village a few miles west of Greylock that we are heading for.

ELI

Where are you from?

NATHANIEL

Cornwall.

ELI

Cornwall...? You are a long way.

NATHANIEL

We are no longer wanted there.

ELI

Why not?

Leona looks uncomfortably at Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL

The Duke of Cornwall owes my friends a fair bit of coin. They are merchants. They sold him some rather priceless jewels from Andalusia. Espana. My friends are wise. They know when to keep their mouths shut...

LEONA

...For the most part...

NATHANIEL

...But they have been cheated a few too many times not to raise Hell.

ELI

How much debt are we talking here?

LEONA

Too much.

ELI

This sounds like a matter for his majesty. And if he is unwilling, his holiness in Rome.

NATHANIEL

It is not that simple. Not for us.

ELI

Why not? I was a priest. Perhaps I can help you. The Pope is sworn to intervene in matters such as these.

The couple goes silent.

Eli takes a moment to study them. He notices their head coverings.

ELI (cont'd)

What are you? ...Mohammedans?

They shake their heads no.

ELI (cont'd)

...Pagans?

NATHANIEL

Jews.

ELI

Jews!? I have never met a Jew before.

LEONA

We keep to ourselves. We always travel heavily armed.

ELI

I thought that all Jews are wealthy.

LEONA

That would be nice.

ELI

Where are the rest of you?

NATHANIEL

Some of them are taking their chances back in Cornwall. They say that it is madness to walk these woods alone.

LEONA

Like me. I still think this is madness.

NATHANIEL

My friends are going back to Spain. We too would go, but I have received word that our kindred near Greylock are in desperate need of new rabbi.

LEONA

When HaShem closes one door, he opens another.

NATHANIEL

And we would prefer to stay where we can speak the common tongue.

ELI

How long have you been a rabbi?

NATHANIEL

Since I was sixteen.

ELI

So you read Hebrew?

NATHANIEL

I read a fair bit.

ELI

And you are actually allowed to get married? Must be nice.

NATHANIEL

Most of the time.

He smiles softly at Leona.

ELI

My father was a merchant. I met a few Moors growing up. We never traded with the Jews.

LEONA

As you can see, we have no horns.

ELI

The only thing I know about you...is
that you deny our Lord.

Nathaniel and Leona grow cold.

NATHANIEL

I am not having this conversation
tonight.

ELI

I am curious.

LEONA

You have your ways. We have ours.

ELI

You are the living descendants of
Abraham.

NATHANIEL

We do not discuss our faith with
outsiders.

ELI

Please...

NATHANIEL

I have had to have this conversation
too many times.

ELI

You read the Old Testament in the
original language.

LEONA

As Moses wrote it.

ELI

I only read Latin. So I am dying to
know: Who is Jesus to you? The Arabs
call him a prophet.

NATHANIEL

We do not have an official stance on
the Nazarene. I am sure he was a
righteous man.

ELI

But not the Messiah...?

NATHANIEL

For us, the Messiah needs to bring
peace to the world.

(MORE)

NATHANIEL (cont'd)

The name of the Nazarene has not been all too kind to us. Would you not agree?

ELI

So, if for you, Jesus is not the Messiah, who is?

LEONA

Only HaShem knows.

NATHANIEL

I do not usually discuss this, even with my own flock, but our sages teach us that name of Mashiach was the alive since before the time of creation. HaShem created seven things before He made anything else: The Machiach, the Throne of Glory, the House of the Sanctuary, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, Repentance, and the Torah.

ELI

The Torah...?

NATHANIEL

The first five books...

ELI

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy...

NATHANIEL

HaShem created this world based upon the principles of the Torah.

ELI

And that other word... Gehenna...

NATHANIEL

The Hebrew word for "Hell."

ELI

So, Jews do believe in Hell?

LEONA

We believe in rewards and punishments.

NATHANIEL

Our sages teach us that when when a soul sheds its mortality, it needs to be cleansed.

(MORE)

NATHANIEL (cont'd)

The "flames," so to speak, are the pain of confronting your sins.

ELI

It sounds like Purgatory.

LEONA

It is where you got the idea from.

ELI

So how long does Gehenna last?

LEONA

Who can say...?

NATHANIEL

Our sages tell teach us that Jews go to Gehenna for a maximum of one earthly year. That is why we only say the mourner's prayer for eleven months. It eases their passing. It is an insult to the soul to suggest that it needs the entire year to be cleansed.

LEONA

Some souls only need one month...

NATHANIEL

Some may only need a few minutes...

LEONA

Martyrs skip Gehenna altogether...

NATHANIEL

As do those who die of illness...

LEONA

Their pain is on earth.

NATHANIEL

What about babies who die? Do they get a pass?

LEONA

Of course they do.

ELI

That is good to know.

NATHANIEL

So the next time someone tells you to go to Hell, the appropriate response is, "Are not we all?"

LEONA

Hell is not something that we go to.
Hell is something that we all go
through.

ELI

So you believe in Hell... Do you
believe in Satan?

NATHANIEL

Of course. Satan is an angel. He is
the one who tempts us. Every test
originates from God.

ELI

So then where does evil come from?

NATHANIEL

From within. All humans have two
natures--a good inclination, and an
evil inclination.

LEONA

Both are necessary.

NATHANIEL

Babies have the evil inclination from
birth.

LEONA

Boys develop the good inclination at
thirteen. Girls develop it a twelve,
because we are holy.

Leona chuckles.

NATHANIEL

Leona...

LEONA

But it is just as necessary to have
the evil inclination. Selfishness...
Ambition... We need these...

NATHANIEL

The Talmud states that without the
yetzar hara, man would never build a
house, or take a wife, or have
children.

ELI

Did Adam and Eve have an evil
inclination?

NATHANIEL

Not at first. They were created innocent. That was the purpose of the serpent. Since the yetzar hara did not yet exist inside of them yet, it had to exist outside of them. God has to have all things in balance. Measure for measure. That is why God says, "I create good, and I create evil. I the Lord do all of these." Without the existence of evil, there is no free will, and there are no consequences for your free will.

ELI

Do you believe in Heaven?

NATHANIEL

...Perhaps...

LEONA

We believe in a World to Come.

NATHANIEL

Judaism does not have straightforward answers. It is a religion of questions, mostly. We are called to wrestle with our God.

LEONA

Heaven is nice, but it is only in this life here that we are able to repair the world. That is why every soul in Heaven envies us.

NATHANIEL

This is the world that every spirit craves to live in...

LEONA

...Including God Himself.

NATHANIEL

That is why we are here. To bring God into the world.

ELI

What about the Messiah? Is he not supposed to bring God into the world?

Nathaniel and Leona nod.

ELI (cont'd)

So what can you tell me about the Messiah? Is he virgin-born? Is he not without sin?

NATHANIEL

The Mashiach will bring the Torah to the four corners of the earth, and I am not convinced that there is only one. Moses was a type of Mashiach. So was King David.

LEONA

So was King Cyrus, and he was a gentile.

ELI

He was a pagan!

LEONA

Even still... He was a righteous pagan. He returned us to Israel. When comes such another?

NATHANIEL

Esther and Mordecai both were Maschiachs. But the world was not yet ready for the big Maschiach.

ELI

Will the Messiah be divine?

NATHANIEL

Define "divine."

ELI

A part of God.

NATHANIEL

Everything is a part of God.

ELI

You know what I mean! More of God then we are!

NATHANIEL

The Maschiach has a piece of everyone soul--

LEONA

(stopping him)

--Nathaniel!

NATHANIEL

It's fine.

(to Eli)

We do not speak on this lightly, but since you're asking... The Maschiach has a piece of every human soul inside of him. And likewise, we all have a piece of him in us.

ELI

And he precedes all of humanity?

NATHANIEL

Aye.

ELI

Where in the Bible is this?

LEONA

We Jews have other books...

(to Nathaniel)

...That are meant to stay private.

NATHANIEL

Studying this sort of thing can be dangerous.

LEONA

It can confuse the ignorant.

NATHANIEL

It can lead to madness.

Eli takes a bite of dried meat.

ELI

I hope you find kinder faces in Greylock.

LEONA

We are cautiously optimistic.

ELI

I find it funny that you say that the Messiah precedes Creation.

NATHANIEL

Why?

ELI

The Gospel of John reads, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"

Nathaniel and Leona think for a moment.

NATHANIEL

Are you sure he wasn't talking about
the Torah?

Eli thinks for a long while. He looks perplexed.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Eli continues to walk through the woods. He hears music. He stops. Nora is sitting, playing music up ahead of him.

She wears a cap that obscures her pointed ears. She looks off in the distance at first. She stops playing, stands up, and faces him.

NORA

Not lost, are you?

ELI

It is unsafe for a woman to be out
here alone.

NORA

I could say the same for you, human.

ELI

Who are you?

NORA

I do not give my name to strangers.
(points to the trees)
The trees are whispering. Do you know
what they are saying?

Pause.

NORA (cont'd)

They say that a young man makes his
way to White Rose Abbey alone.

ELI

How do you know that?

Nora takes off her cap, revealing her pointed ears.

NORA

I told you. The trees are talking.

Eli crosses tries to move his legs, but something compels him to stay in place. It is as if he is paralyzed by fear.

He crosses himself.

Nora smirks at him.

ELI
Let me pass.

NORA
Walk past me, if you are so inclined.

ELI
Step aside.

NORA
Go on.

ELI
Step aside... Just step aside,
please...

NORA
This is the season of Yule, when
mortal men have every right to feel
fear.

Ember growls. She stands right beside Nora. Eli stares at her in wide-eyed fear.

NORA (cont'd)
Be not afraid, son of man. She is the
last of the fire drakes. She is kind
to those who are kind to her.

Nora reaches into her satchel and pulls out a thin ovular object: It glows brightly! Eli is drawn to it.

NORA (cont'd)
This scale belonged to her mother.

Ember gives a sad moan.

NORA (cont'd)
Her dear, dear mother...
(offers it to him)
Feel it! It is still warm!

Eli reaches his hand out and timidly feels it.

NORA (cont'd)
Any mortal who holds it bears
protection from the darkly forces.
And there are darkly forces.

Eli quickly withdraws his hand.

A wolf howls in the distance.

Ember growls back at them.

The wolves howl back at Ember.

Ember howls back. Silence. No noise is returned.

ELI

God can do all things.

NORA

And yet, He permits so much. If it makes you feel better, tell yourself that your God has led you to me. Take it! You need it more than us!

ELI

How can I take a piece of pagan magic into a house of Jehovah?

NORA

"Pagan" is your word; not ours. The fire-drakes were a noble breed once, no thanks to you.

Eli takes it.

NORA (cont'd)

Tell not a soul. Keep it hidden. Keep it on you at all times.

Eli buries it in his satchel.

NORA (cont'd)

Lose it never. It will protect you.

Nora and Ember walk off. Eli watches the two of them disappear into the darkness.

Wolves howl in the distance. Eli looks away and quickly scampers off.

INT. SNOWY FOREST

Eli walks onward.

INT. ICY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora rubs Ember's belly, as if she were a dog.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Eli keeps walking.

INT. ICY CAVE - NIGHT

Ember sleeps in Nora's lap. Ember plays her instrument softly.

NORNS
(off-screen)
Nora...

Nora looks up in shock.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns look straight forward.

FIRST NORN
Do not be too eager to defend White
Rose Abbey against your sister, for
the day you cross its threshold is
the day you die.

INT. ICY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora faces forward.

NORA
They can come back to us! I know they
will!

Nora's words are strong, but they fall into the darkness.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns stare forward at Nora, then look down at their mighty tapestry in progress.

INT. ICY CAVE - NIGHT

Nora keeps looking up.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Eli walks onward. He hears the howls of distant wolves. He holds up the dragon scale and keeps walking.

He looks up and stops.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - WHITE ROSE ABBY - NIGHT

The dark form of the wooden abbey looms up ahead.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Eli crosses himself and keeps walking.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

The aging Father Abbot SAMUEL sits alone, reading a page of the Bible.

Another Monk, MARK, walks in.

MARK
Father Abbot...

Samuel looks up at him.

MARK (cont'd)
A man is here, seeking to join us.

SAMUEL
Another one...

MARK
He expects to be tested.

Samuel stands up and walks out of the room.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Samuel and Eli sit across from each other.

SAMUEL
You would be the first ordained
father to come here in decades.

ELI
Former father.

SAMUEL
Once a father, always a father.

ELI
It was a mistake.

SAMUEL

Jehovah does not make mistakes.

ELI

But we do.

SAMUEL

How could holiness be a mistake?

ELI

My father pushed me into it.

SAMUEL

What was your father?

ELI

A merchant.

SAMUEL

Why would he push you into this?

ELI

I was drawn to the Bible as a child.

SAMUEL

If you prefer to the finer things in life, then this is not your home.

ELI

Christ said to live in simplicity.

SAMUEL

We are as remote as can be. There are closer abbeys, if you wish to go to market each week.

ELI

I do not.

SAMUEL

Why forsake you the priesthood?

Eli knows not what to say.

ELI

The walls were closing in on me.

SAMUEL

How long did you last?

ELI

A year.

SAMUEL

I too am ordained. I was a priest for twenty years. Most men would adore such a calling. The only priests who fail are those who dwell in unrepentant sin. What was yours?

Eli shrugs.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Was there a woman?

Eli shakes his head no.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Oh, come now. Were you whoring and gambling?

Eli shakes his head no again.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

I was a priest for five years. I have seen it all.

Eli says nothing.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

How did you leave?

ELI

I just left. December the Twenty-Third. Last year.

SAMUEL

The night before Christmas Eve?

Eli nods his head yes.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Most men who come here are running from something. A few of them are running from Jehovah, ironically. He has a way of catching up with them, as He did with Jonah.

Eli nods.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

You will join us in prayer. Then you will see your duties.

Eli nods again.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Samuel stands behind the altar. Bread and wine are on it. The cantor, STEPHEN, stands in front. He guides all other monks in the song.

Eli stands in the back. He is the only one who says nothing.

Samuel holds up the Sacraments. The Monks are lined up before him. One by one, he puts the wafer in their mouths and lifts the chalice of wine to their lips. Eli is last.

INT. COPYING ROOM - NIGHT

A small room with writing desks. Each one has a Bible, ink, quills, and parchment.

Mark guides Eli inside.

MARK

This is all we do here. Copying the Bible. All day, every day.

Eli nods as he looks the desks over.

MARK (cont'd)

You know your letters, I presume?

ELI

I learned from the best.

MARK

How well do you concentrate?

ELI

Exceedingly.

Mark nods.

INT. BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

The Monks lay sleeping in blankets on the floor. Eli looks straight up. He curls over on his side and closes his eyes.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns weave their tapestry.

INT. BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli opens his eyes, perplexed. He takes out his dragon scale looks it over. He wraps it in the blanket that he uses as a pillow.

He goes back to sleep.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

The monks sing together, led by Stephen.

MONKS
(singing)
Ava Maia, Maria, Maria, Ava Maria,
Maria...

INT. COPYING ROOM - NIGHT

Eli sits with the other monks, copying the Bible.

INT. CONFESSION ROOM - NIGHT

Samuel sits. Another monk, PETER, sits before him and makes the sign of the cross.

PETER
Forgive me, Father, I have sinned.

SAMUEL
Let me guess...

PETER
I keep thinking about those
milkmaids.

SAMUEL
Perfectly natural.

PETER
How could sin be natural?

SAMUEL
The commandment to be fruitful and
multiply still applies, even when we
become geldings for the sake of
Heaven. Say your prayers. Your sins
are forgiven.

Peter nods.

Peter leaves. A moment later, Stephen walks in and sits. He makes the sign of the cross.

STEPHEN

Forgive me Father, I have sinned.

SAMUEL

The usual?

STEPHEN

Aye.

SAMUEL

Set your sights on the music. That is your duty. You are married to the choir, just as you are married to Christ.

STEPHEN

I keep asking Christ for respite.

SAMUEL

Remember what Paul said. Three times he asked for the thorn to be removed from his side, and three times the Lord refused, for through his weakness, the strength of the Lord was made whole.

Stephen nods.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Your sins are forgiven. Send in the next.

Stephen leaves. A moment later, Eli walks in. He sits down and makes the sign of the cross.

ELI

Forgive me, Father, I have sinned.

SAMUEL

Already? You've only been here a day.

ELI

I am sure I've done something.

SAMUEL

How are you getting along?

ELI

Good.

SAMUEL
This life can be drudgery.

ELI
I like drudgery.

SAMUEL
Do you miss the priesthood.

Eli shakes his head no.

SAMUEL (cont'd)
Can you see yourself here in a year?

ELI
Aye.

SAMUEL
Five years?

ELI
Aye.

SAMUEL
Ten years?

Eli thinks, then nods his head.

SAMUEL (cont'd)
Can you think of any sins that you
have not yet confessed? Anything that
might impair your service.

Eli shakes his head no.

SAMUEL (cont'd)
Then we best not waste our time.

Beat.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Samuel stands in front of the others. Eli knees before him.

SAMUEL
(to Eli)
Do you swear to embrace poverty?

ELI
In Christ, I do.

SAMUEL
Chastity?

ELI
In Christ, I do.

SAMUEL
All rights to property?

ELI
In Christ, I do.

SAMUEL
Fidelity to the monastic order?

ELI
In Christ, I do.

Eli places both of his hands on Eli's shoulders.

SAMUEL
In the name of Saint Nicholas of
Myra, I name you one of us.

Samuel kisses him on both cheeks.

INT. BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli walks into the bedchamber alone with a rosary in his hand. He looks around softly, then sits down. He closes his eyes and prays.

INT. COPYING ROOM - NIGHT

Eli sits with the other monks, copying the Bible. He and Mark draw angels and dragons in the margins.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Samuel stands alone with with rosary. He sits down and closes his eyes. Something troubles him. After a few silent moments, he opens his eyes.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Samuel sits alone.

Eli walks in.

ELI
You asked to see me, Father Abbot?

SAMUEL

Sit.

Eli sits down at Samuel's bedside.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Do you know how old White Rose Abbey is?

Eli shakes his head no.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Since before the time of Christ. It was a pagan temple. For two hundred years, these walls have been consecrated to Christ. It is essential that they remain so.

ELI

And it will. Under you.

SAMUEL

I met one of them once. The little people. She was terrifyingly beautiful. It was in the dead of winter. She begged me and begged me to let her in, but I stayed strong. I knew better. That is how they work. They cannot come where they are not invited.

ELI

When was this?

SAMUEL

Many years ago. Before you were born. They are watching us always, Eli, the little people.

ELI

Do you know who else is watching us? Saint Nicholas.

SAMUEL

The Wonder-Worker.

ELI

I met a man in the woods. He said to call upon him should we need him.

SAMUEL

Who was he?

ELI

I asked his name. He never gave it.

Beat.

SAMUEL

Saint Nicholas will guard us. And God leaves us make decisions for ourselves.

Beat.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

I am old. Far older than I look. Most monks go to the nearest church for confession; for mass. We are so secluded here, it is not practical. Most Father Abbots are not ordained, but ours must be.

Beat.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

We are in December. Two days to the year that you fled your vocation. Now I ask you to take another.

ELI

Father...

SAMUEL

You can run from Christ all you like, but he runs with you. Make no mistake.

ELI

I am no Father Abbot!

SAMUEL

Jonah ran from God. Moses fled to the wilderness.

ELI

I know nothing!

SAMUEL

Be silent!

Eli stares at him.

INT. BED CHAMBER - NIGHT

All the monks are in their cots. Eli lays in bed, unable to sleep.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT - LATER

Samuel lays alone in bed. Unable to sleep. He coughs a little.

INT. BED CHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli closes his eyes.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns weave their tapestry. They look up at Eli.

INT. BED CHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli opens his eyes with a gasp. He takes out his dragon scale and clutches it tight.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Eli stands in the chapel alone. He looks around. He kneels down and prays.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Eli sits with Samuel.

ELI

I appear not to have much of a choice, do I?

SAMUEL

Not if you want us to live here. I must ask you, are there any sins that you need to confess?

Eli shakes his head no.

SAMUEL (cont'd)

Nothing at all? Are you sure? It all falls on you. If you fail, these walls will crumble.

Eli is deep in thought.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT - LATER

Eli stands before the Monks. Samuel stands behind him.

Eli takes off his own ring and puts it on Eli's finger. He holds up a small vial and anoints Eli's forehead with oil. He puts his hands on his head.

SAMUEL

In the name of Saint Nicholas, I must decrease. You must increase.

The Monks watch solemnly.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Samuel and Mark sit across from each other.

ELI

I cannot promise to be holy. I have not a shred of holiness within me.

Beat.

SAMUEL

Stay humble. That is all we ask.

Eli stares at him.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

All of the Monks are assembled. Eli stands behind the altar, now in an abbot's robes. He holds up the bread and the wine.

All of the Monks file forward. Eli administers communion to him.

Samuel is last.

INT. COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

All of the Monks are stand at the table. Eli walks to the head and sits down. The rest do the same.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli and Samuel sleep in the same room together.

SAMUEL

You will grow accustomed to all of
this. I promise.

Eli listens, but says nothing.

INT. CONFESSION ROOM - NIGHT

Eli sits stoically. Mark sits down and crosses himself.

MARK

Forgive me Father, I have sinned.
Arrogance and ingratitude.

ELI

Copy a few more of those pages. That
is all you need do. Your sins are
forgiven.

Mark nods and walks out.

Stephen sits down and crosses himself.

STEPHEN

Forgive me, Father. I have sinned. I
have dreams I dare not describe.

ELI

Do they involve maidens?

STEPHEN

Maidens, and other people.

ELI

You have had these dreams since
boyhood, haven't you?

STEPHEN

Yes, Father.

ELI

Say the Lord's Prayer. Spend the rest
of the day reading the Book of
Proverbs. You shall benefit from it.
Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven.

Stephen nods lowly and walks out.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Samuel lays in bed.

Eli stands over him. He observes how Samuel is withdrawing.

ELI
Would you like me to bring you some
food?

SAMUEL
Not now... Just...stay with me.

Samuel softly places his hand on Eli's wrist. Eli is clearly uncomfortable by this touch of affection.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT - LATER

Samuel and Eli sit alone. Eli has a bowl of soup in his lap. He lifts the spoon to Samuel's lips. Samuel drinks.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Eli sits with the other monks.

ELI
He still breathes... We cannot ask
much more of him....

MARK
Does he talk?

ELI
A little.

STEPHEN
How much longer does he have?

ELI
(suddenly snapping)
How should I know?

All of the Monks are taken aback by Eli's sudden aggression--Eli himself included.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli sits at Samuel's bedside.

ELI
Did you know that this was coming? Is
this why you moved so quick with me?

Nothing from Samuel. Long silence.

SAMUEL
I am afraid, Eli.

ELI
Of what?

SAMUEL
Purgatory.

ELI
You are so righteous, you might skip
it altogether.

SAMUEL
I doubt it.

ELI
Pain is not something you go to. It
is something you go through. We all
go through pain. You will come out.

They stay in silence.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Eli stands in the center, deep in thought.

Mark walks in.

MARK
Father Abbot... There is a woman
outside.

ELI
What does she want?

MARK
I know not... She is blind. She looks
like she is freezing to death.

ELI
Then what are you waiting for? Bring
her in!

MARK
We are men only.

ELI
Bring her!

MARK
She is rather unseemly looking.

ELI

Go!

Mark strides out.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Eli and Selma sit across from each other. She still wears the cloth around her eyes;

ELI

My lady...

She nods.

ELI (cont'd)

What are you doing all the way out here?

SELMA

Are you the man in charge?

ELI

I am.

SELMA

What is your name, my lord?

ELI

Eli, Father Abbot.

SELMA

Forgive me, Eli, Father Abbot, but I have not eaten in many, many days.

ELI

We have plenty of bread.

SELMA

Have you any meat?

ELI

Of course.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Selma munches down on some dried pieces of meat.

SELMA

You are a kind man. I can see that.

ELI

Have you always been blind?

SELMA

It came on me quite suddenly, years ago. I was ill-prepared.

ELI

You need not wear that.

SELMA

I wish to.

ELI

Your name, madam?

SELMA

Names...I have had so many... I wish to warn you. Winter will be colder this year than it has ever been.

ELI

We have plenty of wood.

SELMA

You are you ready for the Solstice? Ready for the Yule?

ELI

Yule? We call it Christmastime now.

SELMA

You are a good man. I wish for no harm to befall upon you. Leave. Leave this damned temple to its own devices. Be spared. Leave, and take all your possessions with you.

(pause)

Do you recall what the Greeks and Romans called this time? Saturnalia. The banquet for the birth of the gods. Zeus. Athena. Poseidon.

ELI

Talking like that will get you killed, even if you are a woman.

SELMA

Oh...? How do you plan to do that...?

Eli frowns at her defiance.

SELMA (cont'd)
Judgment has been declared. You have
one last chance to leave.

Eli stares at her in disbelief for a moment.

He stands up and storms out of the room, slamming the door,
locking her in.

Selma stays still and calm.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Eli sits with Samuel, who is nonresponsive.

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Selma sits alone in the stone cold room.

Eli towers over her.

ELI
What gives you the liberty to speak
to me thus?

SELMA
The wisdom of the ages.

ELI
We could hang you now. Who would
object?

SELMA
Would you hang a woman?

ELI
If there was need. Women have hung
before.

SELMA
Who gives you your authority?

ELI
Jesus Christ.

Selma laughs. Eli is started.

SELMA
Shall I tell you the secret? Would
you like to know? Your Nazarene was
one of us. Aye. He was a sorcerer
like none other.

(MORE)

SELMA (cont'd)

He was reared in Egypt, the cradle of magic. He was taught by the magi from the east. Did you know that? They gave him more than gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Why do you think they found him? His star foretold his power.

Eli walks out.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Eli stands before the others.

ELI

We have the right to execute her.
What say all of you?

He waits. No one stirs.

MARK

We are monks, not killers.

ELI

She is mad, but she is harmless. We will keep her here for a few days. Make sure there is no one else out there. We will release her after Yule.

PETER

Yule?

ELI

(correcting himself)
--Christmas.

Eli walks out.

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Selma sits there, looking off at nothing.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eli gently administers the Sacraments to Samuel, who is still in bed.

Samuel drinks the wine and eats the wafer.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Eli lays near Samuel. Eli closes his eyes and goes to sleep.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

Eli walks towards the Norns weave their tapestry. They look up at Eli.

NORN 1

Son of man, we request your worship.

NORN 2

Place your faith in us.

NORN 3

Every monk in White Rose Abbey is a trespasser...

NORN 1

...And a thief.

ELI

So you say...

NORN 2

You are in grave peril.

ELI

God alone is the dispenser of fate.

NORN 3

Would you like to put that to the test?

ELI

By all means!

The Norns laughs at him.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eli opens his eyes.

He pulls out his dragon scale and flips it over, examining it. It a flash of anger, he breaks it.

Thunder is heard from far off.

Eli is startled for a moment, but he shrugs it off. He falls back down and closes his eyes.

A moment later, Mark rushes in.

MARK
Eli! Eli!

Eli opens his eyes.

ELI
What?

MARK
She's gone!

Eli sleepily gets up.

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Mark shows Eli that Selma is gone from her cell.

ELI
Who let her out?

MARK
No one.

ELI
How long has she been gone?

MARK
We know not.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Samuel lays alone in bed. He opens his eyes.

Behind him, Selma stands against the wall. Her teeth are now more pointed.

Samuel senses a new presence in his room. He rolls over to face her...

SAMUEL
You...

SELMA
You couldn't keep me out forever.

SAMUEL
Who let you in?

SELMA
No less than your successor.

SAMUEL

Impossible.

SELMA

Nothing is impossible. You know that.

SAMUEL

You have no hope.

SELMA

I have every hope.

SAMUEL

We follow Christ here.

Selma rips off the cloth over her eyes, revealing two black empty sockets.

SELMA

Then I grant you the greatest gift of all--a martyr's doom.

Selma flies forward and digs her fingers into Samuel's skull. Samuel screams, then suddenly goes silent.

Selma plucks his bloody eyeballs and puts them into her own face. Samuel's blood drips down her face.

She scampers off.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

All of the Monks are crowded around Samuel's corpse.

ELI

God forbid!

PETER

What kind of a madwoman is this?

MARK

God forgive us! We should have slain her when we had the chance!

ELI

God forgive us, indeed!

MARK

We should hunt her down.

STEPHEN

Should we split up?

PETER
I am not walking alone.

MARK
Neither am I!

ELI
We should stay together.

MARK
What if she escapes out the door?
Then we have no justice.

ELI
I will guard the door.

MARK
As will I!

Mark puts his hand on Eli's shoulder.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eli and Mark stand together, facing the door, daggers at the ready.

MARK
I can't believe Samuel. It doesn't seem possible. He has always been here.

ELI
I know.

Eli closes his eyes in silent prayer.

MARK
What are you doing?

Eli waits a moment before speaking.

ELI
Praying.

MARK
For what?

ELI
For Saint Nicholas' aid. We need him.
Pray with me.

Mark nods and closes his eyes. For a moment, there is nothing but silence between them.

There is banging on the door.

ELI (cont'd)
(calling)
Who's there?

NORA
(off-screen)
I am a lady, seeking shelter!

MARK
(quietly to Eli)
Another one...

ELI
(calling)
Who are you?

NORA
(off-screen)
Just a friend.

ELI
What is your name?

Pause. They wait.

NORA
(off-screen)
Open up. I am your only hope.

Eli and Mark exchange looks. They hold up their daggers. Eli opens the door.

Nora and Ember walk in. Nora's pointed ears are fully visible.

Mark is dumbfounded.

ELI
You!

NORA
You fool!

Ember snarls from beside Nora.

NORA (cont'd)
You broke the scale!

ELI
I had to! It was unholy!

Ember snarls again, even louder.

NORA

You have opened the gate. Not even I
can foresee what will transpire now.

MARK

Who is this?

ELI

I met her in the forest. She is one
of the fay folk.

NORA

I am a light elf, sometimes called a
dwarf. We make our home deep beneath
the earth. We pride ourselves on the
treasures we craft.

MARK

I did not think that the little
people could tread holy ground.

NORA

(glancing up at a
crucifix)

Believe me, I am no lover of your
faith. It pricks me. But evil stalks
you.

MARK

We have already lost our master.

NORA

Show me.

Mark and Eli lead them off. Nora and Ember follow.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Nora stands over the bloody sheets of Samuel's bed. Eli,
Mark, and Ember are beside her. His body is gone.

ELI

She tore out his eyes.

Nora dips her finger in the blood and smells it. She puts
her fingers to Ember's nose. Ember also smells it.

Nora rises.

NORA

This was the work of my sister,
Selma, the queen of the Krampus.

ELI

Krampus?

NORA

Demons of the Pre-Christian world.
Their powers are greatest in winter.
They used to scour Europe, ensuring
that Yuletide was properly observed.
With the coming of Christianity, they
have been driven to near-extinction.
They are naturally blind. They crave
the eyes of mortals.

MARK

We should have killed her when we had
the chance.

NORA

You wouldn't have been able to.

MARK

What can we do?

NORA

You have an advantage. You have me. I
am no mere elf. I am their queen.
Your ancestors used to worship me as
a goddess.

MARK

Blasphemy.

ELI

What is your name?

Nora is momentarily confused by this question.

NORA

My moniker is far too complicated for
your mortal ears. Call me Nora.

ELI

Nora...

MARK

How old are you?

NORA

Impossible to say. Your mortal mind
can only imagine numbers going up and
down in value. You cannot imagine
them going side to side, or diagonal,
or loopy-loop. Rest assured, I am
quite old.

MARK

Can your subjects help us? Where are they?

NORA

Hibernating. When the time is right, I will awaken them.

ELI

When will that be?

NORA

When you finally abandon your faith.

ELI

Impossible.

NORA

So you say, but I used to say the same.

Eli and Mark have no answer for this.

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Two monks, JAMES and JOHN, stand side by side, daggers at the ready, guarding the corridor.

SELMA

(off-screen)

Hello.

James and John spin around. Selma stands before them. She now sports a pair of horns on her head.

They point their dagger at her.

She stands calm and powerful.

SELMA (cont'd)

There is no need for that, my lords.

James and John do not move.

SELMA (cont'd)

You have nothing to fear from a poor woman who does not even have a soul. My people do not even have eyes. Let us play a game. A game of riddles that your ancestors used to play with me. If you prove yourselves to be as wise as they were, I shall reward you with your lives. It isn't much.

James and John are too scared to speak.

SELMA (cont'd)

Riddle Number One: I grow in the dark, swelling and standing at attention. A hungry girl grabs my boneless bump with both of her hands, and covered it in cloth, a mushrooming mound. What am I?

James and John think, while keeping their eyes on her.

JAMES

A pile of dough.

SELMA

Very good. Now, Riddle Number Two: I hang by the thigh of a man, under the lap of my lord. Up top, there's a slit; It's stiff and hard; and hardness serves me well. When that man hitches up his robe past his knees, he wants to greet the old hole with me, the head of his dangler, which fits perfectly, as it always does. What am I?

James and John think some more.

JOHN

A key.

SELMA

Exquisite. Now, Riddle Number Three: I used to be locked up by a lovely lady. She laid me snug in a chest till she dug me out to give to her manly master, just as he asked her to. What am I?

James and John try to figure it out, but they are at a loss.

JAMES

A manhood.

SELMA

Oh, so wrong. A shirt!

In a flash, Selma pounces on them and knocks them to the floor. They scream.

Selma digs into their skulls and pulls out their eyes.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

The screams of James and John reach the room. Eli, Mark, and Nora look up.

NORA
She strikes!

Nora runs out the room. Eli, Mark, and Ember follow her.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The bloody bodies of James and John lay on the floor, eyeless.

Nora, Eli, and Mark stand over them.

Nora kneels down and feels their cold faces.

ELI
We need to gather everyone. In the chapel!

Nora looks up, gathering information from the air.

NORA
Too late! She has already taken it.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Selma walks into the chapel, rather timidly, step by step. She looks around at the holy relics and the altar.

As she steps closer into the chapel, it is as if all the crucifixes are surrounding her like soldiers.

She grabs the cloth from the altar and yanks it off, knocking off the holy objects on it.

Selma gazes into the eyes of an icon of Christ.

She uses the cloth to knock it over.

INT. WRITING ROOM - NIGHT

Eli stands with Nora and Ember. The other Monks are gathered around. Eli introduces them to Nora.

SELMA

I am Nora, queen of the light elves.
Do not fear her. I am here to save us
from Selma, queen of the demons.

MARK

Had you the power to destroy her, you
would have done so already.

ELI

I know of one who can.

NORA

Who?

ELI

Saint Nicholas of Myra, the Wonder-
Worker.

NORA

...The traveler...

ELI

He is sworn to defend us.

NORA

Let me defend you.

MARK

Why you?

NORA

If I can save you, it will be in the
name of Odin and Thor. You will see
firsthand that they are strongest.

MARK

I was beginning to wonder why you
were putting your life on the line
for us...

NORA

You will return to us. I know you
will.

ELI

We place our trust in God alone.

Nora looks around.

NORA

What say the rest of you? Your God
has not saved you. Too much blood has
been shed already.

ELI
We must trust the Lord,
notwithstanding

NORA
Why? Why trust an absent God?

ELI
He is invisible, not absent.

NORA
Then conjure Him. Make him visible.

Eli looks helpless.

ELI
I wish I could...

This answer gives Nora no pleasure. Eli looks around at everyone.

ELI (cont'd)
Let us all pray for Saint Nicholas.
The harder we pray, the sooner he
will appear.

MARK
Are you sure?

ELI
Aye! I am!

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Selma trashes the room, knocking everything over, screaming like a feral child as she does. She is careful not to touch anything holy with her bare hands.

INT. WRITING ROOM - NIGHT

The Monks sit around the room with their hands folded and their eyes closed.

The only one standing is Nora. She looks around at them.

She sits down next to Eli. He looks at her.

NORA
Do you trust your earthly masters?

ELI

The Vatican? His Holiness in Rome is
God's man on Earth.

NORA

He does more harm to you than the
Norse Invaders ever could.

ELI

How?

NORA

He denies you the most basic of human
pleasures. He scorns sex. He scorns
marriage.

ELI

Not all marriage.

NORA

Nay. Just yours.

ELI

We are married to our vocation.

NORA

Have you ever loved a woman?

ELI

That is none of your concern.

NORA

Answer me.

Eli is silent.

NORA (cont'd)

My gods would have celebrated your
lust.

ELI

Sin is sin.

NORA

It is narural...

Nora looks around at all of the other monks and raises her
voice. They look up at her.

NORA (cont'd)

Have any of you ever known a woman...
Biblically?

No man has the courage to answer her.

NORA (cont'd)
Well...? You should have.

ELI
We are men of God.

Nora looks back to Eli.

NORA
If I were to go to Selma, would you
watch me?

ELI
I cannot leave my men.

Nora looks to the others and motions to the crucifixes on
the walls.

NORA
Stay near these icons, and she cannot
touch you.
(to Eli)
Come with me. Let me show you the
power of Nora.

She extends her hand. Eli takes it. She lifts him to his
feet.

Mark shoots up.

MARK
Me too!

Eli nods.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nora, Ember, Eli, and Mark stand together. Nora looks
around.

NORA
She will come. She knows we are
alone.

MARK
Where is Saint Nicholas? Why comes he
not?

NORA
Your God is weak. Now it is time that
you accept it.

MARK

Saint Nicholas tarries. For some reason, he comes not.

ELI

I have a great and terrible secret.

Mark looks deep into Eli's eyes.

MARK

You can tell me anything.

ELI

I have known a few women in my life.

MARK

So we all.

ELI

One girl I impregnated two months into my vocation. She was married to the town butcher.

MARK

Adultery is a mortal sin.

ELI

Her husband went off on these long hunting trips. She was lonely. And she was all too happy to warm my bed.

MARK

How do you know her child was yours?

ELI

Her husband was twenty years her senior. Far too old.

MARK

So she's raising your child now?

ELI

My son was born on a Monday and died that Wednesday.

Beat of silence.

MARK

Damn.

ELI

Damn indeed.

MARK

So God killed your child.

NORA

So it would seem...

MARK

But what of the butcher...?

ELI

He was daft. He never realized that the child was not his.

MARK

So you deceived everyone...?

Eli nods.

MARK (cont'd)

How does it feel to be a devil?

Eli is silent.

MARK (cont'd)

Was your boy baptized?

ELI

He would have been on Sunday. I would've been the one to do it.

MARK

You've condemned him to Hell.

ELI

What?

MARK

Your son was never initiated into the Church? He was born in sin. He died in sin.

ELI

Babies are innocent.

MARK

Hardly. Babies are the most vile, selfish creatures of all.

ELI

You're mad.

MARK

Your son did not know Christ.

Eli whips out his dagger and points it at Mark.

ELI
Say any more, and I will kill you.

MARK
Go ahead. It changes nothing.

ELI
I had no way of knowing he'd die.

MARK
Even if you had baptized him, who's
to say that God would have recognized
it? You are no man of the cloth.

Pause. Silence.

ELI
Go back to the others.

MARK
I came to watch.

ELI
Go back to the others, or you will
have to kill me.

Mark considers his options. He walks away.

Eli looks to Nora.

She regards him with pity.

NORA
You Christians turn on each other
just as much as the Northmen did.

Eli says nothing.

NORA (cont'd)
You are human. Humans make mistakes.
And being human is a privilege.

ELI
A privilege?

NORA
Take it from someone who knows. I do
not see your God condemning your
child.

ELI

You know not the first thing about my God.

NORA

From everything that I've seen, He is merciful to His own detriment.

ELI

You're not wrong.

NORA

I rarely am.

Eli rubs his temples.

ELI

I should never have broken your scale. I should have listened to them.

NORA

Who?

ELI

The Women... The Weavers...

NORA

The Weavers? Where did you see them?

ELI

In my nightmares.

Nora reaches her hands out and feels his forehead. She feels for his eyes, which he closes. She rubs his eyelids.

NORA

So... You've seen them... The Norns. They have touched you. They live in the bottom of Yggdrasil, the world-tree.

ELI

The what?

NORA

Some men believe that the world is flat. Some believe it to be round. Nonsense All ignorance. Our world is in fact shaped like a giant tree. You live in Midgard, this middle-Earth. The Norns; Weavers of the Tapestry of Fate--they live in Hell.

ELI

Hell...?

NORA

Not the Christian Hell. The real Hell. The icy abode of the roots of Yggdrasil.

ELI

Yggdrasil... Am I saying it right?

NORA

Yggdrasil...

ELI

The Norns told me that I will die.

NORA

They say that to everyone. You will see your boy again. I am sure. Up there, in the treetops of Yggdrasil, among the golden leaves, where my masters once lived. Death is a gift that I will never know. I have no soul. No fay does. When I die, if I die, I have nowhere to go, up or down. You humans, only you can live on.

Ember snarls.

Nora and Eli look forward.

Selma stands before them.

SELMA

Do you remember them? Beowulf?
Siegfried? When comes such another?

Nora holds up a sword.

So does Selma.

The two ladies sword fight.

Their blades clash against each other.

Eventually, they lock blades.

Eli rips off his cross necklace and throws it at Selma. He misses. The cross lands on the floor.

Selma lifts her free hand and snaps her fingers.

Eli's neck suddenly snaps. He hits the floor dead.

Ember howls.

NORA

Eli!

SELMA

Are you surprised?

Selma backs away. The two ladies point their blades at each other.

SELMA (cont'd)

I am the serpent that strikes!

Nora frowns. A wave of horror rolls across her face.

NORA

Nay... This will drain us both!
Neither of us are able!

SELMA

I am the serpent that strikes!

Nora speaks reluctantly.

NORA

I am the staff that repels the
serpent.

SELMA

I am the flames that consume the
staff.

NORA

I am the rain that quenches the
flames.

SELMA

I am the desert that dries the
rain.

NORA

I am the sea that covers the
desert.

SELMA

I am the fog that covers the sea.

NORA

I am the sun that dispels the
fog.

SELMA

I am the clouds that hide the sun.

NORA

And the sun comes again!

SELMA

I am the planets that eclipse the sun.

NORA

And the sun comes again!

Selma drops her sword. Her hands are burning red!

Selma is practically crippled! She holds up her hands and screams!

She runs off.

Nora picks up Selma's fallen sword. She considers going after her.

She kneels st Eli's motionless body. She feels his face.

Ember whines loudly.

INT. WRITING ROOM - NIGHT

Nora and Ember stand before the other monks. Nora's two swords lean against the wall.

NORA

It was quick and painless. He was defenseless as soon as if was rid of his crucifix.

PETER

We should stay here. We shouldn't move.

MARK

We can't stay here forever.

PETER

We need to get out.

STEPHEN

Where can we go? Outside? There is nothing out there but the freezing cold. And that's her domain.

MARK

We are rats caught in a trap. We need to act quickly. She will come for us here at some point.

NORA

Which is why you are in most need of this!

Nora places a small chest on top of the altar. She opens it and pulls out necklaces with hammers on them.

NORA (cont'd)

These were worn by your ancestors. Thor's hammer. Call on him, and his father, Odin the All-Father, and you can still pay homage to Yahweh. It is not idolatry. Think of it as adding more kings to your royal family.

Pregnant pause as the Monks consider this.

MARK

"You are to have no other gods before Me."

NORA

Not before Him. Beside Him.

MARK

"My name is Jealous, and I am a jealous God."

NORA

Then He should not have forsaken you.

Silence as the Monks consider this.

STEPHEN

We don't even have a Father Abbot. How can we know what's right anymore?

From beyond this room, everyone hears banging at the front door.

Everyone jumps to their feet.

The banging continues.

Nora motions to the Monks. They huddle behind her.

The banging stops.

The end of a staff pounds against the floor. It gets closer, and closer, and closer...

Nora goes from fearful to angry.

NORA

Nay... These are my people now! Not yours! You stay out of here!

The Monks see him. Their dread turns to wide-eyed awe.

MARK

Saint Nicholas...

Saint Nicholas is revealed to be standing before them, dressed in rich robes.

SAINT NICHOLAS

In the flesh.

NORA

You have no right to be here!

SAINT NICHOLAS

I was sent for.

Saint Nicholas motions to the Monks. They huddle around him, like little children. It is as if God Himself as walked into the room.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

Who among you knows how to sing?

Sheepishly, the Monks lift up their hands.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

That is all it takes. Krampus is a slave to paganism, and paganism is no match for words of praise to Adoni.

(singing joyfully)

We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and
mountain,
following yonder star.
O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.

(speaking)

Sing with me!

(singing)

Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie
Jesus...

All of the Monks join in...

MONKS
(singing)
Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie
Jesus...

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

In the ruins of the chapel, Selma sits on the floor, crying over her burned, bruised hands. Her tears are full of anger.

The songs of the Monks fill her ears.

MONKS
(voice-over)
Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie
Jesus...

Selma puts her hands over her ears and screams.

INT. WRITING ROOM - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas sits in the center of the room. The Monks sit around him.

Nora, pointedly, stands off to the side.

MARK
Is it true that you raised children
from the dead?

STEPHEN
Did you appear to sailors?

PETER
Did you really slap a heretic at the
Council of Nicaea?

SAINT NICHOLAS
I have taken so many walks...

MARK
You look so young, considering...

SAINT NICHOLAS
I feel old. I am old. With these
legs, I have traversed the enormity
of God's great globe.

MARK

Tell us how you became a saint!

SAINT NICHOLAS

One day, I discovered that my body refused to change. I went to my good friend, his holiness in Rome. He had no answers, but he told me that if I searched, I might find them for myself...

MARK

And did you?

SAINT NICHOLAS

Perhaps.

NORA

Are you done yet with your stories? Have you nothing better to do?

SAINT NICHOLAS

If you wish to depart, you are welcome to.

NORA

My sister with come for me.

SAINT NICHOLAS

So you are safest with us?

NORA

Unfortunately.

SAINT NICHOLAS

I will protect you as best I can.

NORA

Your powers come not from the little people; this much I know.

SAINT NICHOLAS

My powers come from the Husband of Israel.

As the following debate ensues, the Monks look back and forth between them.

NORA

Oh, please... Your so-called Yahweh was originally a Canaanite storm god. The Ancient Hebrews proclaimed Him to be absolute.

(MORE)

NORA (cont'd)

But before that, He was said to get drunk at parties. He even had a wife named Asherah...

SAINT NICHOLAS

What evidence have you for this?

NORA

Evidence...? Your Church suppresses all evidence! Before Christianity was sanctified by Rome, there were a hundred different versions of it. Remember Gnosticism?

SAINT NICHOLAS

All too well.

NORA

Gnosticism was an early form of Christianity that taught that the God of the Old Testament is evil. Your beloved Nazarene came to pave the way for personal enlightenment. The Gnostics had their own gospels. The Church burned them. In them, your Nazarene not once commands his followers to build churches. He tells them to look within.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Gnosticism is a heresy. We were right to condemn it.

NORA

How convenient. Let's talk about your Beloved Carpenter King... The one you whom you call virgin-born... The Greeks and Jews tell a different tale... He was the illegitimate son of a Roman centurion named Panthera. This is no secret; it has been whispered throughout the ages.

SAINT NICHOLAS

I remember.

NORA

Either he took Mary by force, or else she went with him willingly. I do not judge her one bit. She was free to love whomever she wished.

SAINT NICHOLAS

These are vile and unfounded
slanders.

NORA

The truth seeps through the cracks,
Saint Nicholas. Your Church is rife
with hypocrisies. You claim to follow
the teachings of a humble carpenter,
and yet you amass wealth and power.

SAINT NICHOLAS

The failings of individuals within
the Church do not diminish it. We are
all striving to live by His example.
Even saints are fallible. The Church
is the body of Christ on Earth,
despite despite its imperfections.

NORA

But what of the evidence that
contradicts your stories? Josephus
and Philo, respected Jewish
historians, never recorded any
miraculous deeds performed by the
Rabbi of Nazareth. If He were truly
divine, would not His miracles have
been notable enough to document?

SAINT NICHOLAS

We have the four Gospels.

NORA

But nothing from anyone reputable.

SAINT NICHOLAS

The writings of Josephus and Philo,
though not Christian, acknowledge the
existence of Yeshua. The mere fact
that these Jewish writers mention him
at all shows his importance. Josephus
refers to him as a wise man and a
doer of wonderful works, even if he
does not elaborate on the miracles.

NORA

Mentioning someone is far from
validating divine claims. And
Gnosticism, with its alternative
gospels and secret knowledge, exposes
the Church's efforts to monopolize
spiritual truth.

SAINT NICHOLAS

We excluded the Gnostic texts because they are heresy.

NORA

You ask these men to place much faith in a message made by men. The gods of my people need no such efforts. Their stories speak for themselves.

SAINT NICHOLAS

So you say.

If your God reigns supreme, then why is there suffering? Why is there evil?

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

How do you even know the difference between good and evil? You gods couldn't tell you. They were wicked themselves.

NORA

Answer the question.

SAINT NICHOLAS

The suffering of the world can be explained through man's free will.

NORA

Man's free will...? But what about natural disasters, diseases...? These have nothing to do with man's free will.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Natural disasters and diseases are part of the brokenness of our world, a world that has been marred by the Fall of Man.

NORA

Excuses....

SAINT NICHOLAS

God's love is shown in His willingness to enter into our suffering. Through Christ, God experienced our pain, to the point of death. Consider the nature of your gods.

NORA

My gods reflect the realities of
life.

SAINT NICHOLAS

They perpetuate bloodshed, treachery,
hedonism....

NORA

My gods guide us in ways your
distant, abstract God cannot.
My gods had no need to hide behind
layers of theology and doctrine.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Neither does mine.

NORA

Oh contraire...

SAINT NICHOLAS

Enough! I shall invoke Yeshua when I
meet this demon myself!

Saint Nicholas leaves the room.

Nora smirks and follows.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas walks down the hallway.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Come, come... Don't be shy...

He walks a little longer, then suddenly stops.

Selma stands before him, silently stoic.

Saint Nicholas holds up his sword.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

I do not condemn you. The Son of God
condemns you.

(singing)

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, has come
to ransom Yisrael...

Selma yanks the sword out of Saint Nicholas' hand and turns
it around. In a flash, she stabs Saint Nicholas in the
stomach.

Saint Nicholas groans loudly and falls to his knees, then onto his side.

Selma lifts his sword for the killing blow...

Nora steps forward with both swords.

Selma looks up at her and reaches out her hands.

SELMA

You cannot stop me. I am the winds of change!

NORA

I am the tree that stops the wind.

SELMA

I am the earthquake that swallows the stone.

NORA

I am the hawk that survives the earthquake.

SELMA

I am the serpent that strikes the hawk.

NORA

I am the archer who pierces the serpent.

SELMA

I am the lion who eats the hunter.

NORA

I am the...the... I am the... the...

Selma laughs. Nora looks humiliated.

SELMA

Have you nothing to say?

NORA

Yeshua!!!

Selma stares at Nora in disbelief.

NORA (cont'd)

Yeshua!!!

Selma is rebelled by some unknown force. She clutches her stomach and groans.

NORA (cont'd)
Yeshua!!!

Selma's sword breaks. She hobbles off.

Nora takes a few steps to pursue Selma, but she stops.

She bends down and vomits on the ground.

It is a loud, ugly sight. Nora vomits three times.

NORA (cont'd)
Dammit!

Saint Nicholas keeps groaning.

She goes to Saint Nicholas. His stomach is bleeding.

Nora takes off her outer cloak and uses it to stop the bleeding.

Saint Nicholas sees Nora over him. His vision goes in and out...

...All goes burry...

INT. WRITING ROOM - DAY

Saint Nicholas wakes up. The Monks watch from a distance as Nora tends to his wound. She lifts a potion to his lips.

NORA
Drink this. It will dull the pain.

Saint Nicholas groans. She lifts his head and forces him to drink it. Some of it pours down his cheek.

After a few seconds, Saint Nicholas regains most of his strength.

SAINT NICHOLAS
Why...?

NORA
I thought you were almighty... Are you capable of dying...?

Saint Nicholas shakes his head weakly as he tries to think up an answer. He cannot. His wits evade him.

SAINT NICHOLAS
...Why...? ...Why did you...?

NORA

I like humans. Even the arrogant
asses. I feel at one with them.

Saint Nicholas sits up and collects his thoughts.

SAINT NICHOLAS

...Selma... You stopped her....

NORA

I spoke the name of the Nazarene.
Thrice. In Hebrew.

SAINT NICHOLAS

So you confess the power of his name?

Nora nods her head yes.

NORA

It nearly destroyed the both of us.

Saint Nicholas grabs his book and flips through it.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Do you sing?

NORA

Your songs are poison.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Perhaps we can find one pleasant for
you.

Nora scoffs.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

If I found you one, would you sing
with me?

Silence from Nora.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)

A good Christian song would heal my
wound.

NORA

I will not speak his name again; not
in any tongue.

Saint Nicholas flips through his book until he finds the
correct page. He smiles softly.

SAINT NICHOLAS

This song will not be written for hundreds of years. It concerns Saint Wenceslaus, a Prince of Bohemia, renown for his piety. After his death, he was remembered as a king.

NORA

You humans have a way of telling stories. Most of you are greater in legend than you were in life.

SAINT NICHOLAS

In this song, he is accompanied by his page as he takes a long journey by foot through the snow to bring food and drink to a poor peasant, just in time for the Feast of Saint Stephen, which falls on December the Twenty-Sixth.

NORA

And who, pray tell, is Saint Stephen?

SAINT NICHOLAS

The first Christian martyr, stoned to death in the Book of Acts. In the song, King Wenceslaus and his page find the peasant at a fountain dedicated to Saint Agnes of Rome.

NORA

And who, pray tell, is Saint Agnes of Rome?

SAINT NICHOLAS

A third century Catholic martyr. She dedicated herself Christ, and she refused to marry any of her suitors. She was dragged through the streets naked, and when no fire would burn her, she was beheaded. She is the patron saint of--

NORA

--Let me guess; chastity and virgins.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Aye.

NORA

You prioritize the strangest things.

SAINT NICHOLAS
Will you sing with me?

NORA
I hate his name!

SAINT NICHOLAS
It is nowhere here.

NORA
Are you so sure?

Nora looks it over...

SAINT NICHOLAS
Can you say the word "Christian?"

NORA
"Christian..."
(she considers it)
It does not prick me... It only
annoys me.

Saint Nicholas gives her his hand.

SAINT NICHOLAS
Help me up.

Nora rises. She helps him up, holding his song book.

Saint Nicholas preforms a grandiose gesture in the air.

Music suddenly plays from an unknown source.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
(signing)
Good King Wenceslas looked out on the
Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep
and crisp and even.

NORA
(singing)
Brightly shone the moon that night,
though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
gath'ring winter fuel...

SAINT NICHOLAS
(singing)
"Hither, page, and stand by me, if
you know it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and
what his dwelling?"

NORA

(singing)

"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by
Saint Agnes' fountain."

SAINT NICHOLAS

(singing)

"Bring me food and bring me wine,
bring me pine logs hither,
You and I will see him dine, when we
bear them thither."

BOTH

(singing)

Page and monarch, forth they went,
forth they went together,
Through the cold wind's wild lament
and the bitter weather.

NORA

(singing)

"Sire, the night is darker now, and
the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can
go no longer."

SAINT NICHOLAS

(singing)

"Mark my footsteps, my good page,
tread now in them boldly,
You shall find the winter's rage
freeze your blood less coldly."

NORA

(singing)

In his master's steps he trod, where
the snow lay dinted.

SAINT NICHOLAS

(singing)

Heat was in the very sod which the
saint had printed.

BOTH

(singing)

Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
while God's gifts possessing,
You who now will bless the poor shall
yourselves find blessing.

As the music ends, Saint Nicholas lets out a hearty laugh.
It is the closest thing he ever gets to a "Ho-Ho-Ho!"

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Selma kneels down and raises her hands. She closes her eyes.

The three Krampus appear in a burst of green fire.

Selma cradles the Krampus in her arms as if she is their mother. They are all without eyes.

Selma unfolds a piece of cloth, revealing three sets of eyes. She puts the eyes in each of them.

She cradles them some more.

SELMA

My sister stole my blade from me, the
little thief. I give you one charge:
Find me another! The best there is!

The Krampus growl and bow their heads.

They disappear in a burst of fire.

Selma waits for their return.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Saint Nicholas tells a story to the Monks, who sit at his feet like little children.

Nora stands off to the side.

SAINT NICHOLAS

I once knew a poor farmer with three daughters. He was unable to provide for their doweries. He was too proud for charity. But my heart went out to them. So for three nights, I crept into his house. And do you know how I got it? Guess! Through the chimney. I placed gold coins in their stockings, drying over the fireplace. I thought I had done well. But on the third night, the farmer was waiting for me. I made him swear to say nothing of this, but he did not keep his word. In no time at all, all of Christendom knew of how I had climbed up and down his chimney.

MARK

Tell us about Nicaea.

SAINT NICHOLAS

If you read the New Testament carefully, there are verses that equate Jesus to God, and there are verses that make him distinct from God. I held to the orthodox view that Jesus and God the Father were of the same substance; light from light; the same hypostasis. By the third century, Christianity had proven itself to be a uniting power in Rome. Emperor Constantine wanted to sanctify it for political reasons.

So, he convened the Council of Nicaea. Bishops and theologians from all over the empire were present. Among them was Arius, who taught that Christ was a created being and not co-eternal with the Father.

Arius spoke, "There was a time when the Son was not..." I could bear it no longer. I crossed the room and struck Arius across the face.

Emperor Constantine ordered that I be stripped of my bishop robes and be thrown in prison.

Thankfully, the council condemned Arianism and affirmed the Nicene Creed, declaring that the Son is of one substance with the Father, and that the Son eternally precedes from the Father, like a ray of light from the sun. My actions were vindicated. I was released from jail. My bishop robes were restored.

The Monks clap.

Saint Nicholas is clearly well-pleased with himself.

NORA

How are you feeling now?

SAINT NICHOLAS

Splendid, thanks to your incredible hospitality.

He picks up his songbook and opens it.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
I have selected some new songs. I
will sing them while we fight.

NORA
Just as long as I don't sing them.

The page is full of Hebrew letters.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas, Nora, and Ember walks down the hallway
together.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Selma kneels with her eyes closed in meditation.

The Krampus reappear in a burst of fire. One of them bears
an object wrapped in old cloth.

Selma rises and unwraps it. It is a rusty old spear. Selma
steps back, amazed.

SELMA
Can it be...? The Spear of Destiny,
who's tip was used to pierce the
blood of the righteous...? It has
been lost for eons... Where did you
find it...?

The Krampus all growl at her.

Selma is memorized by it.

SELMA (cont'd)
It comes to me now as if on the wings
of legend...

Selma takes it and brandishes it.

The Krampus bow to her. Selma reaches out to them tenderly.

SELMA (cont'd)
(singing)
Veistu, hvé rísta skal?
Veistu, hvé ráða skal?
Veistu, hvé fár skal finna?
Veistu, hvé skal á freista?
Veistu, hvé beita skal?
Veistu, hvé blóta skal?
Veistu, hvé senda skal?
(MORE)

SELMA (cont'd)
Veistu, hvé sóa skal?

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas, Nora, and Ember walks down the hallway together.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas, Nora, and Ember enter the chapel.

Selma is waiting for the three of them. Her Krampus stand behind her.

SELMA
You have come to see my greatest triumph.

SAINT NICHOLAS
We have come to see your greatest defeat.

NORA
We both have nothing to lose. This is their world now. It never was our world to begin with. They made us from nothing.

Saint Nicholas and Nora hold up their swords.

So do the Krampus.

A short sword-fight ensues. Saint Nicholas and Nora each take on a Krampus.

Selma tries to stab Ember with the Spear of Destiny. Ember narrowly doges her, snarling and growing all the way.

As Saint Nicholas sings, he directs his words at Selma.

SAINT NICHOLAS
(singing in Hebrew)
Yeshua hu Hamashiach u kavod Adoni...

Selma screams in pain at hearing these words. Her hands rattle in place, but she manages not to drop the Spear.

The Krampus are soon killed. Saint Nicholas and Nora stab them. They fall to the ground.

Their bodies disappear in a burst of flame.

Selma has her Spear aimed right at Ember.

SELMA
(singing in Hebrew)
Shema Yisrael Adoni Eloheinu
Adoni echad...

Selma screams in pain. She lets go of the Spear with one hand. Her other hand drops it a little.

Ember takes a big gulp of air. Her eyes glisten. She prepares to breathe fire.

Selma takes on a tender tone.

SELMA (cont'd)
My dear sweet child, would you really
strike one of your own...?

Ember hesitates in pity.

Selma uses this to her advantage. In one swift motion, she grabs the Spear of Destiny with both hands and impales Ember.

Ember screams in pain.

Nora looks over at her in horror.

NORA
Ember!!!

Selma pulls the Spear out of Ember, who falls over dead.

The tip is wet with dragon blood.

Selma points it at them. They point their own swords at her.

SELMA
I remember how obsessed Odin was with
his own demise. The Norns told him
that it would happen with the
destruction of the world. Odin
envisioned the moon falling from the
sky and the world being overturned by
blood. He assumed all earthly life
would end with him. Alas, the Norns
just meant the destruction of his own
world. He disappeared bit by bit. By
the time he faded completely, no
human cared to take notice.

Nora makes up her mind what she must do. She looks at Saint Nicholas. He nods to her.

NORA
(singing in Hebrew)
Yeshua hu Hamashiach u kavod Adoni...

Nora immediately winces in pain. She screams. Her entire body has just received a third degree burn.

Saint Nicholas puts his hand on her shoulder.

SAINT NICHOLAS
(singing in Hebrew)
V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha...

Selma falters a little.

NORA
(singing in Hebrew)
V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha...

Nora and Selam wince together. Another burst of pain rolls through them.

SELMA
Nora...

Nora drops her two swords. She reaches her hands out to Selma.

NORA
(singing)
Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Yeshua Lord, at Thy birth
Yeshua Lord, at Thy birth.

Nora and Selma drop to their knees in agony, but as Selma does, she drops the Spear of Destiny.

They both scream.

Nora rushes to Selma. She picks up the Spear of Destiny. She runs Selma through.

Selma screams.

Nora eventually pulls it out.

Selma falls over.

Nora drops to the floor as well, letting go of the Spear.

Saint Nicholas rushes to Nora. He grabs her.

Nora is still alive. In her weakened state, she observes Ember's bloody carcass.

Nora shakes herself out of Saint Nicholas' clasp. She rushes to Ember's body and cradles her...

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

All of the holy objects have been repaired.

The remaining Monks gather around. Saint Nicholas stands in front of the altar. Mark stands off to the side. They watch him pensively. Nora stands alone in the far back.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Christ commanded his disciples to go
out into the world. Now you all must
do the same. You need fear no evil,
for you, my friends, are never alone.
Now, let us receive Christ.

All of the Monks line up to receive communion. Nora, pointedly, does not.

Saint Nicholas places a wafer in each of their mouths.

Mark lifts the chalice to each of their lips.

Saint Nicholas watches Nora as she walks out of the chapel. When he is done serving communion, he follows after her...

INT. SMALL ROOM - NIGHT

Nora sits down on the bench, all alone. She looks around pensively, then sets her gaze straight ahead.

She starts breathing deeply and erratically, but catches herself and stops.

Saint Nicholas walks in. He stares at her in pity. She does not acknowledge him. Many long seconds pass...

He sits down next to her.

Long. Awkward. Pause.

NORA

You have the pride of being fashioned
in His own image.

SAINT NICHOLAS

You are on a journey. Remember that.
A journey we all must take.

(beat)

The longest journey of all. I
remember--

NORA

(interrupting him)

--Be silent.

They sit in silence for a long while. Nora looks straight ahead. Saint Nicholas sits awkwardly, not knowing where to settle his gaze.

NORA (cont'd)

He is taking his time... He never
comes when he should...

Saint Nicholas says nothing. He has nothing to say.

NORA (cont'd)

Here!

Nora takes off her signet ring and hands it to him.

NORA (cont'd)

This is it. All the power I have
left.

SAINT NICHOLAS

What would I do with pagan magic?

NORA

It would not be pagan if you used it.
All of my people are at your command.

SAINT NICHOLAS

The children of the earth? What would
I do with them?

NORA

Whatever you wish. They will answer
to the one who wakes them. I wish I
could sleep with them, but these
wounds are too far deep.

Another awkward pause.

A surge of pain flies through her body, like a lightning bolt. She tries stubbornly to hide it, but she still shivers.

NORA (cont'd)
Sing me something.... I don't want to
go in silence... Sing for me...

SAINT NICHOLAS
You hate my songs.

He waits. No answer from her.

SAINT NICHOLAS (cont'd)
What would you like me to sing?

NORA
Dealer's choice.

SAINT NICHOLAS
(singing)
Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie
Jesus....

NORA
(singing)
Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie Jesus, Pie
Jesus....

SAINT NICHOLAS
(singing)
Yeshua hu Hamashiach u kavod Adoni...

NORA
(singing)
Yeshua hu Hamashiach u kavod Adoni...

SAINT NICHOLAS
(singing)
Shema Yisrael Adoni Eloheinu
Adoni echad...

NORA
(singing)
Be near me, Yeshua
In Thy tender care
And take me to Heaven
To live with Thee there...

Bright light shines on Nora's face. She stares into it,
memorized. She starts breathing loudly and deeply. Saint
Nicholas wraps his arms around her. Her breathing grows more
erratic.

The bright light smoothers the screen. After a moment, the
light subsides. Nora has vanished.

Saint Nicholas looks down. A pile of snow sits on the bench where she sat. He hastily gets a bucket and scoops the snow into it.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas lovingly pours Nora's slush onto the ground.

He scoops away some snow beside it and piles from rocks beside it--a makeshift grave marker.

He sits down next to it. He takes off Nora's ring and looks it over.

INT. ICY CAVE - NIGHT

The Dwarves are still sleeping in place.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas closes his eyes exhaustively.

NORNS
(off-screen)
...Father Christmas...

He shoots his eyes open.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns face forward.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas stares at them with hatred and fear.

INT. WHITE VOID - DAY

The Norns face forward.

NORN 1
Where will you go?

NORN 2
What will you do when you get there?

NORN 3
Let us see your fate.

Norn One tosses some rune-stones on the ground. The Norns look them over.

NORN 1
...Exquisite...

NORN 2
...Curiouser and curiouser...

NORN 3
It seems, your time among men is not yet over, Father Christmas.

NORN 1
You have promises to keep...

NORN 2
...And miles to go before you sleep!

NORN 3
...And miles to go before you sleep!

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - NIGHT

Saint Nicholas stares forward in exhaustion for a few more moments, then takes his staff in hand and rises to his feet.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - DAY

Saint Nicholas sits on a stump, carving a new toy. His eyes are full of hope and joy.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - DAY

Saint Nicholas strides through the trees. His lips form the smallest hint of a smile.

SAINT NICHOLAS
(voice over)
I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep... And miles to go before I sleep... And miles to go before I sleep.

Saint Nicholas disappears into the forest's depths.

THE END CREDITS ROLL OVER A PAGE OF MEDIEVAL PARCHMENT.

THE END.