

**Yuletide terror: Christmas horror on film and television
Indiegogo campaign**

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Yuletide Terror: Christmas Horror on Film and Television Indiegogo Campaign

Posted on September 7, 2017. Written by [Sinj Karan](#)

CHRISTMAS: the holiday, the celebration, the political battleground, is all about presents, shopping, religious and cultural othering, and a whole bunch of things for all people.

Canadian micro-publisher, [Spectacular Optical](#), is coming out with their take on Christmas, with a compendium of essays, stories, and reviews on Christmas Horror in film and television. Titled, *Yuletide Terror: Christmas Horror on Film and Television*, the offering promises to offer a definitive, in-depth exploration of the history of these subversive film and television presentations that allow viewers to engage in different ways with the complicated cultural history of the Christmas season. The group has just launched an [indiegogo campaign](#) for the book and related products that ends on September 12.

Sinj Karan from Rampage, spoke to some of the contributors, whose works will be part of this collection:

SK: How does Christmas horror, both in film and television, deconstruct the whole stereotype of what Christmas means and symbolizes?

Diane A Rogers (Diane): I suppose Christmas, to many people, represents a very happy time for games, fun and gifts – a holiday from work or school, a safe, nice place to be, perhaps around the family hearth. If you celebrate Christmas as part of your religion, or even a festival like Saturnalia, it's a time to rejoice and make merry with feasting and drinking. Christmas horror, then, suggests a juxtaposition of fear and terror with this merriment but perhaps exposes something in doing so; a dark undercurrent of human nature that is always present and what people perhaps try to bury or forget about at such festive times. Christmas horror reminds us that there is a dark side to everything and, in a sense maybe, a truth about the world; that not everyone has a 'nice' Christmas, a perfect family or even a safe place to be. Therefore it reveals an element of hypocrisy in parts of society and areas which the sugar-coated capitalist stereotype of Christmas ignores.

Paul Corupe: Genre films are fascinating to me because of the way they are able to transgress traditional narratives. Although they're still beholden to a framework of sorts, they tend to have more freedom to push a story in unexpected directions or to question common beliefs. For example, in the book, we talk about several films that subvert the nativity including elves, which borrows the story of Jesus' birth and turns it completely inside out. The film, ludicrously, is about a young woman is being groomed by her Nazi grandfather so she can be impregnated by an evil elf and deliver a baby that will become the prototype for a new master race, rather than the savior for humankind. Here's a story about stopping an immaculate-ish conception at all costs instead of celebrating it. And while *Elves* isn't particularly serious in its approach, it achieves what the best of these Christmas horror films does, by tipping sacred cows and poking holes in our cultural consensus.

Leslie Hatton: Christmas is often considered a time for family, celebration, and generosity. But what about people who don't get along with their family members? What if you're sick, jobless, or struggling to pay the bills? Christmas can be incredibly stressful and scary! Feeling pressure to celebrate can turn the holiday into a nightmare.

SK: What made you respond to the most important holiday in the Christian calendar this way? What part of your personal engagement with Christmas (be it within family or outside) drew you to this sub-genre of Christmas horror in film/tv?

Diane: As a child, in western culture at least, you're trained to have some sort of idea about the 'perfect Christmas' which, for me, was spending time with my parents being happy and excited, getting presents, but also playing games and interacting with family members in a way that we didn't normally have time for. My favourite thing though was that I was allowed to watch lots of TV, get bundled up warm from the winter cold, snuggle up by the fire (I was lucky enough to grow up with a real coal fire) and gloriously indulge in endless films and TV programmes. My 1980s childhood was before the internet, DVD players and even just before VHS was common, so the idea of the 'big Christmas film' that would premiere on the BBC on Christmas Day afternoon (always after the Queen's speech and Christmas Top of the Pops) was incredibly exciting. The film would be something never shown on TV before; leafing through the Christmas Radio Times (BBC TV guide magazine) and choosing all the exciting films I wanted to watch became a ritual.

I became interested in gothic and folk horror over a period of time, when I was a young teenager I enjoyed visiting the video shop to rent a horror film which I probably shouldn't have been allowed to watch. At Christmas in the UK there has also been a tradition, at least since the early 1970s, of having ghost stories on TV at Christmas, which were repeated in later years – usually adaptations of M.R. James stories, which were in fact written to be read out on Christmas Eve by a roaring fire. One BBC series in 2000 had Christopher Lee playing M.R. James, sitting by a fireplace reading ghost stories to his students which I think is difficult to beat for a stereotype of traditional Christmas viewing. Also of course Dickens' A Christmas Carol, adapted many times over, has a very British nostalgia to it whilst also being a genuinely scary ghost story at times. Folk horror, to me, is a natural extension of this, Robin Redbreast, which my chapter for Yuletide Terror focuses on, was a BBC Play for Today preceding the 1970s BBC Ghost Stories for Christmas and looks at a much darker side of British tradition around the Christmas period incorporating pagan ritual and practice.

Paul: I personally still enjoy the winter holiday season as a bright spot in the year, but it certainly has stressful aspects—family pressures, dealing with shopping, hosting parties, the manic consumerism. I think most people have a complicated relationship with Christmas at best, in that they know they're supposed to be happy and joyful at this time of the year even if sometimes they don't quite feel it. Christmas horror films have become a way to indulge these negative feelings in a fun way, be it via a killer Santa, a Christmas ghost story or alien invaders who ruin the holidays by kidnapping Old Saint Nick.

Leslie: I've always liked the idea of subversiveness in pop culture. I appreciate a good, catchy pop song that has dark or even malevolent lyrics. To introduce an element of horror into what's supposed to be a joyous time of year feels like the ultimate subversion.

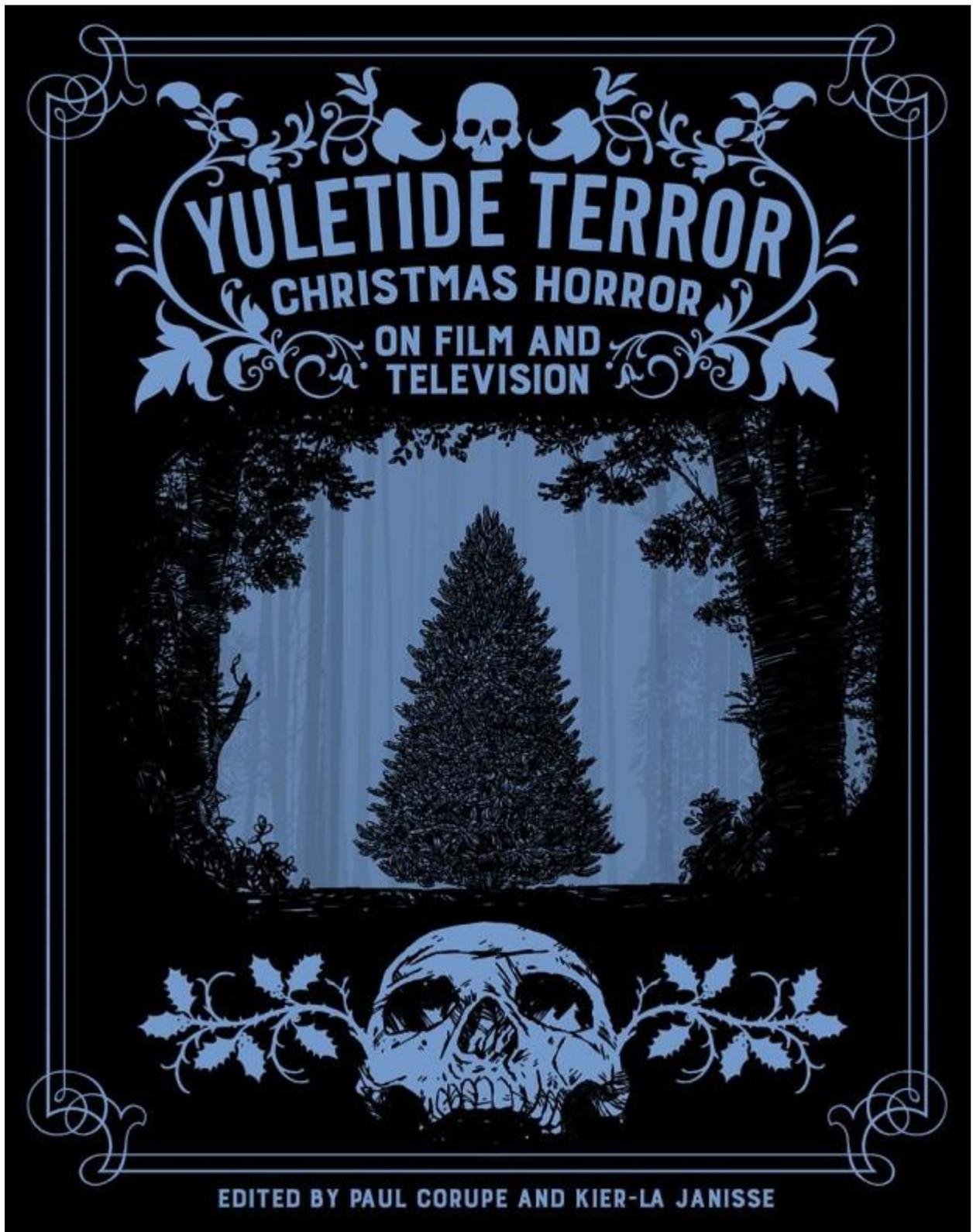
SK: Religion can bring such shades of dogma, superstition, beliefs, all fertile fodder to creative horror narratives. In your opinion, has this new commercial universality of the 'Christmas' export, relegated Christmas horror stories to more genre fiction, than something that could have been mainstream if it remained rooted in religious traditions and practices?

Diane: I think this is correct to a degree; 'Christmas' in recent decades could certainly be a TV or film genre; as the Western genre (for example) employs cowboys, saloons, horses, shootouts, horses, stagecoaches, Christmas horror is similarly often against a background of staple elements like a family or group of friends, a home with a hearth, carol singing, gift-giving and a Coca-Cola Father Christmas figure – and the usurping or unsettling of these elements in some way. These are less to do with religion and more focussed on the corporatisation of the festive period, but I'm not sure how much more mainstream Christmas horror would be if narratives remained more rooted in religious traditions and practices. The folk horror figure of the Christmas Krampus (half-goat, half-demon who punishes children) has crept in to some recent TV and film which gives the generic idea of Christmas superstition and belief a different edge but I think, in general,

turning religious tradition and practice into something of fear and horror can prove much more controversial, offensive or difficult for general audiences and therefore can relegate it to the sidelines in terms of wider distribution.

Paul: Christmas horror stories are, by their nature, always going to be somewhat outside the mainstream. Just looking at the history of the Santa Claus myth, the nativity and other Christmas traditions, an obvious reading is the gradual replacement of darker pagan elements with prevailing Christian values. Certainly there are Christmas horror movies that deal with religion, but I think anytime a film takes on an organized belief system in a questioning way, it's going to upset somebody. That's why you'll never see Kirk Cameron in a Christmas horror movie or have Krampus make a cameo on the Hallmark channel.

Leslie: That is an interesting aspect that I had not considered, but yes, I think that the commercial juggernaut of mainstream Christmas makes alternate points of view that much harder to get across.



SK: What's your favourite Christmas horror story/film/tv show and why?

Diane: For a film, I have to watch Scrooged (1988) every year; even though it's about thirty years old now, I remember seeing it at the cinema and still think it's an excellent updating of the Dickens classic. Although only a '12' rating, it's genuinely creepy in places (the Ghost of 'Christmas Yet to Come' having a blank, fizzling TV screen for a face remains a perfect figure of fear for the Black Mirror generation), Bill Murray is in his prime as a TV executive obsessed with

ratings, trying to terrify audiences into watching his network's Christmas TV special and it even has David Johansen from the New York Dolls as a ghostly cab driver, what's not to love? It manages to soften my cynical heart every time with genuine pleas from Bill Murray direct to camera about generally being nice to other humans, of which I think Dickens would approve.

For TV, the BBC Ghost Stories for Christmas DVD boxset comes out regularly – I don't think any of the tales are actually much to do with Christmas but have lots to do with witchcraft, hauntings and cursed stones and are perfect to curl up in front of with loved ones in the dark to cower in creeping terror. Other than that, my ritual watch of Pee Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special isn't really horror of course but Grace Jones' performance of Little Drummer Boy is always something to behold.

Paul: A Christmas Carol is by far my favourite Christmas horror narrative, I have been fascinated with it since I was a kid and I had the Classics Illustrated comic book adaptation. I watched the George C. Scott TV movie adaptation of the story when it first aired in 1984 and still watch it almost every year; it's likely that I've seen it more times than any other film. For me, Dickens crafted the ideal Christmas story, a tale of facing the darkest depths of yourself to find redemption, a story of discovering compassion and gaining outside perspective on becoming the best person you can be. Plus it's punctuated with powerful moments of dread—the initial appearance of Marley's ghost, Scrooge discovering his name on the grave, the ghostly funeral carriage that runs down the street. These are some of the most iconic moments in Christmas horror and have influenced countless other films, as we discovered when putting together the chapters from our contributors.

Leslie: *À l'intérieur* is not only one of my favorite genre films, it's one of my favorite films of any category. I didn't fully grasp the Christmas connection until I had seen it a few times. I think that makes it even more subversive than a film that markets itself as specific Christmas-themed horror.

SK: Other than the unique collection of Christmas Horror in Film and TV, what makes Yuletide Terror, special to you?

Diane: It's wonderful to be invited to be part of such a project, and being given the opportunity to examine Christmas horror from a number of diverse perspectives, including the folk horror that is related to my ongoing research. My current PhD work is on folklore and folk horror in British television of the 1970s, including television films and plays: a lot of which had an unsettling atmosphere with narratives around pagan rituals, witchcraft, ghostly hauntings or the eerie British landscape with a horror or fantasy element. A number of these programmes are only recently gaining attention and has yet to be attributed with the social significance they deserve, many of which were originally screened in winter or around Christmas time so are embedded into the culture of Christmas without necessarily being about Christmas. Yuletide Terror allows the consideration of Christmas horror as a concept overall as well as the individual film and programmes, and I can't wait to cosy up by the fire to read my copy and discover more fearful festive gems.

Paul: One appealing aspect of Christmas horror to me is that you can only really enjoy it during the Christmas season; there's only a short window in which to watch these films before you pack up your DVDs and stick them in a box until next year. Watching the serial killer Santas of Christmas Evil or Silent Night Deadly Night or curling up with Bob Clark's Canadian classic Black Christmas on a warm July afternoon with a glass of lemonade doesn't quite cut it. Watching these films still gets me in the Christmas spirit just as effectively as A Charlie Brown Christmas or It's a Wonderful Life.

Leslie: Until recently, I didn't realize just how much Christmas Horror there was in pop culture, so it's amazing to me that there's such a wide range of it out there. It makes me appreciate the variety of interpretations of how Christmas can be truly scary.

SK: From popular culture, can you think of worthy horror substitutes for Santa?

Diane: Donald Trump. I bet everyone says that. Trying to take away peoples' rights and freedoms, he's the Krampus horror figure that threatens and takes things away, like human rights, but he's the ultimate joke that keeps on giving. I'm hugely enjoying the current TV series of Ash vs the Evil Dead, it's a great extension of the films and Bruce Campbell is hilarious, so I'd love to see Ash have to work as a department store Santa, or even fill in for the real Father Christmas. I can imagine him treating the workshop elves the same as the medieval villagers in Army of Darkness: "Alright you primitive screwheads, listen up!" That would be groovy.

Paul: Forget about a substitute, the idea of Santa itself is pretty terrifying when you think about it. Here's a total stranger who, late at night when you're sleeping, sneaks into your house down the chimney, eats your food and — for those who are naughty, anyways — sticks dirty coal in your socks. It's a classic home invasion tale, and the fact that he's also a wizard who does it to every home around the world every single year makes it even weirder. I think, as we show in the book, that the Santa of current popular culture wasn't always so squeaky clean. The many folklore figures that preceded Santa or that evolved beside him, such as Krampus, have a much darker history of violence, death and punishing the naughty. And this forgotten tradition sometimes peeks through the twinkle lights and tinsel in Christmas horror films.

Leslie: I do wish that Krampus would become as popular in North America as he is in parts of Europe! He's much scarier than The Grinch.