



Witchever Path Presents

Happy Yule's Mass, Januae!



[sound of HITMAN.....]

[swirling winter winds, sound of ravens]

Januae

[narrating]

The cold winds sting my eyes as I find myself standing in a winter landscape. Large, twisted trees flank this path, which then splits up ahead into three, distinct roads. I smell the burning timber before I see the smoke in the air. Someone has lit a fire, no doubt to keep warm. The cold has already started to sting my extremities and with no idea where I am, it seems my only choice is to walk toward the fire and hope that whomever I encounter is at least friendly.

I trudge through the snow for what seems like an eternity, and I begin to worry about frostbite setting in until I round the corner and onto the next path where I see a large bonfire roaring in the middle of a glen. The fire is enormous, but I see only one person sitting on a log, warming their hands. They appear to have some sort of instrument or weapon hanging over their shoulder.

Januae

[calling out to the person]

Excuse me! Don't be frightened!
May I come by your fire? It's so cold.

Traveler

[worried stage whisper]

Run! Get outta here, they'll see you!

Januae

[confused... shaking]

I mean you no harm.
I'm freezing!

Traveler

[a bit louder]

Stranger, save yourself!

[fire goes out for a second]

[tittering of fairy laughs]

Traveler

[upset that the trap is sprung]
Goddamnit. Too late.



Januae

[watching the man disappear]
Hello?! Stranger, where did you go...

[here's snapping, suddenly the changelings come in]

Changeling 1

We got you, we got you, now the play can begin.

Changeling 2

It's Yule Time, It's Yule Time! We'll Dance and We'll Spin

Changeling 3

You're here now, you're with us. We've lured you in!

Reggie

I'm hungry, when's breakfast, I think we need to --

Changelings 1-3

Shut up, Reggie!

Redcap

[joyous]

Ah, there you are, mortal!

Had yeh but heeded the warning of our fire, we'd have had to let you go!

But now here, we can have our Yule's Mass fun!

Are ye ready to play the game o' Widdershins Roulette?

Januae

[shocked]

Widdershins! That moth creature?!

Oh... Oh no.

[remembering the laborious stupidity]

I'm back *here*.

Redcap

[angry]

AY! Yeh want me to grind yer bones in my molars, boyo, are yeh getting ready to play the games like the good little mortal yeh are?

Januae

[readying to run. Very cold]

You can't eat me, that's --



Redcap

[laughing]

I can and will.... But because it's our joyous winter holiday, I'll give you a sporting chance.
What do you say, good folk? Shall we give him a chance?

[Changelings all agree and bicker]

Redcap

[explaining the terms]

So here are me terms, future man.
Find me the three keys to Yule's Mass and I will let you go free, back to your world and away
from here. Fail, and we'll be having a jaunty meal.

Januae

[exasperated]

I... what... All right, what am I seeking?

[Changelings unsure]

Changeling 1

A caul that's placed and not removed, to bring life into this world!

Changeling 2

A light so bright that in the night, you see through blizzard's swirl

Changeling 3

The mascot of this festive time, without it we can't play

Reggie

I like the naked ones.

Changelings

Shut Up, Reggie!

Januae

[incredulous]

That's not helpful in the least.
Can I ask a few questions?



Redcap

[annoyed]

That's all the hints ye get. You've not much time. Find one and you'll be transported to the next.

You'll find them in the order of Widdershins!

Now, you frosty lamb.... Let me.... There. Jump into the circle, please.

Januae

[confused]

Why?

Redcap

[offended]

The man jumps across space and time and he's skeptical of me?!

Jump!

Januae

[done with it]

Very well. I'll Juuuuuuuuuuummmppppppppp

Aaaaaaaaaa

Changeling 1

Where'd he go?

Changeling 2

Probably somewhere stupid

Changeling 3

Knowing Sporin, we probably lost him wherever he lost that bard.

Reggie

That's a funny play on that person's name.

Changeling 1

What?

Reggie.

You know, that bard, very clever.

[sound of wind and jingle bells]

[Jazzy Christmas Piano]



Lionel, the Zealot

[in that peanuts cadence from the Christmas Show]

I think you don't understand the true meaning of Yule, Hagbard Olafson.
Schrodinger, Pig Boy, tie them to the stake.

Hagbard

[annoyed]

You asked for a tree, untouched by an axe, to be the centerpiece of your play.
I fulfilled my end of the bargain.

Lionel

[evil, peanuts like indignation]

Hagbard Olafson, you truly are a blockhead. That little sapling isn't fit to burn a squirrel on, let alone an unbeliever. And before we commit your soul to the sacred flame, allow me to tell you the true meaning of Yule's Mass.

Light's Please.

And on the hill, on the darkest night of the year, the mortal shepherds saw a great golden light. They began to quake in fear, and then heard a voice that said, "Yes, you are right to fear. For I am the Black Goat of the Wood, and I have seen your works, you filthy shepherds, and what hungers drive you. For you see, I too have my own appetites."

And they wept, for there the Black Goat came racing down the hill. They looked to the heavens where they hoped to find some divine intervention, some avenging angel of a righteous god come down to smite the awakened elder shadow but as they looked they saw...

[sound of Januae falling, crashed onto Lionel, killing him]

Januae

[finishing his scream with a grunt]

Pig Boy

[Afraid]

An Avenging Angel! Flee!

Shrodinger!

[unsure]

But what about Lionel?!

Pig Boy

[terrified]

The blanket sniffer's dead, you fool! Fly!

Hagbard



[relieved]

Thank you for the assistance, stranger. I thought I was done for.
I just --

Januae

[groans in pain]

Hagbard

Are you all right, stranger?

Januae

[righting himself]

I think so, it seems this large, dirty pile of bedding broke my fall.
[realizing he's talking to a tied up person]
Why ... are you tied up?

Hagbard

[worried the other two might come back]

They were unhappy with the bargain we made for some information.
I'd get them a tree, untouched by an axe for their revels, and in return they'd shed light on
where I'd.... oh, good grief.

[laughs to himself]

I was so stupid. This place, friend. It'll kill you if you're not careful.

Januae

[wary but empathetic]

It seems that way. I'll untie you, in exchange for you helping me find something.

Hagbard

[interested]

Tell me what you're looking for and I'll see what I can do.

Januae

[narrate]

And so I tell this Hagbard exactly what happened to me. About my jaunt into this strange dimension, the trap laid out by the large abhuman wearing a redcap died in blood, and about the three keys I needed to find in order to avoid being eaten. I even told them of my first appearance in this realm, months ago, where the creature Widdershins forced me to listen to a strange, monotonous song that summoned nightmarish creatures to join in the chorus.



Hagbard listens to me with an empathy I have rarely experienced since I began jaunting uncontrollably. But their eyes seemed to glow with a sincerity I hadn't seen since, well, I don't want to speak of it. When I finished, they smiled at me.

Hagbard

[calm]

Untie me and I'll get you your first key, and then you'll be 1/3 of the way of home.

Januae

[surprised]

I have your word.

Hagbard

[amused, warm]

You're in a land where names and words have a lot of power, friend. And you've heard my name. So I promise on that name, I won't knowingly harm you directly, or indirectly while you're in Faerie.

Januae

[satisfied]

That's acceptable. Okay, let me help... They tied you up with a bow.
Who does that?

[unties them]

Hagbard

[jumps down from pyre]

Fantastic! Thank you so much!

I better get going before Lionel's henchmen realize you're not an angel and sic their hound on me. He's vicious, although a good dancer.

[laughs]

Januae

[feeling tricked]

Hold on. You promised to get me the first key.

Hagbard

[amused]

I didn't lie. It's right there. The tree. It's the symbol of Yule Time here.



Januae

[confused]

That, twig? It's barely a sapling. It's needles are even falling off, it's practically dead!
How is that ... and even if that's true that's *the third one I'm supposed to find* based on what they said.

Hagbard

[corrects him]

Ah, but they said Widdershins. And you know what that means, Januae?
It means counter clockwise... So three would really be.

Januae

[gets it and is so annoyed this is what he has to go through]

Three would really be the first.

Good Grief.

Hagbard

[kindly]

If what the redcap told you was right, all you gotta do is pick the sapling up, and you'll be on your way.

[walks over, picks it up for Januae]

Here you go. Good luck, friend.

Januae

[grateful again and touched by this person's kindness]

I don't suppose you'd come with me.

Hagbard

[demurred]

I would, but... I've got my own quest.

Here, take it.

Januae

[grabs little tree]

Thank You... Whoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

[twinkle sounds]

[Januae falls into a snow drift]

[Januae spits out snow]



Januae

[narrate]

I wade my way out of the snowdrift and find myself standing next to a striped pole, which stands like a monolith amongst the white, rolling hills. I hear the croaking cries within the trees and I'm immediately on high alert for abhumans until I hear a bizarre, rolling thump coming my way. I turn in time to see a mass of snow in a vaguely humanoid shape lumber its way toward me, it's lower body a rolling snowball. It's eyes appear to be made of black shining stones. Upon its head, it wears a type of black hood with golden runes embroidered into the fabric.

It's arms appear to be made of wood, yet twist and groan with every movement this monster makes toward me. And then it speaks.

Grim the Snowman

[checking the Jaunter out]

Well, happy birthday to me!

Look at you, appearing out of nowhere like a little hornless Krampus!

I'm Grim! How are you?

Januae

[shocked, as a giant animated snow creature is talking to him]

Stay back, whatever you are!

Grim

[laughing it off]

Whatever I ? Oh, sweetheart, you've never seen a talking snowman before? You got nothing to be frightened of. It's my Yule Time. And it's the magic of Yule that brought me to life right here, just like how it brought somebody so handsome for me to flirt with. I mean, I'm positively melting here, dahlin.

Januae

[intimidated by flattering snow-devil]

Um, thank you. I'm looking for something in order to help me get home.

Would you be so kind as to help me?

Grim

[Kind]

Slow down there, stranger. We haven't even gotten your name yet. Manners is manners, after all. Don't really get a lot of people up here, and I'm trying to be a nice gentleman, maybe find me a suitor to have some fun and good conversation with before I melt away. But every time I think I find Mr. Right, they fall asleep on me! So I just cover them up with the snow over there, and keep waiting for the right one to arrive.

[tone is colder, harder] One day, I shall wake them in much the same way the pale masters did me.



[Kind again] But you, big britches, you seem pretty wonderful. Something different about you. A touch of raw, uncontrollable power in them bones. Maybe you got what it takes to keep yourself moving along with old Grim, here?

Januae

[trying to distract him]

Well, let me get to know you a bit before we move that fast, right?

Can't rudely rush in now can we?

[thinking fast]

You said you were brought to life or woken up.

How'd that happen?

Grim

[narcissistically charmed]

How sweet, taking interest in lil ol me.

Well, the pale masters rolled me together from three different directions, binding my body together with the secret language of shadows that came before the light. One of them, I call her Auntie, she was exiled here after bringing a puppet to life in Italy what set fire to the inside of a whale, if you can believe it. But they made my body mostly out of snow, not wood, so they needed something special, and that's when they found the silk hood of the nameless one just lying on that old stump. And Auntie, she just slipped it over my head and "whoomph" here's

Grim! And I just danced around all happy as a possum in a compost heap.

And them pale masters was as pleased as punch, they were fittin to try it again, but they needed this here hood. Well, they tried to get it from me, but I showed them. You wanna guess where they are?

Januae

[guessing]

Buried right over there?

Grim

[confused]

What? No [laughs], you're crazy, cutie. No, I didn't want to date 'em, I smashed their heads on the ice and then fed them to the great white wolf.

[howling]

Oh, hear him? Don't worry, big britches, you're my new suitor. He'll leave you be if I ask him.

Do you think I should ask him?

Januae

[being sly]

Well, I don't know. My people, have sort of a ... no, it's silly. You don't want to hear this.



Grim

[intrigued]

Oh, I think I might.

Januae

[clears throat]

Well, it's customary in the Ninth World for the one making their intentions clear to bow low and take off their hat as a sign of respect to the one they're courting. Then, charmed, the receiving party almost always agrees to the courtship. It's the height of decorum.

Grim

[flustered]

Well, My word, I'll. Oh. All right, handsome, here we go.
... oh, I thought for sure I'd have to bury you... then I take off my h---

[The air is still, Januae waits, hears the howl of the wolf and then quickly snatches the hood]

Januae

[relieved]

I can't believe that woooooorrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

[sound of wind and jingle bells]

[the sound of the farm]

[shriek of Robert]

[Januae is still standing]

Januae

[narration]

The last teleportation wasn't as severe as the first two, but it isn't the same method of travel as my jaunts. I arrive on my feet, but my surroundings, while still cold, are not covered in snow. Wherever I am, it seems to be mid-fall, and dead leaves lie near my feet. I am standing next to what appears to be a wooden barn. I hear a loud scream as a great four legged beast with massive horns races out of the darkness, lowering its head to ram its prey on the other side of the barn. I hear a man yelling and then hear this loud pop that sounds not unlike the pyrotechnics that used to be fired off in the fishing town I was raised in as a boy.

[gun shots]

But then I hear the great beast moan as its body slumps and I realize it has been shot somewhere in the darkness. I duck low, and attempt to hide, my back against the barn as I hear a conflict happening inside. It's loud, quick, and brutal... And then I hear the sliding of the barn door and suddenly a palpable darkness washes over me and the surrounding area like a wave, I almost cannot breathe, I'm suffocating as I feel the darkness inspect me, probe me, and pull from my mindLowen. NO! This darkness will not take me, and then I see it a red light, no, several, coming toward me. They are small, intense bulbs of brightness, and they rush toward me, with the same speed and terrifying relentless of the nanite swarms... but as they get closer,



I see they are not numera, but some sort of rodent with large, bushy tails. One leaps for me and I grab it, mid air....

[sound of wind and jingle bells]

Januae

[narrate]

I wake up feeling a warm breeze on my face. Warmth! The air has the familiar feel of the Ninth World, and when I get my bearings, it appears I'm just West of the Ringway. I know I have not experienced a dream. The bruises on my sides and back from my numerous falls are proof of that. I see no sign of the cowl or tree, but as I am no longer in that bizarre dimension, I can only assume this "red cap" held his end of the bargain. I'm hungry, and reach into my satchel for some trail bread, when I feel the shooting pain of little teeth in my index finger. I yank my hand out of the bag and kick it away, just as a half dozen of those furry tailed rodents burst forth from my satchel and scatter into the underbrush.

Januae

[out loud]

Well, let's hope we can leave that development unresolved

[jingle bells and Hitman]

Announcer

Tonight after *Happy Yule's Mass*, *Januae!* get ready for the holiday tale you never knew you needed.

Tah-KNEE-ya had it all.

Looks.

Tania

MMM.

Body.

Announcer

Talent.

Tania

The Mandible Account just got signed.

Ayyyeeee!

Announcer

Influence



Tania

Congresswoman, you're looking beautiful.

Announcer

All that she was missing was one thing.

Tania

I wish I had someone to spend this Holiday with....

[slips]

Whooooooooaaaaahhhhh.

Unh.

Whoever's in charge of inspecting that bridge railing's gonna be in trouble, because soon I'm going to own this park.

[Growling of a Troll]

Tania

[panicked]

Stay back... I got mace.

I got...

[music]

I got to get your number.

[uplifting music]

Friend

[exasperated]

Tan, girl, are you crazy?

He's not right for you!

Tania

Why not?

Friend

[rattling it off rom-com style]

He's loud

Troll

[Roars]

Friend

He's gross...



Guy

[confused]

Ah, you all right there, fella?

[Troll vomits and it sounds like a tidal wave, and you hear metal and various heavy things fall out, including a live sheep]

Friend

He's a troll. Like a mythical troll.

He literally lives under that bridge.

Tania

Agnar just understands what's important in life. He's the first person to see me for who I am.

And to really understand my needs,

Troll

MEAT MEAL!

Announcer

It's time to take a Lover's Troll through Central Park. Only on whatever network this is.

[sound of the Oz9 Hum]

Colin

[groaning]

Again?! Who writes these holiday's specials?

And again, Yule's Mass?

Leet

[thinking about it]

I just don't get it.

Colin

[relieved]

So you agree with me.

Leet

[feeling sympathy]

Why are those little goblin guys so mean to Reggie?



Olivia

[interjecting]

No one panic, but there appears to be a large snowman onboard, attempting to flirt with Dr. Theo.

Leet

[amused]

Whoa, I guess Frosty's got a type.

Olivia

[flirty]

He's not the only one.

Oz9 Narrator

Well, it's that time of year again, when A Ninth World Journal, Oz-9 and Witchever Path wish you a very happy holidays. Best wishes for a brighter, happier new year, which with the bar being where it is, seems more likely.

Steven

Our cast was!

David S. Dear as Januae

Rick Croft as Sporn, Pig Boy, and Reggie

Melissa Croft as Changeling 1 and Lionel

Sparkle Boy as Twinkie

Jas as Changeling 3 and Tania

DJ Sylvis as Hagbard

Steven as Changeling 2, Shrodinger and Agnar

Aaron Lirette as Grim the Snowman

JD Lauriat as your Hallmark Announcer

Valerie Von Vice as Kandace

Timothy Sherburn as Coin

Richard Cowen As Leet

Shannon Perry as Olivia

and

Richard Naldony as the Oz9 Narraror

Don't forget, you still have time to vote in the Catamount poll to decide what will happen to our new Scooby-inspired gang. And we'll see you all in the new year.