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# In Focus with Alan Taylor

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## Krampus: Saint Nicholas' Dark Companion

DEC 3, 2013 |

While Saint Nicholas may bring gifts to good boys and girls, ancient folklore in Europe's Alpine region also tells of Krampus, a frightening beast-like creature who emerges during the Yule season, looking for naughty children to punish in horrible ways -- or possibly to drag back to his lair in a sack. In keeping with pre-Germanic Pagan traditions, men dressed as these demons have been frightening children on Krampusnacht for centuries, chasing them and hitting them with sticks, on an (often alcohol-fueled) run through the dark streets. [\[20 photos\]](#)

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A participant dressed as Krampus walks the streets in search of delinquent children during Krampusnacht on November 30, 2013 in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria. Sixteen Krampus groups including over 200 Krampuses participated in the first annual Neustift event. Krampus, in Tyrol also called Tuifl, is a demon-like creature represented by a fearsome, hand-carved wooden mask with animal horns, a suit made from sheep or goat skin and large cow bells attached to the waist that the wearer rings by running or shaking his hips up and down. Krampus has been a part of Central European, alpine folklore going back at least a millennium, and since the 17th-century Krampus traditionally accompanies St. Nicholas and

angels on the evening of December 5 to visit households to reward children that have been good while reprimanding those who have not. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) #



2 A member of the Haiminger Krampusgruppe dressed as the Krampus creature carries a delinquent little boy whom the Krampus will now take to Hell to transform him into the demon-like Krampus on the town square during their annual Krampusnacht in Tyrol, on December 1, 2013 in Haiming, Austria. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) #



3 Woodcarver Markus Spiegel carves a traditional Perchten mask out of stone pine wood in Pfaffenhofen, some 35 km (22 miles) west of Innsbruck, November 20, 2012. Each year in November and January people in the western Austria regions dress-up in Perchten (also known in some regions as Krampus or Tuifl) costumes and parade through the streets to perform a 1,500 year-old pagan ritual to disperse the ghosts of winter. Each handmade traditional costume, consisting of up to 14 separate sheep or goat skins, takes three dress makers one day to produce, and costs between 500 - 600 euros. Some 15 hours are needed for a woodcarver to sculpt each demon mask which is made from stone pine wood with goat horns attached. The mask costs an additional 600 euros. (Reuters/Dominic Ebenbichler) # 📷



4 Participants who arrived by bus gather before dressing as Krampus, prior to Krampusnacht on November 30, 2013 in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



5 Members of the Haiminger Krampusgruppe parade on the town square during their annual Krampusnacht in Tyrol, on December 1, 2013. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



6 A man dressed as Krampus, the companion of St. Nicholas and one of Austria's unique Advent traditions, makes his way during a traditional Krampus procession in Unken, Austrian province of Salzburg, on December 5, 2010. (AP Photo/Kerstin Joensson) # 📷



- 7 People watch the Krampus procession of the Koatlacker devil's association on December 4, 2011 in Prad near Merano, Italy. In the tradition, which involves elaborate masks, some of which are centuries old, the devils accompany St. Nicholas when he visits little children to determine who has been good or bad, and the tradition is still practiced in Austria, southern Germany and the South Tyrol region of northern Italy. (Johannes Simon/Getty Images) # 📸



8 A participant dressed as Krampus parades past onlookers on his Krampus vehicle on November 30, 2013 in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📷





9 A member of the Haiminger Krampusgruppe dressed as Krampus hits a fire to release sparks on the town square during their annual Krampusnacht in Tyrol, on December 1, 2013. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



10 Members of the Haiminger Krampusgruppe watch as little girls dressed as angels distribute sweets prior to the annual Krampusnacht in Haiming, Austria, on December 1, 2013. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



11 A Krampus creature, prior to the annual Krampusnacht in Tyrol on December 1, 2013. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📷



12 Members of the Koatlacker devil's association, dressed as demonic creatures take part in a Krampus procession on December 4, 2011 in Prad near Merano, Italy. (Johannes Simon/Getty Images) # 📸



**13** A members of the Haiminger Krampusgruppe pulls another on a fiery cart to the town square during the annual Krampusnacht in Haiming, Austria, on December 1, 2013. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



14 Men dressed as Krampus, during a traditional Krampus procession in the city of Munich, Germany, on December 7, 2008.  
(AP Photo/Matthias Schrader) # 📷



**15** A participant dressed as Krampus pulls a barrel of fire past onlookers during his search for delinquent children on Krampusnacht, November 30, 2013 in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



**16** A man dressed in traditional Perchten (also known in some regions as Krampus or Tuifl) costume and mask performs during a Perchten festival in the western Austrian village of Heitwerwang, some 90 km (56 miles) west of Innsbruck, on November 23, 2012. (Reuters/Dominic Ebenbichler) # 📷





17 A man dressed as Krampus, during a traditional Krampus procession in St. Martin near Lofer in Salzburg province, Austria, on December 5, 2009. (AP Photo/Kerstin Joensson) # 📸



**18** A participant who arrived by bus tries on his Krampus mask as other participants put on their costumes prior to Krampusnacht on November 30, 2013 in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 🍻



19 Krampus, in search of delinquent children, approaches a little boy during Krampusnacht in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria, on November 30, 2013. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📸



**20** Krampus creatures roam the streets in search of naughty children to punish during Krampusnacht, November 30, 2013, in Neustift im Stubaital, Austria. Sixteen Krampus groups including over 200 Krampuses participated in the first annual Neustift event. Krampus has been a part of Central European, alpine folklore going back at least a millennium, and since the 17th-century Krampus traditionally accompanies St. Nicholas and angels on the evening of December 5 to visit households to reward children that have been good while reprimanding those who have not. However, in the last few decades Tyrol in particular has seen the founding of numerous village Krampus associations with up to 100 members each, who parade without St. Nicholas at Krampus events throughout November and early December. (Sean Gallup/Getty Images) # 📷

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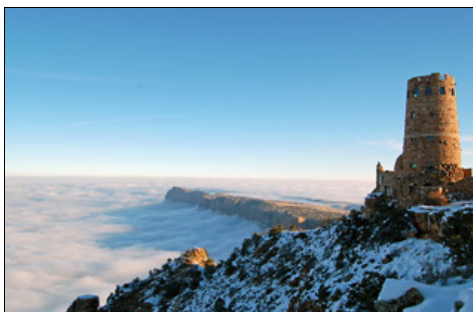
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