

*Infamous weirdo, the boogeyman, shows up in several adaptations of the Christmas favorite, **Babes in Toyland**, as well as in **The Nightmare Before Christmas**.*

bringing them the joy of Christmas. This visually stunning, delightful story contains more than just a skeleton in a Santa suit; there is also Oogie Boogie, the boogeyman, a rag doll stitched together like Frankenstein's creature, a mad scientist, as well as an assortment of ghouls, ghosts and odd monsters.

Cue Sinister Laughter

Who's more eerie than the Master of the Macabre himself? Vincent Price brings a thrilling atmosphere to Christmas better than anyone. Worth seeking out is the nearly forgotten, 1949 made-for-TV special, *Charles Dickens' The Christmas Carol*. In chilling black-and-white, Price serves as the classic story's narrator, appearing between dramatic segments sitting in a chair as if reading the story to the audience.

What is Dr. Seuss' Grinch if not a green, furry monster? His monstrousness is reinforced when the creature's story is narrated by legendary monster movie actor Boris Karloff. Extending this layer of meaning, actor Anthony Hopkins, well-known for his role as man-eater, Hannibal Lecter, provided narration in the live action version from 2000.

Price also provides his distinctive voice for one of the two heads of the Troll King in the animated children's program, 1987's *The Little Troll Prince*. This religious-themed Christmas TV special explains how a troll prince with no desire to follow in his father's wicked footsteps escapes to the human world. There, he learns about God's message, and goes on to become an adorable, pleasant little gnome. Vincent Price's final screen performance was an appearance in Tim Burton's 1990 film, *Edward Scissorhands*. He plays the role of the Inventor who dies tragically before he can give his creation, Edward, flesh for hands. The movie's story climaxes on the holiday with the neighbors avoiding the Boggs' family Christmas party and eventually chasing Edward back into the isolated mansion on the hill. This fairy tale of a movie, told by Hollywood's favorite dark storyteller Tim Burton is a heartwarming film with a romantic gothic edge.

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore"

Northern Exposure's third season, holiday episode entitled "Seoul Mates" provides an intriguing mix of Christmas cheer and spookiness. The custom of Cicely, Alaska's residents is to celebrate the holiday incorporating the folklore of the Native Americans, honoring a mythological story about a raven. The town is covered in black bird decorations and lights. Dr. Fleischman's soft spoken secretary, Marilyn, is cast in the lead role of the town's raven pageant, and Chris' morning radio show includes Edgar Allan Poe-inspired commentary about the creepy bird we usually associate with darker sentiments. The Emmy award-winning episode creatively includes the local mythology of the raven, which metaphorically resembles the familiar Nativity story, with an emphasis on the themes of birth and light.

When Santa Attacks

If you think about it, we commonly share stories with our children that could easily have a sinister tone: a supernatural old man, dressed in a red and white suit made of animal fur, who assisted by his minions of elves breaks into our homes each Christmas Eve to dispense rewards or punishment based on an ambiguous notion of what's nice or naughty—after voyeuristically observing us all through the year. Aren't we inviting nightmares from the frightening images inherent in our cultivation of the holiday?

If this sort of twisted fear makes your heart race, you may enjoy watching the 1989 episode "And All Through the House" from the TV series, *Tales From the Crypt*. This campy installment features an unfaithful wife who brutally murders her husband on Christmas Eve with the intention of blaming it on a killer she hears a warning about

from the radio. Unfortunately, the scales of justice are not tipping in her favor when the ax-wielding escapee from the local asylum, now dressed in a Santa Claus suit, comes to her house and wants in! Completists shouldn't miss the British made, 1972 Amicus Productions feature film, *Tales From the Crypt*. The film's first segment, starring grand dame Joan Collins, is from the same original story. Both segments were inspired by the popular horror comic.

Photo: Joan Collins and Oliver MacGreevey going toe-to-toe in *Tales From the Crypt* (1972).

Cinerama Releasing Corporation/
Photofest

The bizarre British TV comedy series, *The League of Gentlemen* brilliantly created their Christmas Special in 2000, entitled "Yule Never Leave," which takes its inspiration from anthology horror films, like the above Amicus Productions, to make one of the most unusual holiday shows ever. These funny men weave three vignettes into one story, as the characters from the small village of Royston Vasey confide in the vicar on Christmas Eve. The



first vignette is about a woman seeking revenge against her line-dancing obsessed husband. However, her revenge may cost her more than she intended to pay. The second is a hilariously perverted story with a twist—a German choir director stands accused by the new boy in the group of being a vampire. The third concerns itself with a nineteenth century veterinarian who is cursed by a spell to bring harm to the animals he treats. Additionally, the irreverent, vulgar vicar herself is visited by a terrifying vision of Santa from her own Christmas past.

Hidden Gems:

When, What to My Wondering Eyes Should Appear

One quirky but overlooked piece is 1993's *Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life*. This Academy Award-nominated short film, starring Richard E. Grant, dramatizes the anxiety-filled absurdist writer Franz Kafka's struggle to create the opening line of his novel *The Metamorphosis* on Christmas Eve. Unsure what character Gregor Samsa will change into, the writer is continually distracted by the holiday celebration going on in the apartment below. Though not a retelling of *It's a Wonderful Life*, this stylized story is still worth finding. Look for the cockroach, played by Crispin Letts, in one fantasy scene singing "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life."

If you wish for the beauty of a white Christmas every year, the 1971 episode of *Night Gallery* may appeal to you. In "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," a young boy is struck by a powerful experience from his past—the sound of the postman's footsteps muffled by freshly fallen snow. At school, the boy gazes longingly at a snowglobe, becoming more and more withdrawn and obsessed with the silence that snow brings when it blankets the ground. His daydreams of

