



The TOWN that FORGOT CHRISTMAS



A Festive Scenario for *Through the Hedgerow*
By Jonathan Rowe

In the Age of Plagues, the Puritans have banned all ‘pagan’ festivities. When Lord Yule visits the mortal world, he is arrested by the Witch-Harrow. Yule’s elves, led by Jack Frost, escape through the Hedgerow and kidnap children. These kidnappings are a Conundrum for the Briar Knights to solve. PCs must enter Carstonsworth, gather the time-slipped children, visit the captive Lord Yule, and restore his powers by promoting festive cheer in the town – all while dodging the emissaries of the Witch-Harrow.

CARSTONSWORTH IN THE AGE OF PLAGUES

The town has been taken over by Puritans who have banned Christmas festivities and arrested half a dozen women on charges of witchcraft. The mayor, RUPERT RUMBOLD, initially encouraged the witch-hunt, but since his own wife has been arrested he has started to doubt the cause. The real leaders of the witch-hunt are OBADIAH OSMAR, an Inquisitor of the Witch-Harrow, and his lieutenant, ANSELM FALK.

Osmar and Falk performed a ritual to bind the demon of Christmas indulgence – and captured LORD YULE (Father Christmas) himself! They have the merry old elf chained in iron at the Witch-House with the other prisoners. Meanwhile, JACK FROST has brought kidnapped children to Carstonsworth to lure Briar Knights here, to help him rescue Lord Yule.

THE KIDNAPPINGS

ETHEL (Age I), the daughter of King Alfred, always trying to escape from the nuns assigned to educate her. Alfred himself commands that she be found. In Age III she is known as Ethel Flett.

CHARLIE HUFFAM (Age III), a Victorian boy working in a bottling factory to pay his family’s debts. His guardian, the cantankerous Mrs Roylance, blames the boy for running away but is worried that she will be blamed for losing him when his parents return. Huffam is actually Charlie’s middle name, used out of shame over his family debts.

EDWARD HUGHES (Age IV), a 1940s schoolboy who loves to roam the Yorkshire moorlands. He was abducted while camping with his brother, Gerald, who is distraught.

Briar Knights at home in these Ages might start ‘under Oath’ to bring the child back, before entering the Hedgerow.

THE CONUNDRUM

PCs see visions of the three children and a winter town where everyone seems miserable. They see the gallows set up in the town square to hang witches (indicating the Witch-Harrow is the Nemesis). They are commanded to seek Father Christmas and free the captives and must start no fight during the Christmas season.

<u>AGE/NEMESIS</u>	<u>FIELD</u>	<u>COGNIZANCE</u>	<u>ARMIGER</u>
III / Witch-Harrow	A town (Carstonsworth)	Free captives	Lord Yule
<u>SINISTER</u>	<u>REBUS</u>	<u>BAN</u>	<u>BLAZON</u>
Obadiah Osmar the Inquisitor	Find the abducted children	Start no fight	Winterslow

ACT I: WINTER COMES TO CARSTONSWORTH

Briar Knights leave the Hedgerow – and meet with PCs at home in Age III – at the remains of a huge bonfire on a hill known as WINTERSLOW. This is a Mythic Site aligned with Wands, with the Virtue of summoning Lord Yule, an Old God. A Gramayre Check will reveal the Site is dormant and cannot be awoken – a terrible curse has befallen here.

The terrified peasants of Winterslow Village reveal what happened, but there are Snoops among them who report to the Witch-Harrow.

INVESTIGATING THE EVENTS ON WINTERSLOW: TL 1, Peril d4, Hazard: Alarm then Alert. PCs must go from shuttered house to house, using Wits or Charm to get villagers to talk, or else Might or Weapons to intimidate them.

- **Bare/Partial:** Villagers celebrated Christmas on the common, but a Witch-Hunter arrived with armed men, arrested several revellers, including one dressed as Father Christmas, and burned the Yule Tree. Prisoners were taken to nearby Carstonsworth.
- **Modest/Minor:** Also, The celebration was in honour of Lord Yule, who appeared to give his blessings; the Witch-Hunter Obadiah Osmar burned the sleigh and gifts and shackled him in iron chains.
- **Major or better:** The festival was interrupted by Osmar and Anselm Falk who captured Lord Yule with spells; learn a carol that is **LORE OF SWORDS** (God Rest You Merry Gentlemen).

On the journey to Carstonsworth, snow starts to fall and continues for the rest of the adventure. Entering the town involves passing a checkpoint manned by Hexen Hammers: make a Nemesis Check and a d8 Glamour Check for Fays. If the Dread occurs, the Hexen Hammers must be dealt with.

DEALING WITH THE HEXEN HAMMERS: TL 1, Peril d8, Tactics 2, Armoured, Cold Iron, Hazard: Alarm then Alert/Injury. Fays must fight the Hammers (Injury) or flee through the streets (Alert); mortal Briar Knights can remain detached from this Challenge.

- **Bare/Partial:** You give them the slip, but burn the Peril Die for Nemesis Checks.
- **Modest/Minor:** You escape the Hammers.
- **Major or better:** Also, you acquire something useful (a flintlock, a purse of coins, identification papers, Lore of Pentacles).

ACT II: FINDING THE LOST CHILDREN

The PCs must search the town for the children and information about Lord Yule. This is a TL 3 Challenge; each threat roll encounters one of the 4 targets (below) and each has its own Peril Die and Hazards, based on the target. Unlike normal Challenges, PCs can take Breathers or Respite between threat rolls.

Explore the town: TL 3, variable Peril, Overwhelming, Hazards: varying.

- **Bare/Partial:** You find your targets, but burn the Peril Die for Nemesis Checks.

- **Modest:** You find your targets.
- **Minor:** Also, you find a safe house, **THE HOLLY TREE**, where the innkeeper, **MATHILDA DURDEN**, secretly celebrates Christmas with her family; the carol they whisper is **LORE OF CUPS** (Deck the Halls).
- **Major or better:** Also, coffee and tiffin served here.

The children are under a Glamour that makes them seem like inhabitants of the Age and cloud their memory of their Home Age. Make a Sight Check (d4 Peril) to see them as they are and speak to them about or show them something familiar (Check, d6 Peril) will make them remember their homes.

THE INK BOY

Charlie Huffam has been apprenticed to a miserly lawyer named **SEPTIMUS QUIBBLEWICK** and set to work filling the ink wells for the miserable clerks toiling in the freezing chambers of Quibblewick & Snatchpurse (deceased). Quibblewick can summon Hexen Hammers to deal with thieves and troublemakers. One clerk, **BOB SCRABBLE**, shows the boy kindness (they warm themselves with a candle stub he has saved). D6 PERIL, HAZARD: ALERT OR INJURY OUTCOME: Charlie has seen the arrest papers drawn up for Lord Yule (as “Christmas, termed Father, pagan imposter and seditionist”) and Hester Rumbold (the Mayor’s wife, charged with “witchcraft and curses laid against the Chief Inquisitor Obadiah Osmar”).

THE HAWK BOY

Edward Hughes has been set to work for the arrogant and self-righteous **MAYOR RUMBOLD**, to clean out the mews, where he is pecked and scratched by **PRINCE SABLE**, the vicious hawk that the Mayor dotes on. Hexen Hammers are stationed at the residence. D8 PERIL, HAZARD: ENTRAP OR INJURY, OUTCOME: Edward has heard the Mayor arguing with Obadiah Osmar about his wife, then weeping in his study afterwards. If approached, Rumbold offers an Oath: rescue his wife from the Witch-House.

THE WARRIOR GIRL

Ethel Flett has been left with a gang of street urchins – the **MALT RATS** – that beg and steal around the marketplace and hide from Hexen Hammers in a closed-down brewery. D6 Peril, Hazard: Elude or Injury, Outcome: Ethel has risen to a position of leadership over the gang and knows the layout of the town, including escape routes through alleys or canals (d6 ally for stealing things or secret routes).

JACK FROST AND HIS ELVES

Glamour makes the elves seem to be townsfolk (d8 Check to spot them with the Sight, but they are not dressed for the cold, which is a Telltale Sign). They follow the Briar Knights and spy on them, perhaps giving warnings of danger (d8 ally, Judge's discretion). D6 PERIL, WARED, HAZARD: PARALYSIS, OUTCOME: if captured or cornered, Jack Frost will offer an Oath to rescue Lord Yule and his elves serve as a d8 ally (wintry spirits of ingenuity and surprises).

When the Challenge ends, the PCs should have gathered the children and the elves, perhaps safe at The Holly Tree, and can plan their next move. This might be a good time for an Interlude.

ACT III: A VISIT TO FATHER CHRISTMAS

Jack Frost wants the Briar Knights to break into the Witch-House and rescue Lord Yule and offers his ally die for this (but only for Dramas involving ingenuity, surprises, or the wintry weather, otherwise shrink it). Ethel's gang of street urchins is another ally (for theft or secret routes, otherwise shrink it). Finally, Mayor Rumbold might support the mission - his sealed writ is dro gear for gaining access to the prison conventionally.

The Witch-House is a brick building in the grounds of old Carstones Abbey. It has one entrance (a stout door) and two storeys. There are high barred windows and a stables alongside. Half a dozen Hexen Hammers are quartered here, with the prisoners upstairs. Lord Yule is kept in the rearmost cellar, swathed in Cold Iron chains.

BREAKING INTO THE WITCH-HOUSE: TL 2, Peril d8, Scope 4, Armoured, Cold Iron, Deadly, Hazard: Alert or Injury. If the Drama involves stealth rather than violence, ignore Deadly/Armoured/Injury.

- Bare/Partial: You find Lord Yule, but burn the Peril Die for Nemesis Checks.
- Modest: You find your prisoner(s).
- Minor: Also, you can escape easily (burn the Peril Die on the escape Challenge)
- Major or better: Also, escape is only TL 0.

Lord Yule is a forlorn figure: his green felt robes are ragged, his grey beard matted, his cheeks hollow, his breathing laboured. Even if the irons are struck from him, he cannot rise.

"I am powerless as long as Christmas does not visit this town.

Let Christmas cheer be offered and gifts exchanged, and then no bonds will hold me."

This is a Divine Oath, to ensure the citizens of Carstonsworth celebrate Christmas this night.

ESCAPE FROM THE WITCH-HOUSE: TL 1, Peril d8, ignore Scope, Hazard: Injury or Entrap. If the Hexen Hammers are in pursuit, add Deadly/Armoured.

ACT IV: A WINTER WASSAIL

The Briar Knights must revisit the NPCs previously encountered and do something to make them celebrate Christmas with gifts or acts of goodwill. Treat this as a Challenge where each NPC is a threat level using the Peril/Hazards from Act II. Depending on the Drama, the Judge might allow Breathers or Respites between threat levels.

Jack Frost is still an ally for this.

BRING CHRISTMAS TO TOWN: TL 2, Peril varies, Hazards: varying.

SEPTIMUS QUIBBLEWICK must be induced to give his clerks a holiday. Invoking the tragedy in Quibblewick's past that has made him so miserable (let the PCs create something in the Drama, but Charlie will know gossip of a broken engagement or an unloving parent) exhausts the Peril Die.

RUPERT RUMBOLD must order a Christmas banquet for his servants and invite townsfolk too - to the horror of the Puritans. This will certainly meet with Hexen Hammer resistance (Armoured, Cold Iron, perhaps Deadly). He should also release Prince Sable.

THE MALT RATS must hand over some of their thefts as gifts to the poorest people in town. Inspiring them to do this involves touching their hard hearts or entertaining them with Christmas cheer as a role model (telling them stories or riddles, providing a feast). Ethel can contribute her Ally Die to this.

- Bare/Partial: The celebrations go ahead, but a final confrontation with Osmar or Falk must happen.
- Modest: The celebrations go ahead and Lord Yule (now Father Christmas, in splendid red furs) bursts his chains and breaks down the doors of the Witch-House, freeing all the prisoners.
- Minor or better: Also, he has gifts for each of the three children (a Treasure they must take back to their Age).

EPILOGUE: ...AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

If Father Christmas gives gifts to the children:

- **TO CHARLIE**, a quill and nib: *“You have served the inkwell, now it will serve you.”*
- **TO EDWARD**, the hawk, Lord Sable: *“You have felt his unyielding spirit, now you shall share it with others.”*
- **TO ETHEL**, a choice, a distaff (spindle for spinning) or a seax (short sword); she chooses the sword: *“Be you hale, Lady of Battles”* is Father Christmas’s only blessing.

As Judge, decide the powers of these Treasures for future adventures.

Inside the Hedgerow, each child must be escorted back to their Home Age:

- **AGE I:** Ethel is returned to King Alfred. He marvels at his daughter and her sword and names her Ethelfled (‘Noble Beauty’) and vows to guard her sword until she is of age to wield it.
- **AGE III:** Charlie is returned to his guardian, Mrs Roylance – but it is a scene of happiness, as Charlie’s father, John Dickens, has been released from debtor’s prison. The Briar Knights can slip away from the party, knowing the Treasure will be safe with the young Charles Huffam Dickens.
- **AGE IV:** Edward returns to his family in Calderdale. He has bonded with the hawk, and the two rush onto the moors to play. If the Briar Knights have another guardian for.

EMISSARIES OF THE DARK

Allow Falk or Osmar to turn up at any time, adding their distinctive Hazards (and boosting the Peril Die) for part of any Challenge.

NEMESIS DIE SIZE

EMISSARY

D4	Asenath Foukes, Snoop: a spy for the Witch-Harrow; her children all report gossip back to her (TL 0, d4 Peril, Alarm or Alert)
D6	Reuben Day, Scold: a lay preacher who enjoys denouncing neighbours and strangers for sinful things such as wearing lace or whistling (TL 1, d6 Peril, Hazard: Alarm or Alert)
D8	Hexen Hammers: thugs who enjoy bullying people in the name of Puritan religion (TL 2, d8 Peril, Armoured, Cold Iron, Hazard: Injury)
D10	Anselm Falk, Hexen Hound: a mercenary soldier who had an intense conversion after a battlefield injury, working out his guilt for the war crimes he committed (TL 3, d10 Peril, Armoured, Blast, Cold Iron, Deadly, Hazard: Injury or Entrap)
D12	Obadiah Osmar, Inquisitor: devoted to the Dark in the guise of Puritanism. Delights in spreading paranoia and fear, enjoys terrifying sermons and mind games, can sense people’s sins and uses this to manipulate Falk (TL 3, d10 Peril, Armoured, Blast, Cold Iron, Deadly, Hazard: Paralyse or Bewitch)

A SCENARIO BY JONATHAN ROWE FOR

HROUGH THE HEDGEROW

A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF RUSTIC FANTASY