



IT'S A GIFT TO HAVE YOU HERE TODAY!

By Jason Lewicki

The leaves are gone. The grass is turning brown. Winter is coming, and the cold is setting in. Oh, you thought that was a bad thing? Nope! As the cold season comes closer, so do the holidays, surprise no-school days, and the beautiful sight of the sun glittering on the snow.



As this issue debuts at the beginning of December, the holiday season is soon to be upon us. Thanksgiving and Black Friday have passed us by; now, it's time for Christmas music to blare on our radios and for people everywhere to start fussing over what gifts they can get for their loved ones as those important dates drift closer and closer. Whatever your plans, though, we here at the West Street Journal hope you enjoy this special time of year!

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A DILL-LIGHTFUL CHRISTMAS!

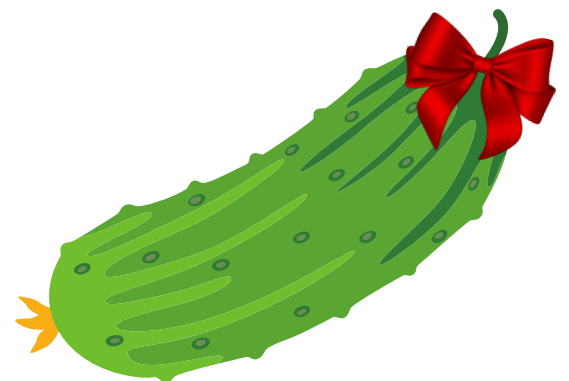
BY PAYTON BURKE

Winter has always seemed to be a season of holidays. With the wide array of winter holidays, there is an equal, if not greater list of odd or unusual holiday rituals. One such example is a tradition my family follows: that of the Christmas Pickle. I wasn't sure how this practice started in my family; however, the tradition goes that after the tree has been decorated and the children have gone to bed, the parents will hide an ornament in the shape of a green pickle among the branches. The first child to find the pickle either opens the first present or receives an extra present, and is even said to receive a blessing of good luck for the coming year. Remembering the odd tradition, I sought to find the origin of this odd ornament...only to find that no one is quite sure of its origins either.

One tale claims that as the Civil War raged, a captured Union soldier was starving in a Confederate prison camp. One Christmas Eve, the soldier requested a simple pickle, to which his captors obliged. The story says that that pickle gave the unnamed soldier enough strength to survive until his release at the end of the Civil War, thus saving his life. It is said that following this event, the soldier started the tradition within his own family to celebrate that same story of strength each Christmas Eve; however, no sources seem to explain how this tradition expanded beyond a simple family tradition.

The above tale is ultimately a very niche (and a tad contrived) explanation for the beloved Christmas pickle, and most are under the impression that this green pickle tree ornament is of old Germanic tradition. Confusingly, the New York Times reported that 91% of Germans had never even heard of the tradition, leading to the most likely (and, quite frankly, the least fun) explanation for the odd ornament: considering the popularity of fruits, nuts, and other vegetables (presumably pickles) being featured in 1840s German glassblowers' work, the F. W. Woolworth Company (a renowned American retail company), likely formulated the story of a longstanding German Christmas tradition in order to sell more ornaments in America.

While it's a shame to think such a unique tradition is far more likely to have been born out of a scam, it's truly a testament to how much of a big dill the story of the Christmas Pickle has become to become so widespread and the subject of so many creative and whimsical Christmas tales.



A Short Christmas Apologetic

by Malakai Ramirez

The common meaning of the word “apology” is an expression of remorse, but this was not actually how it was first used. Apology originally meant, and is still expressed in some cases today, as a defense; the famous dialogue recording the speech Socrates gave at his trial was titled *Apology* for this very reason. Ever since the beginning of religion, there existed a certain class of academics who devoted themselves to giving “apologies” for their faith, and a new word branched off from the ancient Greek *apologia* to refer to this class of argument: Apologetics. In a way, the following ideas would count as apologetics, as they are an apology for Christmas itself.

For a holiday that is meant to celebrate the birth of Jesus there seems to be a lot of unnecessary, strange, and unrelated rituals that participants follow. First, a gathering of our families over for a great feast; the next day, all of the gifts that have been piling up under a tree dressed with shiny things reveal their identities from the wrappings meant to conceal them. Children are told tales that a fat man in a funny red outfit had a bunch of little elves at the North Pole make these gifts, and that he brings them to the tree on a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer. I’m sure you already know all this, but did you know that the reason for such odd practices is because of their pagan roots?

A lot of ancient cultures also had their own festivals and celebrations during this time of the year, in which similar rituals were also performed: Kissing under the mistletoe began as a Nordic/Celtic fertility ritual; the Romans hung small metal ornaments on trees outside their homes during Saturnalia, with each ornament being associated with a certain god; early Germanic tribes decorated trees with fruits and candles in honor of Odin; the Anglo-Saxons had a tradition called wassailing, which ultimately evolved to become Christmas caroling; the date of December 25 has ancient astrological significance; these are just a few of the various pagan traditions that influenced the creation of the holiday we know and love.

Having taken note of facts like these, should Christmas still be considered a Christian holiday? There is an argument to be made that since most people who celebrate Christmas probably aren’t very religious about the holiday itself, it is, in a way, not a Christian holiday, at least not to them; however, the present argument is about paganism: just because Christmas traditions have their origins in pagan cultures, that does not make it no longer, or at least any less of a Christian holiday.

Many people mistake this adaptation of pagan rituals as just a method for Christianity to gain power and control. The problem with this belief is not its factual basis: it is certainly true, but the problem is the underlying assumption that accompanies this fact, which is that power and control are necessarily bad things or are always desired for bad intentions. If the Christian philosophy was put in a favorable light, it would seem necessary to adapt and improve the already-good traditions of others so they may move away from paganism and toward a better faith.

However, one could ask: “What exactly makes these traditions good in the eyes of God? Do they not promote idolatry and immorality?” Even though these rituals were once performed to worship a false idol, it does not mean that there is something inherent in the ritual which makes it for that idol. It could just as well be performed for another god. As such, the early Christians replaced the deities those rituals were for with their own God and discarded all of the methods of worship they saw as immoral, such as the sacrifice of the Lord of Misrule on the last day of Saturnalia, or the wanton drunkenness and excess of Bacchanalia.

Of course, no one actually thinks of these things. Most people don’t really care whether the Christmas traditions are Roman or Norse or Christian, and I think it’s safe to assume nobody does them with a god or God in mind. However, it is still important to recognize the history of Christmas in the right context, and to also know that the values of family, gift-giving, and being merry are always good, regardless if either the One God or many gods make them so.



A Comedy of Tenors: A Good Production

BY ANONYMOUS

Finally! After three long months of rehearsals and the infamous Tech Week, A Comedy of Tenors was performed this past month. A Comedy of Tenors was a hilarious production about marital disputes, mistaken identity, and an opera concert that just can't seem to keep its performers. Saunders, the producer of an opera concert, and Max, Saunders's son-in-law, struggle to maintain a requirement of three tenors for the concert; the problem is, these singers will not stick to the plan! Either their mother has died, or another performer has choked them. The two cannot catch a break! Tito and Maria have constant marital arguments accompanied by accusations of cheating; Carlo Nucci is the direct rival of Tito and is in love with his daughter Mimi, but due to a miscommunication, Tito thinks Maria and Carlo are having an affair. This leads to both Tito and Carlo leaving the concert, and Saunders looking for two new singers. With the introduction of Beppo, a bellhop who is identical to Tito in every way save for his personality, it seems that all is saved. Of course, given the nature of the play, that winds up not quite being the case: when Racon, a famous Russian singer and an ex-fling of Tito's, arrives on the scene, Beppo's bumbling charm ends up creating just as many problems as it solves. In the end, Max (the play's constant voice of reason) sorts out the misunderstandings between Maria and Tito, Mimi and Carlo, and Beppo and Racon. Beppo, Carlo, Racon, and Tito go out on stage while Max stays behind to talk with his wife and newborn son.

The key stars of this production are:

Aiden Ouellette as Tito
Isaac Rysdam as Saunders
Noah Schooley as Max
Ash Burnette as Maria
Jordan Gebro as Mimi
Luna Bancroft as Carlo
Lily 'L' Kassin as Racon.

And who could forget the people behind the scenes?
The crew chiefs:

Noah Nuhtjarv in stage management
Anna Verstraete in business and house management
Riley Weis in lighting
Hannah Hatt in sound
Olivia Liamos in costume
Lily Kassin in props

The crews spent hours upon hours finding costumes that were accurate to the time period of the play, tracking every ticket and ad sold for the playbook, arranging lights to naturally wash the walls, discovering sound effects, and finding fitting props. If it were not for the tech crews, there wouldn't have been nearly as much of an amazing show. We must not forget to mention, of course, the stage managers and the actors who spent over 130 hours in the previous nine weeks perfecting their performances for this play. The actors had turned the characters into their own; meanwhile, the stage managers jotted down every cue for the show and cued both the lighting and sound crews during the live show.

All of these assorted ingredients ended up resulting in one big, perfect show. The portrayal of the characters made for hilarious punchlines and plot twists. Costume changes were quick, and despite them being difficult, were seemingly accomplished with ease. Part of the show required the lights to fade down just dim enough for the tenors Max, Carlo, and Tito to be silhouetted; at the same time, there was an edited audio recording of the Traviata for the actors to lip sync playing. The moment shows how people across the crews have to work together and rely on one another.

This production was a joy to watch. Big props to Mr. Gallant (a.k.a. the director, and the director of MHS's theater program) and every student involved, because you all did great!



Dungeons & Dragons Class Guide: The Druid

"LIFE, UH, FINDS A WAY."
-DR. IAN MALCOLM, "JURASSING PARK"

What Is A Druid?

A Druid is a primeval warden of nature, a watchful and wise protector of the wilds that employs the magic of beasts, leaves, and the very elements themselves. A Druid may be a benevolent bringer of abundance, a stoic and wary hermit, or even a destructive embodiment of the tempestuous wrath of Mother Nature herself, but in all forms, they are avatars of primordial forces that form the world. A Druid can transform into animals, summon primal and mystical allies to aid them in combat, and support their team through potent healing and buffs alike. However a Druid chooses to use their power, the utility and power they can bring to a party of adventurers is truly a sight to behold.



How Does A Druid Work?

Like Bards and Clerics, Druids are primarily spellcasters, though they can still pack a bit of oomph behind themselves. With a *dc* hit die and the ability to use light and medium armor, as well as shields (besides those made of metal, oddly), Druids are certainly capable of taking some solid hits. However, as a Druid, your normal *HP* and *Armor Class* will find themselves not being used as much as you'd initially think: the Druid's primary feature is *Wild Shape*, which allows them to (a set amount of times per *Long Rest*) transform into any *Beast* with a *CR* (Challenge Rating, the relative power level of a monster) that scales as you level up. You can transform into a small and stealthy animal to sneak into places, a quick and nimble animal to chase down a fleeing target, or a large and powerful animal to aid your allies in combat. As you level up, your *Wild Shape* grows in power: not only does the *CR* improve, but you also gain the ability to transform into creatures that can swim, and eventually even those that can fly. At the peak of their power, Druids can not only cast spells in their *Wild Shape* form, but they can even use that feature an unlimited amount of times. Besides *Wild Shape*, though, Druids are also adept spellcasters: with potent healing spells like *Healing Word* and *Mass Cure Wounds*, devastating combat spells like *Call Lightning* and *Fire Storm*, and handy summoning spells like *Conjure Animals* and *Summon Fey*. While a Druid might not be as entirely support-focused as its divine counterpart, the Cleric, its spells are particularly adept at manipulating the battlefield to its liking by both literally altering the terrain and summoning swarms of critters to overrun its foes.

What Types Of Druids Are There?

More so than some other classes, a Druid's abilities primarily come from its subclass, known as a *Druidic Circle*, that it gains at level 2. As such, your *Druid's Circle* is an integral part of their character, and your decision should thus be made wisely (wisdom, like for Clerics, is the stat Druids use to cast their spells, so it had better be high). A *Druidic Circle* is essentially a secret natural society of sorts that your Druid is a part of, and they are typically organized by their respective beliefs about the world, their place in it, and what they must do to protect it. Two *Circles* are offered in the *Player's Handbook*: the *Circle of the Land* and the *Circle of the Moon*. The *Circle of the Land* is somewhat of an all-purpose Druid that represents the general vibe of nature; it gives the Druid some additional spells (some of which aren't even on the *Druid spell list*) based on what environment they're from, as well as some other miscellaneous natural abilities. The *Circle of the Moon*, meanwhile, doubles down on the *Wild Shape* feature and makes it way stronger; *Moon Druids* can transform into stronger animals, do so more quickly in combat, and even heal themselves while they're going *beast mode*. There are plenty of other *Druidic Circles* to discover if you go poking around in the underbrush, but these two are good for those just starting out.

What Does A Druid Represent?

A Druid, as has been previously mentioned, is a guardian of the natural world. Now, that might initially just imply trees and animals and that sort of thing, but it's important to note that the broad term of "nature" truly encompasses much more than one might envision at first. Plants and animals are part of nature, sure, but so are the elements, weather phenomena, the ocean, and even stars and planets. That's not even mentioning the fact that this is a fantasy realm in which the definition of "natural" is expanded tenfold: your Druid might not just be a friend of the beasts of the world, but they may also have ties to the *Feywild* (a realm inhabited by *Fey* where emotion triumphs over the laws of physics), the *Elemental Planes* (realms that embody each of the four main elements: water, earth, fire, and air), or even the *Upper* or *Lower Planes*, (realms dedicated to the good and evil souls of the world, respectively) depending on how broad you want nature to be. As lovers of the natural order of things, Druids also tend to have a strong distaste for both undead and creatures not of this universe, as both seek to defy the very pillars upon which a Druid's identity is built; however, a Druid could also exhibit an odd fascination with these beings and even seek to study them. If you expand your horizons and truly understand the sheer variety of things that are a part of nature, your Druid can be far more than just yet another tree-hugging hippie.

Why Should You Play A Druid?

Druids are, admittedly, pretty complicated to play. Their *Wild Shape* feature can only be used so many times before they need to recharge their batteries, so each use should really count; even when they do use it, having to flip through the book to find a specific *Beast* to transform into can be tedious, especially considering how much certain animal stats in *D&D* seem to blend together. With all that on top of the inherent complexity in being a representation of the will of nature itself (in spite of the fact that nature having a will at all seems antithetical to its very purpose), one might initially be intimidated by playing a Druid, and that's understandable. However, if one invests some time into truly understanding how a Druid works, it's well worth it, as Druids are incredibly powerful in the right hands. Their *Wild Shape* feature is wildly (heh heh) versatile, and in particular, it makes them fantastic tanks in battle, as their animal forms can soak up a lot of punishment before being knocked out, leaving the Druid with exactly as much *HP* as they had before they transformed. When you combine this utility with the potency of the Druid's spell list, these wardens of balance are truly a 'forest' to be reckoned with.



Who's Who?

Our world needs strong leaders. At Milford High School, we believe that high school students can be great leaders now, as well as in the future. This is why we elect our student leaders every year so they can learn how to best serve your needs. Get to know them and don't hesitate to reach out to them.

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WEST STREET JOURNAL EDITORIAL STAFF '23-'24



We are a group of students who are striving to report school events as well as feature fun stories and topics for the reading pleasure of the Milford High School student body. Feel free to submit your works, ideas and opinions.

JASON LEWICKI

JLEWICKI@MILFORDK12.ORG

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**PAYTON BURKE
ANAGHA PILLAI
MALAKAI RAMIREZ
ISABEL LAMB**
STAFF WRITERS

MRS. KATY HEIDER

KATY.HEIDER@MILFORDK12.ORG

ADVISOR