

Carol of the Cursed Holly

A Fate's Edge One-Shot Adventure

Premise

The remote mountain village of Frosthollow, nestled in a valley perpetually shrouded in winter twilight, is preparing for its annual “Feast of the Endless Night” – a solstice celebration meant to ward off the dark. However, the Cantor traditionally leading the festivities, Elara Nightweaver, has gone mad. Influenced by the Patron **Thrysos, King of Revels**, her carols now carry an infectious, compulsive joy that’s driving the villagers into a dangerous, ecstatic frenzy. They work themselves to exhaustion decorating, feasting non-stop, and dancing. Worse, whispers suggest the **Pale Shepherd** (thresholds, guidance) is claiming souls drawn by this false revelry, and the **Silent Choir** (mercy, silence) seeks to end the cacophony permanently, perhaps by silencing the village entirely.

Setting

Frosthollow is a collection of timber-framed houses blanketed in snow, surrounding a central stone chapel and a large, open square where the Feast is held. The air is crisp, and the perpetual twilight casts long shadows. The village is isolated, a day’s hard travel from the nearest settlement.

Player Characters (PCs)

Assume a mixed group of 3-4 players, ideally with varied skill sets (combat, magic, social, stealth). They might be:

- A sellsword seeking shelter or a contract.
- A Runekeeper investigating strange magical disturbances.
- A local hunter or guide with deep knowledge of the area.
- An exiled minor noble or scholar fleeing something (or someone).

Hook

The PCs arrive in Frosthollow seeking shelter from a sudden, fierce winter storm or are drawn by a specific request (a bounty on the “mad Cantor,” a plea for help from a surviving villager who fled, a need for supplies, or perhaps they are investigators from a nearby town responding to reports of strange lights/sounds). Upon arrival (or shortly after), they witness the effects of the “Cheer”: villagers caroling off-key with manic grins, decorating trees with their own hair or clothing, or

dancing frantically until they collapse.

Key NPCs

Elara Nightweaver (Mad Cantor - Thrysos' Influence)

Once beloved, now gaunt and wild-eyed, her voice carries an otherworldly resonance. She wears a crown of holly that seems to grow into her scalp. She believes she's bringing true joy and light to the world, but it's a joy that consumes.

Thrysos (Patron - Ecstasy & Excess)

Manifests subtly through Elara and the revelry. His influence makes resistance feel wrong, makes the revelry feel *necessary*. His goal is to sustain and grow the revel until it consumes the village and perhaps spreads.

The Pale Shepherd (Patron - Thresholds & Liminality)

Drawn by the unnatural energy and the souls teetering on the brink due to exhaustion and madness. The Shepherd seeks to guide *some* souls peacefully away, but also sees this as a potential "corral" for lost memories or unwanted truths (perhaps related to the village's past). Its presence might manifest as fleeting shadows, a lost lamb, or a sense of being watched by something benevolent yet distant.

The Silent Choir (Patron - Mercy & Silence)

Perceives the revelry as a cacophony of false joy masking underlying pain and desperation. The Choir seeks to impose silence, to end the suffering by ending the noise. This could manifest through a local priest who becomes obsessed with "silencing the heresy" or through direct supernatural effects like objects becoming impossible to speak near.

Greta Frostwhisper (Survivor/Villager)

An elderly woman who hid in the chapel's bell tower when the madness began. She's terrified but sane, knows the village's history, and can warn the PCs. She believes the holly crown is the source.

Father Markus (Possibly Influenced)

The village priest, struggling against the revelry. He might be helpful or an obstacle depending on which Patron influences him.

Structure

1. Introduction (Establishing the Situation)

- **Scene:** PCs arrive in Frosthollow during/just before the storm. They encounter the initial signs of madness (the revelry).
- **Key NPCs Introduced:** Elara (briefly, singing), Villagers (affected), Greta (if found early), Father Markus (conflicted).
- **Major Objective:** Understand the source of the madness and stop it before the Feast of the

Endless Night (set for tonight/soon).

- **Story Beats Generated:** Initial confusion, witnessing the effects of the “Cheer,” potential minor conflict with frenzied villagers.

2. Development (Challenges and Investigation)

- **Challenge 1: Surviving the Revelry:** Simply navigating the village is difficult. PCs must resist the urge to join in (Resolve tests, perhaps gaining Fatigue or a “Revelry” Condition if they fail). Helping affected villagers without getting pulled in is a challenge.
- **Challenge 2: Investigating the Source:** PCs need to learn about Elara, the holly crown, and the strange influences. This involves:
 - Talking to Greta (if found) for history/context.
 - Investigating Elara’s home/lair (the chapel or a decorated grove) for clues about Thrysos’ influence.
 - Dealing with Father Markus, who might be helpful or an obstacle.
 - Possibly encountering manifestations of the Pale Shepherd or the Silent Choir.
- **Challenge 3: Countering the Influences:** Direct action against the supernatural forces.
 - Dealing with Thrysos: Disrupt revelry, confront Elara, break his hold (ritual, opposing magic).
 - Dealing with the Pale Shepherd: Protect souls, negotiate, understand its intent.
 - Dealing with the Silent Choir: Understand its motive, stop its agent, find peaceful resolution.
- **Key Scenes:** The chaotic village square, Elara’s lair (the chapel), Greta’s hiding place (bell tower), confrontations with patrons/villagers.

3. Climax (Major Confrontation)

- **Scene:** The Feast of the Endless Night. Elara, at the height of her power, leads the final revel. Patron influences are strongest.
- **Objective:** Stop Elara and break the spell of the “Cheer.” This likely involves:
 - A social/mental challenge to resist/counter the joy (Wits+Resolve vs. Thrysos).
 - A potential physical/magical confrontation with Elara.
 - A crucial act to destroy/remove the holly crown (ritual, magic, trickery).
 - Managing Patron interactions (leveraging one against another?).

4. Resolution (Consequences)

- **If Successful:** The “Cheer” is broken. Elara is freed/defeated. Villagers recover. Decide Patron fates and the village’s future.
- **If Partial Success:** Revelry dampened, core problem remains. Setup for future threat.

- **If Unsuccessful:** Revelry consumes, Choir silences, Shepherd claims souls. Dark ending.

GM Tools & Dials

- **Patron Prominence:** Adjust how overtly the Patrons act. Thrysos should be most obvious. Shepherd and Choir can be subtle.
- **Revelry Mechanic:** Represent the compulsive “Cheer” with a clock (e.g., “Village Hysteria [6]”). Actions feeding it advance it. Countering it slows/reduces it.
- **Temptation:** Make the revelry *feel* good initially. PCs need rolls to resist joining. Offer minor benefits at the cost of advancing the Hysteria clock.
- **Environmental Hazards:** The winter storm, perpetual twilight, potential avalanches or structural damage.
- **Deck Usage:** Draw from Wilds/Dungeon generator for unexpected complications (hidden cellar, mad animal, structural damage).

Conclusion

This one-shot provides a mix of social investigation, potential combat (with frenzied villagers or the Cantor), magical problem-solving, and dealing with the complex, morally ambiguous influences of multiple Patrons, all wrapped in a wintry, folk-horror atmosphere.