

SMILING FACES

Everyone's so friendly here! Can we stay?

• KYRA, WINDLING AIR SAILOR •

The village of Kyrste, nestled peacefully in the foothills of the Throal Mountains, is well known in the region for its friendly people and hospitality. But Kyrste harbors an ancient, pre-Scourge secret. Every year on the Summer Solstice, the townsfolk sacrifice travelers to unknown forces in an ancient temple beneath the town square. The strange, organic, hive-like tunnels beneath the town suggest that this is not the work of Horrors, but something far more subversive.

SETUP

Conveniently located between Bartertown and Ardanyan, Kyrste makes a good stopping point for many travelers. The adventurers arrive around noon on the Summer Solstice. From the time they arrive, the residents of the small, idyllic town are nothing but friendly. They are approached almost immediately by an older human, who introduces himself as Elder Gareth Kortin. He tells them that every year, the village has a festival for the solstice, and all are invited.

Gareth will tell them that the festivities begin in the town square at dusk. He directs them to the local travelers' inn, The Prayer and Bottle, to rest and relax before the festival. He assures them that it is an event not to be missed, as they are to be the guests of honor. As they walk towards the inn, one or more of the player characters may notice that all of the townsfolk they see are looking at them, all with smiles on their faces.

EVENT ONE: THE PRAYER AND BOTTLE

When the adventurers arrive at the inn, things begin to get odd. The innkeeper, an old human woman named Orla with a constant smile on her face, will tell them that in honor of the festival tonight, all drinks and food are on the house. Even here in the inn, everyone they see simply stares at them with smiles on their faces. Though none of the townsfolk will attempt to initiate conversation with the player characters, they will be very talkative and friendly if someone initiates conversation with them.

While the adventurers are enjoying their food and drinks, one or more of them should hear some of the townsfolk talking in excited whispers. They should not be able to hear anything specific, though they might overhear certain keywords such as 'ritual' or 'temple'. If a player character talks to one of the locals and asks them about this, they will say that they must have been misheard. Nobody in this town knows anything about rituals or temples.

EVENT TWO: SOLSTICE FESTIVAL

Kyrste is a small town, but its residents seem to know how to have fun. In the town square, a huge bonfire is lit at dusk. Dancers of varying skill levels cavort around the fire. People are drinking, smoking, and some of the more alchemically inclined player characters might even notice one or two of the townsfolk using various illicit herbs.

As before, all of the villagers are smiling. Though they are busy with their dancing, music, and drink, they all seem to find time to smile at the adventurers. Unlike earlier in the day, this time the villagers all seem to be keen on talking to the player characters. None of them have anything of importance to say, but all of them stop to give the adventurers drinks, food, and garlands of wild flowers.

However, all of the garlands, every drop of wine and beer, every morsel of food is all laced with keesra (see *Gamemaster's Guide*, p. 125). As the adventurers begin to drift off to sleep from the influence of the poison, it is up to the gamemaster to assuage too much suspicion from the players of conscious characters.

EVENT THREE: THE CATACOMBS

After an indeterminate amount of time, the player characters will awaken lying on slabs. Their heads throb, and they smell of berries. If one of the characters has knowledge of alchemy, or is a windling, they may recognize that they have been drugged by keesra.

They find themselves facing a very strange ceiling: It looks like temple-style architecture, though it is not made of any sort of stone the adventurers find familiar. It has an almost organic look to it, as would tunnels made by ants, or some other variety of insects. Gareth and Orla are standing close by, and seem to be surprised that the player characters are awake so soon.

Only Gareth is an adept (a Wizard to be specific), but he should be of a lower Circle than the player characters. There are a number of ways to deal with him: He wasn't expecting a fight, and is in fact rather cowardly, and thus easily coerced into explaining what has been happening in Kyrste.

CLIMAX

Either Gareth or Orla will tell the group that several decades ago, the villagers discovered these catacombs underneath their town. From that moment, terrible things began to happen in Kyrste. Plagues, blights, missing persons, a variety of other ills and misfortunes. Finally, they discovered that the cause was the invae dwelling within the caverns (*Gamemaster's Guide*, p. 212). Lacking any adepts with the power or expertise required to root out an invae infestation, they developed a potent blood magic ritual to keep the invae spirits asleep in astral space.

Unfortunately, this ritual requires the use of sacrifice magic, and must be renewed every year on midsummer. The residents of Kyrste lure in travelers so that they do not need to sacrifice their loved ones, some of whom are trapped in the catacombs in invae cocoons.

This leaves the player characters with an interesting dilemma: Without the sacrifice, the invae will wake up and begin to wreak havoc. Anyone who is knowledgeable about invae and their ways will know that this will, sooner or later, result in their spread to the surrounding countryside and numerous other problems. If one or more of the player characters are capable of dealing with astral entities, they can purge the town of the invae infestation before the spirits awaken at dawn. Depending on their moral compass, they might even turn the ritual around and use Gareth and Orla as the sacrifice, or just flee town, leaving the people of Kyrste to their fate.

SEQUELS

Depending on how the player characters handle the situation in the tunnels beneath Kyrste, a number of potential future adventures arise. If the adventurers aren't able to handle the invae infestation, then they may desire to come back in the future to eliminate the creatures. They might begin to hear reports of a wide scale invae outbreak around the foothills of the Throal Mountains, which will probably cause at least a twinge of guilt. If they are able to eliminate the invae, then they are left with the issue of what to do with the villagers of Kyrste.

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