Whispers in the Stacks

A Horror Adventure Module for Fate's Edge

Module Type: Horror Adventure

Designed for 3-6 players, Tier II-III characters

Game Master's Guide Included

Using the Deck System and Thepyrgos Setting
Featuring Entities from Corrupted Scholars to the Whispered Judge
Incorporating Sanity Mechanics and Campaign Clocks

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Welcome to the University of Thepyrgos

In the ancient city of Thepyrgos, where knowledge is both currency and curse, the PCs find themselves drawn to the University's towering spires and labyrinthine stacks. What begins as scholarly pursuit quickly transforms into a descent into paranoia and cosmic horror as they discover that the very architecture of learning harbors dark secrets.

This adventure module, "Whispers in the Stacks," challenges your players with unknown threats that lurk in the spaces between knowledge, where isolation breeds fear and the pursuit of truth becomes a dangerous obsession.

1.2 Module Overview

Adventure Hook: The PCs are scholars, researchers, or investigators who have been drawn to the ancient University of Thepyrgos, renowned for its vast archives and the mysterious Synod Hall where "judgment is audible at a whisper."

Setting: The University of Thepyrgos - ancient towers, labyrinthine stacks, and the ominous Synod Hall where legal proceedings blend with supernatural influence.

Themes: Isolation, Unknown Threats, Psychological Decay, Escalating Tension, Moral Ambiguity

Tone: Ominous, claustrophobic, and deeply unsettling. Knowledge becomes dangerous, and what seems like scholarly pursuit reveals itself to be a descent into madness.

Recommended Character Tier: Seasoned to Veteran (41-150 XP)

Estimated Play Time: 3 sessions

2 The University of Thepyrgos - Setting the Scene

2.1 What Lies Within These Walls

The University of Thepyrgos stands as a monument to human knowledge, its towers reaching skyward like fingers grasping for understanding. But within its ancient stones, something has awakened in the spaces between knowledge - perhaps connected to the "General watch" that once seized carts "for the walls." The whispered judgments in Synod Hall are no longer just legal proceedings, but something far more sinister.

The entity feeds on the accumulated fears and secrets of centuries of scholars, students, and seekers who have passed through these halls, making every corridor a potential trap and every book a source of both wisdom and terror.

2.2 Key Characteristics

- **Architectural Horror:** The very building defies logic, with corridors that shift and rooms that are larger within than without.
- **Isolation:** Characters are cut off from help within the University complex, making every decision critical.

- **Psychological Warfare:** The enemy cannot be easily understood or fought, operating on mental rather than physical levels.

- **Escalating Threat:** Fear builds throughout the campaign as the entity grows stronger.

- **Moral Complexity:** Survival may require compromising principles and making difficult ethical choices.

2.3 Navigating the University

Navigation in Thepyrgos is not merely about finding one's way through physical spaces, but understanding the psychological landscape of fear and knowledge. The Deck System becomes crucial here, as each draw represents not just a random encounter but a meaningful narrative element that shapes the growing horror.

3 Key NPCs and Entities

3.1 Aqyl, Son of Aqyl

The Enigmatic Scholar who serves as both guide and potential threat in the depths of academic pursuit.

Aqyl, Son of Aqyl

Threat Level: Major
Harm: Varies
Complication Points: 2-3 CP per interaction
Description: Aqyl appears as a distinguished scholar with deep knowledge of the University's hidden passages and ancient texts. His eyes reflect unusual colors in certain lighting, and he speaks in whispers that carry more than words.
Motivations: Maintain the University's secrets while protecting those he cares about
Abilities:

- Extensive Knowledge: Deep understanding of hidden passages and ancient texts

- Whispered Communication: Speaks in whispers that carry supernatural influence

- Oath-Bound Wisdom: Cannot easily share certain forbidden knowledge

- Partial Influence Resistance: Shows early signs of entity's touch

Weaknesses:

- Bound by oaths and knowledge he cannot unlearn

- Vulnerable to direct confrontation about his true nature

- Becomes confused by absolute statements about reality

Sample Encounter: Aqyl offers guidance through the ancient stacks but his whispered advice leads to places that test the PCs' understanding of their own sanity. The GM can spend their CP to:

- 1 CP: His guidance reveals useful but disturbing information

- 2 CP: He begins to show physical signs of corruption

- 3 CP: His whispers contain hidden commands

- 4+ CP: He becomes a conduit for the entity's influence

3.2 Palikar Captain Thorne

The Reluctant Guardian whose duty conflicts with his growing fear of what lurks within the University walls.

Palikar Captain Thorne

Threat Level: Major
Harm: >
Complication Points: 2-3 CP per scene
Description: Captain Thorne appears as a weathered military officer with knowledge of tower defenses and patrol routes. He has seen colleagues disappear into the stacks, never to return, and his letter-shyness masks deep paranoia.
Motivations: Protect the University from external threats while dealing with internal corruption
Abilities:

- Tactical Knowledge: Understanding of tower defenses and patrol routes

- Military Training: Combat expertise and tactical awareness

- Paranoid Awareness: Heightened sense of supernatural danger

- Authority Command: Can rally remaining guards and scholars

Weaknesses:

- Letter-shy and reluctant to share information

- Becoming increasingly erratic under supernatural pressure

- Vulnerable to psychological manipulation

Sample Encounter: Captain Thorne approaches the PCs offering protection but his military precision begins to crack under the entity's influence. The GM can spend their CP to:

- 1 CP: He reveals knowledge of disappeared colleagues

- 2 CP: His paranoia causes him to suspect the PCs

- 3 CP: He becomes partially corrupted and hunts the PCs

- 4+ CP: He sacrifices himself to buy time for the PCs

4 Horror Elements and Sanity Mechanics

4.1 The Sanity System in Thepyrgos

The University of Thepyrgos is inherently hostile to the human psyche. The isolation, the unknown threats, and the constant psychological warfare all contribute to a slow erosion of sanity that must be carefully managed.

> Sanity as Resource Management
>
> Sanity in Thepyrgos is managed through the Boon system. Instead of traditional sanity points, players must spend Boons to prevent the Dread Clock from advancing. This creates a resource management challenge where players must choose between immediate tactical advantages and long-term psychological stability.

4.2 The Dread Clock

Dread Clock	Psychological deterioration and mounting horror
Segments	●●●●●●●●●●0/10

4.2.1 Advancement Triggers

- Discovering scholars' fate: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon)
- Hearing whispers in the dark: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon)
- Seeing shadows move unnaturally: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon)
- Finding evidence of entity's influence: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)
- Companion shows signs of corruption: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)
- Direct psychic attack from entity: +3 segments (prevent with 3 Boons)

4.2.2 Psychological Effects by Dread Level

- **0-2 Segments - Unease:** Characters feel on edge, -1 die to social rolls involving trust, minor sleep disturbances
- **3-4 Segments - Fear:** -1 die to all rolls when alone, startle easily, avoid dark spaces, nightmares
- **5-6 Segments - Terror:** -2 dice to rolls involving courage or rational thought, may flee from non-threatening situations
- **7-8 Segments - Madness:** -2 dice to most rolls, may act against own interests, hallucinations, unreliable perception
- **9-10 Segments - Broken:** Out of control, may become hostile to allies, permanent psychological damage, requires major intervention to recover

5 Key Locations in Thepyrgos

5.1 Synod Hall

The heart of the University's legal and mystical authority, where judgment is audible at a whisper.

5.2 The Forbidden Stacks

Ancient library levels where forbidden knowledge is kept, and where the entity's influence is strongest.

5.3 The North Tower

Abandoned tower where the first signs of corruption appeared, serving as a focal point for the entity's influence.

5.4 The Palikar Barracks

Guard quarters where the University's protectors have become its prisoners, filled with evidence of disappearances.

6 Custom Horror Mechanics

6.1 The Whispering Mechanic

When in the ancient towers or stacks of the University, PCs must make Wits + Lore rolls (DV 3) to resist hearing the entity's whispers. Each failure:

- Generates 1 CP that the GM can spend for psychological effects
- Advances Dread Clock by 1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon)
- May reveal useful but disturbing information

Whisper Examples:

- "The books remember your name..."
- "Knowledge has a price..."
- "The Matriarch waits for you in Synod Hall..."
- "Your companion's thoughts are not their own..."

6.2 Sacred Geometry Perception

When PCs observe the ancient architecture of the University, particularly in Synod Hall or the older towers, they must make Wits + Investigation rolls (DV 4) to avoid comprehension effects. Each failure:

- Generates 2 CP that the GM can spend for reality distortions
- Advances Dread Clock by 2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)
- May grant forbidden knowledge at great psychological cost

Geometry Manifestations:

- Corridors that should be straight but bend impossibly
- Rooms that are larger on the inside than the outside
- Symbols that shift when not directly observed
- Stairs that lead to different floors depending on the direction of approach

6.3 Knowledge Corruption

PCs who reach 7+ Dread segments begin to show physical signs of the entity's influence:

- Eyes that reflect unusual colors in darkness

- Speaking in whispers without realizing it

- Attraction to dark, enclosed spaces like the ancient stacks

- May be able to communicate with the entity through forbidden knowledge

Corruption Effects:

- +1 die to Lore rolls involving forbidden knowledge

- -1 die to social rolls due to unsettling presence

- Can perceive multiple timeline branches (generates 2 CP per scene)

- Permanent reality distortion (narrative consequence)

6.4   The Collective Dread

The party's collective Dread affects their perception of the University:

- Average Dread level determines reality stability

- High average = shared hallucinations, impossible events become real

- Low average = grounding effect, some resistance to cosmic influence

Collective Effects:

- Shared visions of the entity's true form

- Impossible architectural changes that affect all PCs

- Collective memory gaps about recent events

- Enhanced group paranoia and infighting

7   Campaign Clocks

7.1   Entity's Awakening Clock (12 segments)

Entity's Awakening Clock	Progress toward the collective consciousness of forbidden knowledge being fully disturbed
Segments	●●●●●●●●●●●●0/12

Advancement Triggers:

- Forbidden texts read: +1 segment per major tome

- Ancient secrets uncovered: +2 segments

- Synod Hall judgment heard: +1 segment

- Knowledge used for dark purposes: +2 segments

- PCs delve deeper into forbidden stacks: +1 segment per session

- PCs interfere with awakening: +2 segments

- Ancient binding ritual discovered: -1 segment

7.2 Town Collapse Clock (8 segments)

Town Collapse Clock	How quickly the University community breaks down under supernatural pressure
Segments	●●●●●●●●0/8

Advancement Triggers:

- Dread Clock advances: +1 segment
- Townspeople disappear or go mad: +1 segment each
- PCs fail to provide leadership: +1 segment
- Supernatural events witnessed by townsfolk: +2 segments
- Essential services fail: +1 segment

7.3 Whispering Stacks Clock (8 segments)

Whispering Stacks Clock	Progress toward the entity's full manifestation through accumulated knowledge
Segments	●●●●●●●●0/8

Advancement Triggers:

- Forbidden texts read: +1 segment per major tome
- Ancient secrets uncovered: +2 segments
- Synod Hall judgment heard: +1 segment
- Knowledge used for dark purposes: +2 segments
- PCs delve deeper into forbidden stacks: +1 segment per session

8 Sample Sessions

8.1 Session 1: Arrival at Thepyrgos

Opening Scene: The PCs arrive to find the University eerily quiet with most towers abandoned.

Key Encounters:

1. Investigation of the abandoned North Tower (Wits + Investigation)
2. Conversation with the increasingly paranoid porter (Presence + Sway)
3. First encounter with whispers in the dark stacks (Wits + Perception, DV 3)
4. Discovery of strange symbols carved near the Synod Hall entrance

Dread Clock Advancement:

- First whisper encounter: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon)
- Seeing abandoned, obviously terrified scholar: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)
- Discovering symbols that shouldn't exist: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon)

Campaign Clock Advancement:

- Entity's Awakening: +1 (general unease in the University)
- Town Collapse: +1 (porter's nervousness)

8.2 Session 2: Descent into Darkness

Key Encounters:

1. Exploration of the ancient stacks beneath the University (Wits + Survival)
2. Encounter with a corrupted scholar who speaks in whispers (combat + social)
3. Discovery of the ritual chamber deep in the forbidden stacks (Wits + Lore)
4. First direct contact with entity's influence through whispered knowledge (Spirit + Resolve, DV 5)

Dread Clock Advancement:

- Seeing first corrupted scholar: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)
- Being touched by entity's influence: +3 segments (prevent with 3 Boons)
- Discovering extent of corruption: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)

Campaign Clock Advancement:

- Entity's Awakening: +2 (seals disturbed)
- Town Collapse: +1 (more scholars disappear)

8.3 Session 3: The Truth Revealed

Key Encounters:

1. Research in Aqyl's notes (Wits + Lore)
2. Confrontation with Palikar Captain Thorne as he becomes erratic (Presence + Command)
3. Discovery of ancient warding techniques in the vaults (Wits + Arcana)
4. Choice: Attempt to reinforce seals or flee while there's still time

Dread Clock Advancement:

- Learning the true nature of the entity: +3 segments (prevent with 3 Boons)
- Witnessing Captain Thorne's breakdown: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)
- Realizing the scope of the threat: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons)

Campaign Clock Advancement:

- Entity's Awakening: +3 (major seal damaged)
- Town Collapse: +2 (Captain's authority breaks down)

9 Resolution Paths

9.1 The Sacrifice

Permanently seal the entity using ancient techniques, but it requires one PC to remain behind as a living anchor.

- Success means the entity is contained, but at great personal cost
- Award 15-18 XP
- The sacrificed PC becomes a guardian spirit, occasionally communicating through whispers
- The University remains but is forever changed - some areas are permanently sealed

9.2 The Escape

Flee with evidence of the threat, warning other settlements. The entity remains but is contained for now.

- Award 10-12 XP
- Create ongoing campaign thread
- The University becomes a quarantined zone
- The entity's influence spreads slowly to neighboring regions
- PCs become hunted by those who want to suppress the truth

9.3 The Corruption

Allow the entity to partially manifest, gaining its power but becoming its servants.

- Transform PCs into agents of horror
- Award 8-10 XP but fundamentally change character nature
- PCs gain supernatural abilities but lose humanity
- They become extensions of the entity's will
- The University becomes a hub for the entity's expansion

9.4 The Investigation

Fully understand the entity and find a way to banish it without sacrifice.

- Requires significant research and resources
- Award 18-20 XP if successful, but very difficult
- Must gather knowledge from multiple forbidden texts
- Requires cooperation with corrupted NPCs
- Success permanently seals the entity but weakens the fabric of reality in the area

9.5 The Bargain

Negotiate with the entity to limit its influence in exchange for specific concessions.

- Award 12-15 XP with ongoing supernatural responsibilities

- The entity agrees to limit its feeding in exchange for periodic offerings
- PCs become mediators between the entity and the living
- The University becomes a neutral ground for otherworldly negotiations
- Creates potential for future conflicts when the bargain is tested

10   Using the Deck System

10.1   Drawing from Thepyrgos Deck

The Deck System provides rich narrative content for encounters within the University. Each draw should feel meaningful and contribute to the overall atmosphere of paranoia and unknown threats.

10.1.1   Hearts - Emotional/Social Fallout

- Paranoia spreads among remaining scholars
- PCs turn on each other due to whispered suggestions
- A trusted NPC reveals they've been compromised
- Romantic subplot becomes complicated by supernatural influence
- Family connections are used against PCs by the entity

10.1.2   Spades - Harm/Escalation

- Physical manifestations of knowledge corruption
- Architecture shifts to trap or harm PCs
- Corrupted scholars become hostile
- Ancient defenses activate against intruders
- Reality distortions cause physical injury

10.1.3   Clubs - Resource Depletion

- Essential supplies become contaminated
- Communication with outside world is cut off
- Magical or technological aids malfunction
- Time pressure as the entity's awakening accelerates
- Allies become unavailable due to corruption or disappearance

10.1.4   Diamonds - Magical/Spiritual Disturbance

- Forbidden knowledge reveals itself unexpectedly
- The entity manifests partially in the physical world
- Ancient wards begin to fail
- Reality itself becomes unstable

- Supernatural entities from other dimensions take notice

11 GM Tips and Advice

11.1 Atmosphere and Tension

Building Dread:

- Use lighting, sound, and physical environment to create unease
- Describe sensations and feelings, not just visual details
- Let silences and pauses carry weight
- Make the familiar seem alien and threatening

Pacing the Horror:

- Start subtle and build gradually
- Vary the intensity - allow moments of false security
- Use foreshadowing and ominous signs
- Save the biggest revelations for climactic moments

11.2 Managing Fear and Sanity

Fear as a Resource:

- Fear should be a narrative driver, not a punishment
- Let players feel powerful even when afraid
- Provide opportunities to confront and overcome fears
- Balance terror with moments of triumph

Sanity Management:

- Make sanity loss feel meaningful and personal
- Let it change how characters perceive and interact with the world
- Provide ways to recover or adapt to mental trauma
- Avoid making characters useless when sanity is low

11.3 Narrative Techniques

Player Agency:

- Give players meaningful choices, even when options seem limited
- Let their decisions have real consequences
- Provide multiple approaches to problems
- Respect their courage to face the horror head-on

Unreliable Information:

- Not all sources are trustworthy

- Clues may be misleading or incomplete

- NPCs might be lying, mistaken, or hiding crucial information

- Let players discover the truth through investigation and deduction

12 Appendix: Additional Resources

12.1 Character Options

Recommended Backgrounds:

- Scholar of Fractured Truths (Wizard archetype)

- The Chronicler of Consequences (Bard archetype)

- The Caretaker of Cycles (Druid archetype)

- The Guild-Approved Shadow (Rogue archetype)

- The Border-Warden (Ranger archetype)

Useful Skills:

- Lore (Essential for understanding the entity)

- Investigation (Key for discovering clues)

- Arcana (For dealing with supernatural elements)

- Insight (To detect corruption in others)

- Survival (For navigating the dangerous stacks)

- Diplomacy (For dealing with NPCs)

- Stealth (For avoiding corrupted entities)

Suggested Talents:

- Lorekeeper (Recall obscure history or magic)

- Backlash Soothing (Reduce magical Backlash)

- Silver Tongue (Persuade through speech)

- Battle Instincts (Re-roll failed defense rolls)

- Iron Stomach (Resist mundane poisons)

- Exceptional Coordination (Follower provides +4 assist dice)

12.2 Protective Items

- **Blessed Warding Stone:** Provides +2 dice to resist supernatural influence and reduces Dread Clock advancement by 1 (minimum 1). Crumbles to dust if Dread Clock fills completely.

- **Sanctified Salt:** Can be used to create protective circles or barriers. One use per session to prevent Dread Clock advancement or gain start Controlled vs. supernatural threats.

- **Prayer Book of the Steadfast:** Once per session, allows reroll of failed Spirit + Resolve roll and prevents 1 segment of Dread Clock advancement.

12.3   Cursed Artifacts

- **Whispering Tome:** A book that hums with voices inaudible to most. Reader gains +1 die to Lore rolls but must make Spirit + Resolve (DV 3) each session or advance Dread Clock by 1.

- **Mirror of the Forgotten:** Shows glimpses of possible futures and past events. Provides valuable insights (Wits + Lore, DV 3) but each use advances Dread Clock by 1 and generates 1 CP.

- **Shroud of Whispers:** A burial cloth that grants immunity to fear effects but causes the wearer to hear the entity's whispers constantly. Must make Wits + Perception (DV 4) or advance Dread Clock by 2 each day worn.

13   Conclusion

"Whispers in the Stacks" is designed to challenge your players not just physically, but psychologically and morally. The horror lies not in gore or jump scares, but in the slow erosion of certainty and the terrifying realization that knowledge itself can be a curse.

Remember that the best horror comes from what is left unsaid and unseen. Let the players' imaginations fill in the gaps, and trust in the power of implication over explicit description. The fear of what might be lurking in the shadows is often more effective than showing every monster in detail.

Most importantly, maintain communication with your players about comfort levels and boundaries. Horror can be deeply personal, and what one player finds thrilling, another might find genuinely distressing. A good horror game is one where everyone at the table is having fun and feeling appropriately challenged, not traumatized.

The mechanics provided here are tools to enhance the horror experience, not replace good storytelling and atmosphere. Use them to support your narrative goals and create memorable, chilling experiences for your players.

As the GM, you hold the quill that writes the legend, but it is the players who create the story. Guide them through the stacks of Thepyrgos, challenge their perceptions, and let them emerge changed by their journey - for better or for worse.

In the spaces between knowledge, in the whispers of the stacks, and in the judgments of Synod Hall, the truth waits patiently. Will you listen? Will you pay the price? Will you survive to tell the tale?

The University of Thepyrgos thanks you for your service. Please return all forbidden texts to the proper authorities. Knowledge is a responsibility, not a right.

May your dice roll true, your choices be meaningful, and your players emerge from the stacks forever changed.

Quick Reference Cards

Dread Clock Management

Psychological Effects

Segments	Effects
0-2	Unease: -1 die to social rolls involving trust, minor sleep disturbances
3-4	Fear: -1 die to all rolls when alone, startle easily, avoid dark spaces
5-6	Terror: -2 dice to rolls involving courage or rational thought, may flee
7-8	Madness: -2 dice to most rolls, may act against own interests, hallucinations
9-10	Broken: Out of control, may become hostile, permanent psychological damage

Campaign Clocks Quick Reference

Entity's Awakening Clock (12 segments):

- Measures progress toward collective consciousness disturbance
- Triggers: Forbidden texts, ancient secrets, Synod judgments

Town Collapse Clock (8 segments):

- Tracks University community breakdown
- Triggers: Dread advancement, disappearances, service failures

Whispering Stacks Clock (8 segments):

- Measures entity's manifestation through accumulated knowledge
- Triggers: Forbidden texts, ancient secrets, Synod judgments

Custom Mechanics Summary

Whispering Mechanic:

- Wits + Lore (DV 3) to resist entity whispers
- Failure: 1 CP, +1 Dread segment, disturbing information

Sacred Geometry Perception:

- Wits + Investigation (DV 4) to avoid comprehension effects
- Failure: 2 CP, +2 Dread segments, forbidden knowledge

Knowledge Corruption (7+ Dread):

- Physical signs: unusual eye colors, whispering, attraction to dark spaces

- Effects: +1 Lore die, -1 social die, timeline perception, reality distortion

Deck-Based Complications

Hearts (Social/Emotional):

- Paranoia spreads, PCs turn on each other, NPC compromise

Spades (Harm/Escalation):

- Physical corruption, architectural traps, hostile scholars

Clubs (Resources):

- Contaminated supplies, communication cut, aid malfunction

Diamonds (Supernatural):

- Forbidden knowledge, partial manifestation, ward failure

Resolution Paths Summary

Path	Outcome & XP
The Sacrifice	Seal entity with PC as anchor. Award 15-18 XP.
The Escape	Flee with evidence. Award 10-12 XP.
The Corruption	Become entity's servants. Award 8-10 XP.
The Investigation	Banish entity through research. Award 18-20 XP.
The Bargain	Negotiate entity limitations. Award 12-15 XP.