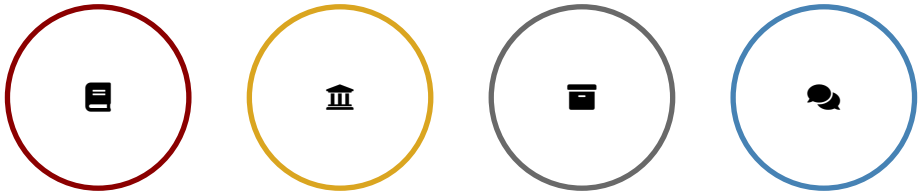
Whispers in the Stacks

A Fate's Edge Horror Campaign

Mixing Thepyrgos and Horror Generators



Horror Thepyrgos Stacks Whispers

Campaign Overview

Campaign Hook

The Premise: 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." They've come seeking knowledge, but find instead that the very architecture of the city seems to harbor dark secrets.

Real Hook: The University's ancient towers and labyrinthine stacks conceal more than forgotten texts. 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.

Thematic Elements: Isolation, Unknown Threats, Psychological Decay, Escalating Tension, Moral Ambiguity

Key Horror Elements:

- **Isolation:** Characters are cut off from help within the University complex
- **Unknown Threats:** The enemy cannot be easily understood or fought
- **Psychological Decay:** Mental stability becomes as important as physical health
- **Escalating Tension:** Fear builds throughout the campaign
- **Moral Ambiguity:** Survival may require compromising principles

Campaign Clocks

Core Campaign Clocks

Entity's Awakening Clock (12 segments)

Progress toward the collective consciousness of forbidden knowledge being fully disturbed 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

Town Collapse Clock (8 segments)

How quickly the University community breaks down under supernatural pressure 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

Dread Clock (10 segments)

Psychological deterioration and mounting horror Advancement Triggers (Players can spend Boons to prevent):

- 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)

The Whispering Stacks Clock (8 segments)

Progress toward the entity's full manifestation through accumulated knowledge Advancement Triggers:

Key NPCs

Important Characters

Aqyl

Motivation: Maintain the University's secrets while protecting those he cares about
Resources: Extensive knowledge of the University's hidden passages and ancient texts
Weakness: Bound by oaths and knowledge he cannot unlearn
Secret: May be partially influenced by the entity, speaking in whispers that carry more than words
Breaking Points: Witnessing Corruption (advance Dread by 2), Personal Loss (advance Dread by 3)
Resolution Paths: Can become a conduit for the entity or help players understand the ancient binding rituals

Palikar Captain Thorne (The Reluctant Guardian)

Motivation: Protect the University from external threats while dealing with internal corruption
Resources: Knowledge of tower defenses and patrol routes
Weakness: Letter-shy and reluctant to share information
Secret: Has seen colleagues disappear into the stacks, never to return
Breaking Points: Moral Compromise (advance Dread by 2), Hopelessness (advance Dread by 1)
Resolution Paths: May sacrifice himself to buy time, or become corrupted and hunt the PCs

The Matriarch of the Synod (The Whispered Judge)

Motivation: Maintain the ancient order of the University, even if it means sacrificing individuals
Resources: Authority over Synod Hall and access to forbidden knowledge
Weakness: Bound by ancient laws and traditions that may be corrupted
Secret: May be a conduit for the entity's influence, speaking its will through "judgments audible at a whisper"
Breaking Points: Comprehending the incomprehensible (advance Dread by 3), Losing sense of self (advance Dread by 3)
Resolution Paths: Can be bargained with through ancient legal precedents, or must be stopped before full possession

Lerris Fenwood (The Student)

Motivation: Gain knowledge and prove himself worthy of his family's legacy
Resources: Fresh perspective and access to student areas
Weakness: Naive and unaware of the true dangers
Secret: May be marked by the entity for his potential as a vessel
Breaking Points: Personal Loss (advance Dread by 3), Moral Compromise (advance Dread by 2)
Resolution Paths: Can be saved through sacrifice, become corrupted, or serve as a key to understanding the entity

Custom Horror Mechanics

Special Campaign Mechanics

The Whispering Mechanic

When in the ancient towers or stacks of the University, PCs must make Wits + Lore rolls (DV 2) 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..."

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 3) 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

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:

Session Structure

Campaign Progression

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 2)
  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)
- **Whispering Stacks Clock Advancement:**
  - Entity's Awakening: +1 (general unease in the University)
  - Town Collapse: +1 (porter's nervousness)

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 4)
- **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)
- **Whispering Stacks Clock Advancement:**
  - Entity's Awakening: +2 (seals disturbed)
  - Town Collapse: +1 (more scholars disappear)

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)

Resolution Paths

Campaign Endings

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

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

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

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

Key Locations

Important Places

Synod Hall

The heart of the University's legal and mystical authority

- Gold-glass mosaics that seem to shift when not directly observed
- Judgment is audible at a whisper - literally
- The Matriarch's chamber where reality bends most readily
- Ancient seals carved into the floor that pulse with otherworldly energy
- **Special Feature:** When the Entity's Awakening Clock fills, the hall becomes a conduit for the entity's full power

The Forbidden Stacks

Ancient library levels where forbidden knowledge is kept

- Corridors that shift and change without warning
- Books that whisper when approached
- Ritual chambers hidden behind false walls
- Areas where gravity flows in impossible directions
- **Special Feature:** The deeper PCs go, the more the Whispering Stacks Clock advances automatically

The North Tower

Abandoned tower where the first signs of corruption appeared

- Carved symbols that glow in the dark
- Rooms that are colder than they should be
- Windows that show views of places that don't exist
- A bell that rings at irregular intervals with no visible mechanism
- **Special Feature:** Serves as a focal point for the entity's influence - Dread Clock advances by 1 segment per hour spent here

The Palikar Barracks

Guard quarters where the University's protectors have become its prisoners

- Armory with weapons that seem to move when not watched
- Sleeping quarters where the beds are always perfectly made but cold
- A common room where ghostly conversations can be heard
- Evidence of guards who disappeared without a trace

GM Preparation

Running This Campaign

Pre-Session Checklist:

- Review all campaign clocks and their advancement triggers
- Prepare 2-3 Deck of Consequences draws for likely complications
- Update faction relationship tracker (NPC loyalties and corruption levels)
- Prepare XP awards based on previous session events
- Identify potential structural advantages for player characters
- Plan 1-2 major scene hooks that generate CP naturally

Key Preparation Elements:

- **Whisper Table:** Prepare a list of entity whispers that reveal information while increasing dread
- **Geometry Anomalies:** Create architectural impossibilities that can be revealed during exploration
- **Corruption Effects:** Plan how knowledge corruption will manifest for each PC
- **NPC Reactions:** Determine how each major NPC will respond as clocks fill
- **Reality Distortions:** Develop effects for when the Collective Dread becomes high

Session Management:

- Announce clocks clearly and update them visibly
- Connect player actions to clock advancement logically
- Offer meaningful choices that affect multiple outcomes
- Let clocks fill when fictionally appropriate
- Provide XP based on engagement and consequences

Horror Atmosphere Tips:

- 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
- 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

Player Agency:

Adventure Index

Quick Reference

Campaign Elements:

- **Primary Generator:** Thepyrgos - "City of a Thousand Stairs"
- **Secondary Generator:** Horror Campaign Template
- **Clock Size:** King (8-segment primary clock)
- **Theme:** Knowledge horror, architectural impossibility, psychological corruption
- **Recommended Party Size:** 3-5 players
- **Suggested Tier Range:** II-IV (41-220 XP)

Key Mechanics:

- Whispering Mechanic (Wits + Lore, DV 2)
- Sacred Geometry Perception (Wits + Investigation, DV 3)
- Knowledge Corruption (7+ Dread segments)
- Collective Dread Effects (Party average)
- Boon-based Sanity Management

Major NPCs:

- Aqyl, Son of Aqyl (Scholar/Mentor)
- Palikar Captain Thorne (Guardian)
- The Matriarch of Synod (Judge/Entity Conduit)
- Lerris Fenwood (Student/Innocent)

Resolution Paths:

- The Sacrifice (15-18 XP)
- The Escape (10-12 XP)
- The Corruption (8-10 XP)
- The Investigation (18-20 XP)
- The Bargain (12-15 XP)

Campaign Clocks:

- Entity's Awakening Clock (12 segments)
- Town Collapse Clock (8 segments)
- Dread Clock (10 segments)
- Whispering Stacks Clock (8 segments)

Key Locations:

- Synod Hall (Judgment chamber)

Sample Complications

Complication Ideas

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

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

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

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

Character Options

Character Concepts

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)

Appropriate Assets:

- Minor: Scholar's Cell, Safehouse Network, Herbal Garden
- Standard: Library Archive, University College, Spy Ring
- Major: Thepyrgos Great Library, Research Academy

Helpful Followers:

- Cap 2 Apprentice (Research assistance)
- Cap 3 Guard (Protection in dangerous areas)
- Cap 4 Scholar (Extensive knowledge base)
- Cap 5 Archivist (Access to forbidden knowledge)

Campaign Variations

Alternative Approaches

Shorter Campaign (1-2 Sessions):

- Focus on a single tower or section of the stacks
- Reduce clock sizes by 2-4 segments
- Pre-corrupt one major NPC to accelerate the plot
- Start with PCs already aware of the threat
- Simplify resolution paths to 2-3 options

Extended Campaign (5+ Sessions):

- Expand to multiple University buildings
- Introduce secondary entities or cults
- Add political intrigue with external factions
- Include investigation of the entity's origins
- Develop long-term consequences of PCs' choices

Investigation Focus:

- Emphasize research and clue-gathering
- Reduce combat encounters
- Increase social interactions with NPCs
- Add puzzle-solving elements
- Focus on understanding rather than confrontation

Action Focus:

- Increase combat encounters with corrupted entities
- Add chase sequences through shifting architecture
- Include more physical challenges and traps
- Reduce dialogue-heavy scenes
- Emphasize survival over understanding

Mixed Approach:

- Balance investigation and action elements
- Include both social and combat encounters
- Vary session focus between exploration and confrontation
- Allow PCs to choose their approach to problems
- Provide multiple paths to the same information

Final Notes

⚠ Important Reminders

Horror Campaign Guidelines:

- **Consent First:** Discuss comfort levels and boundaries with players before starting
- **Pacing Matters:** Horror is most effective when tension builds gradually
- **Player Agency:** Ensure players always have meaningful choices, even in hopeless situations
- **Consequences Feel:** Make the impact of player decisions clear and lasting
- **Atmosphere Counts:** Use description and sensory details to create unease
- **Fear Rewards:** Let players feel powerful even when afraid
- **Sanity Management:** Make mental trauma meaningful, not punitive
- **Hope Endures:** Even in darkness, give players reasons to continue

Campaign Integration:

- **Scale:** This campaign operates on a university level but has regional implications
- **Comprehension:** Understanding the threat may be as dangerous as ignoring it
- **Permanence:** Changes to reality may be irreversible
- **Isolation:** The PCs may be among the few who perceive the true threat
- **Legacy:** Actions taken will echo through the University's future

GM Tools:

- **Whisper Deck:** Prepare 20-30 entity whispers that reveal information while increasing dread
- **Geometry Cards:** Create index cards with architectural impossibilities for quick reference
- **Corruption Tracker:** Note which PCs show signs of knowledge corruption
- **Reality Anchor:** Keep one location in each session that remains "normal" for grounding
- **Escape Routes:** Always provide at least one way out, even if costly
- **Hope Tokens:** Small positive developments that remind players their actions matter

Session End Notes:

- **Cliffhangers:** End sessions on moments of tension to maintain engagement
- **Progress Check:** Review which clocks advanced and why
- **Character Check:** Note any PC corruption or psychological changes
- **Foreshadowing:** Plant seeds for next session's revelations
- **Player Feedback:** Ask what scared or intrigued them most

Campaign Conclusion:

The Ninth Rim

Remember: 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.