

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 Dread Clocks and Boon-Based Horror Mechanics

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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 through an uncaring void. 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. The very air seems to thicken with unspoken knowledge, and shadows move with purpose that defies natural law.

2.2 Key Characteristics

- **Architectural Horror:** The very building defies logic, with corridors that shift and rooms that are larger within than without. Staircases spiral into themselves, leading not upward but inward, toward some geometrical heart of madness.
- **Isolation:** Characters are cut off from help within the University complex, trapped in a maze of stone and shadow where every door leads to another mystery and every window shows only

the endless void of night. The outside world becomes a distant memory.

- **Psychological Warfare:** The enemy cannot be easily understood or fought, operating on mental rather than physical levels. Reality itself becomes a weapon, bending and breaking around the edges of perception.
- **Escalating Threat:** Fear builds throughout the campaign as the entity grows stronger, its whispers becoming roars, its shadows becoming substance, until the boundary between mind and world dissolves entirely.
- **Moral Complexity:** Survival may require compromising principles and making difficult ethical choices. The price of knowledge is paid in sanity, and the cost of truth may be the soul itself.

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. The university breathes, and with each exhalation, new corridors manifest while others collapse into memory.

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

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, shifting from scholarly brown to depths that seem to contain entire galaxies. He speaks in whispers that carry more than words — each syllable seems to echo from vast distances, as if his voice originates from the spaces between stars.

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 SB to:

- 1 SB: His guidance reveals useful but disturbing information
- 2 SB: He begins to show physical signs of corruption — his shadow moves independently
- 3 SB: His whispers contain hidden commands that bypass conscious resistance
- 4+ SB: He becomes a conduit for the entity's influence, his body a vessel for cosmic horror

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: >

Description: Captain Thorne appears as a weathered military officer with knowledge of tower defenses and patrol routes. His uniform, once crisp and authoritative, now bears stains that seem to shift and writhe in peripheral vision. He has seen colleagues disappear into the stacks, never to return, and his letter-shyness masks deep paranoia that has begun to manifest physically — his hands shake when he speaks of the deeper levels.

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 SB to:

- 1 SB: He reveals knowledge of disappeared colleagues, his voice dropping to a terrified whisper
- 2 SB: His paranoia causes him to suspect the PCs, drawing his weapon with trembling

hands

- 3 SB: He becomes partially corrupted and hunts the PCs, his eyes reflecting the entity's light
- 4+ SB: He sacrifices himself to buy time for the PCs, his final words a warning whispered from beyond death

4 Horror Elements and Dread Mechanics

4.1 Dread as Resource Management

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. The very walls seem to press inward, and the silence between heartbeats grows longer with each passing moment.

Dread Clock

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. Each tick of the clock brings them closer to a threshold where reality itself becomes unreliable.

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) — their final notes speak of things that should not be known
- Hearing whispers in the dark: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon) — voices that seem to originate from within your own skull
- Seeing shadows move unnaturally: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon) — figures that cast no light but absorb all shadow
- Finding evidence of entity's influence: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — symbols that hurt to look upon directly
- Companion shows signs of corruption: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — their eyes have begun to reflect impossible depths
- Direct psychic attack from entity: +3 segments (prevent with 3 Boons) — a presence that knows your deepest fears and speaks them aloud

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. The walls seem to breathe, and footsteps echo from empty corridors.
- **3-4 Segments - Fear:** -1 die to all rolls when alone, startle easily, avoid dark spaces, nightmares. Shadows have begun to gather at the edges of vision, watching with intent.
- **5-6 Segments - Terror:** -2 dice to rolls involving courage or rational thought, may flee from non-threatening situations. The air grows thick with unspoken words, and reality begins to fray at the edges.
- **7-8 Segments - Madness:** -2 dice to most rolls, may act against own interests, hallucinations, unreliable perception. Time flows backward in certain corridors, and books rewrite themselves when not observed.
- **9-10 Segments - Broken:** Out of control, may become hostile to allies, permanent psychological damage, requires major intervention to recover. The character has become a conduit for cosmic knowledge they cannot comprehend.

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. The hall stretches impossibly far in all directions, its ceiling lost in shadow. Massive tomes float in the air, their pages turning of their own accord, recording judgments that affect not just the living, but the very fabric of reality itself. The whispers here are not human voices, but the susurrus of cosmic law being rewritten.

5.2 The Forbidden Stacks

Ancient library levels where forbidden knowledge is kept, and where the entity's influence is strongest. The books here are not bound by conventional physics — they shift and rearrange themselves, their spines displaying titles in languages that predate human speech. The air is thick with the scent of old parchment and something else, something that smells of ozone and the void between stars. Reading here is dangerous, as knowledge has weight and some truths are too heavy for mortal minds to bear.

5.3 The North Tower

Abandoned tower where the first signs of corruption appeared, serving as a focal point for the entity's influence. The tower leans at an impossible angle, defying gravity with casual arrogance. Windows show not the outside world, but glimpses of other realities — some beautiful beyond description, others so terrible that looking upon them causes immediate psychological trauma. The stairs spiral upward into darkness, and those who climb them often find themselves returning to the same landing, no matter which direction they travel.

5.4 The Palikar Barracks

Guard quarters where the University's protectors have become its prisoners, filled with evidence of disappearances. The rooms are perfectly maintained, as if the occupants stepped out for a moment

and never returned. Personal effects remain — half-drunk tea cups, books left open at specific pages, weapons still in their racks. But the mirrors show only empty space, and the shadows in the corners move when no one is looking.

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 SB 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, and they are hungry..."
- "Knowledge has a price, and it is always more than you can pay..."
- "The Matriarch waits for you in Synod Hall, where all judgments are final..."
- "Your companion's thoughts are not their own — count the shadows that follow them..."
- "The geometry of this place is wrong. You are not where you think you are..."

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 SB 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, leading not to other rooms but to other dimensions
- Rooms that are larger on the inside than the outside, their walls stretching into infinite space
- Symbols that shift when not directly observed, rearranging themselves into new patterns of meaning
- Stairs that lead to different floors depending on the direction of approach, creating temporal loops
- Doors that open onto themselves, creating portals to the spaces between thoughts

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 — deep purples, impossible golds, the black of space between stars
- Speaking in whispers without realizing it, their voice carrying the weight of cosmic knowledge
- Attraction to dark, enclosed spaces like the ancient stacks, as if drawn by some gravitational pull
- May be able to communicate with the entity through forbidden knowledge, their words becoming prophecy

Corruption Effects:

- +1 die to Lore rolls involving forbidden knowledge, but each use advances the Dread Clock by 1
- -1 die to social rolls due to unsettling presence — others instinctively avoid the character
- Can perceive multiple timeline branches (generates 2 SB per scene) — the weight of infinite possibilities
- Permanent reality distortion (narrative consequence) — the character exists partially outside normal reality

6.4 The Collective Dread

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

- Average Dread level determines reality stability — higher levels make the impossible more probable
- High average = shared hallucinations, impossible events become real, the university reshapes itself around their fears
- Low average = grounding effect, some resistance to cosmic influence, reality maintains a tenuous hold

Collective Effects:

- Shared visions of the entity's true form — a geometry of madness that breaks the mind
- Impossible architectural changes that affect all PCs — corridors that didn't exist before suddenly appear
- Collective memory gaps about recent events — time itself becomes unreliable
- Enhanced group paranoia and infighting — trust becomes a luxury they cannot afford

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 — each book is a doorway to madness
- Ancient secrets uncovered: +2 segments — knowledge that predates human civilization
- Synod Hall judgment heard: +1 segment — cosmic law being rewritten in real-time
- Knowledge used for dark purposes: +2 segments — the entity grows stronger with each application
- PCs delve deeper into forbidden stacks: +1 segment per session — descending into the heart of madness
- PCs interfere with awakening: +2 segments — resistance feeds the entity's hunger
- Ancient binding ritual discovered: -1 segment — hope flickers in the darkness

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 — madness is contagious
- Townspeople disappear or go mad: +1 segment each — the population dwindles
- PCs fail to provide leadership: +1 segment — chaos feeds on uncertainty
- Supernatural events witnessed by townsfolk: +2 segments — reality itself becomes unreliable
- Essential services fail: +1 segment — the infrastructure of civilization crumbles

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 — each book is a sacrifice to the entity
- Ancient secrets uncovered: +2 segments — knowledge that should remain buried
- Synod Hall judgment heard: +1 segment — legal decisions with cosmic consequences
- Knowledge used for dark purposes: +2 segments — the entity grows stronger with each revelation
- PCs delve deeper into forbidden stacks: +1 segment per session — descending into the abyss

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. The silence is not peaceful, but oppressive — the kind of quiet that comes when all sound is absorbed

by hungry shadows.

Key Encounters:

1. Investigation of the abandoned North Tower (Wits + Investigation) — the tower leans at an impossible angle, defying all laws of physics
2. Conversation with the increasingly paranoid porter (Presence + Sway) — his eyes reflect depths that should not exist
3. First encounter with whispers in the dark stacks (Wits + Perception, DV 3) — voices that seem to originate from within your own mind
4. Discovery of strange symbols carved near the Synod Hall entrance — symbols that hurt to look upon directly

Dread Clock Advancement:

- First whisper encounter: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon) — the voices know your name
- Seeing abandoned, obviously terrified scholar: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — their final notes speak of things that should not be
- Discovering symbols that shouldn't exist: +1 segment (prevent with 1 Boon) — geometry that breaks the mind

Campaign Clock Advancement:

- Entity's Awakening: +1 (general unease in the University) — the entity stirs in its ancient slumber
- Town Collapse: +1 (porter's nervousness) — madness spreads like a contagion

8.2 Session 2: Descent into Darkness

Key Encounters:

1. Exploration of the ancient stacks beneath the University (Wits + Survival) — corridors that lead not to other rooms but to other dimensions
2. Encounter with a corrupted scholar who speaks in whispers (combat + social) — their words carry the weight of cosmic knowledge
3. Discovery of the ritual chamber deep in the forbidden stacks (Wits + Lore) — a space where reality is negotiable
4. First direct contact with entity's influence through whispered knowledge (Spirit + Resolve, DV 5) — the presence that knows your deepest fears

Dread Clock Advancement:

- Seeing first corrupted scholar: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — their eyes reflect impossible depths
- Being touched by entity's influence: +3 segments (prevent with 3 Boons) — knowledge that rewrites the soul
- Discovering extent of corruption: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — the university is already lost

Campaign Clock Advancement:

- Entity's Awakening: +2 (seals disturbed) — ancient protections begin to fail
- Town Collapse: +1 (more scholars disappear) — the population dwindles

8.3 Session 3: The Truth Revealed

Key Encounters:

1. Research in Aqyl's notes (Wits + Lore) — knowledge that predates human civilization
2. Confrontation with Palikar Captain Thorne as he becomes erratic (Presence + Command) — his final words are a warning from beyond death
3. Discovery of ancient warding techniques in the vaults (Wits + Arcana) — protections that may yet hold
4. Choice: Attempt to reinforce seals or flee while there's still time — every moment of hesitation feeds the entity

Dread Clock Advancement:

- Learning the true nature of the entity: +3 segments (prevent with 3 Boons) — a geometry of madness that breaks the mind
- Witnessing Captain Thorne's breakdown: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — the last line of defense crumbles
- Realizing the scope of the threat: +2 segments (prevent with 2 Boons) — the entity is older than human memory

Campaign Clock Advancement:

- Entity's Awakening: +3 (major seal damaged) — the entity stirs with cosmic hunger
- Town Collapse: +2 (Captain's authority breaks down) — chaos reigns in the streets

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. The character becomes part of the university itself, their consciousness spread throughout the stone and shadow, forever whispering warnings to future seekers of knowledge.

- Success means the entity is contained, but at great personal cost — the character exists in a state between life and death
- Award 15–18 XP
- The sacrificed PC becomes a guardian spirit, occasionally communicating through whispers that carry fragments of cosmic truth
- The University remains but is forever changed — some areas are permanently sealed, others become sanctuaries of terrible knowledge

9.2 The Escape

Flee with evidence of the threat, warning other settlements. The entity remains but is contained for now, though its influence spreads slowly to neighboring regions like ink through water. The PCs become hunted by those who want to suppress the truth, and haunted by memories of what they witnessed in the depths.

- Award 10–12 XP
- Create ongoing campaign thread — the entity’s influence spreads like a contagion
- The University becomes a quarantined zone, sealed by those who fear the truth
- The entity’s influence spreads slowly to neighboring regions, corrupting knowledge wherever it takes root
- PCs become hunted by those who want to suppress the truth, and haunted by what they cannot forget

9.3 The Corruption

Allow the entity to partially manifest, gaining its power but becoming its servants. The PCs become conduits for cosmic knowledge they cannot fully comprehend, their humanity slowly eroded by the weight of infinite possibilities. They gain power, but at the cost of their souls.

- Transform PCs into agents of horror — their words carry the weight of prophecy
- Award 8–10 XP but fundamentally change character nature — they exist partially outside normal reality
- PCs gain supernatural abilities but lose humanity — their eyes reflect impossible depths
- They become extensions of the entity’s will — knowledge flows through them like blood through veins
- The University becomes a hub for the entity’s expansion — a nexus of cosmic influence

9.4 The Investigation

Fully understand the entity and find a way to banish it without sacrifice. This path requires significant research and resources, and success comes at the cost of confronting truths that may be too terrible to bear. The PCs must gather knowledge from multiple forbidden texts, each one a step closer to madness.

- Requires significant research and resources — knowledge that predates human civilization
- Award 18–20 XP if successful, but very difficult — the price of truth is always high
- Must gather knowledge from multiple forbidden texts — each book is a doorway to madness
- Requires cooperation with corrupted NPCs — trust becomes a luxury they cannot afford
- Success permanently seals the entity but weakens the fabric of reality in the area — some truths are too heavy for the world to bear

9.5 The Bargain

Negotiate with the entity to limit its influence in exchange for specific concessions. The entity agrees to limit its feeding in exchange for periodic offerings — knowledge, souls, or fragments of reality itself. The PCs become mediators between the entity and the living, walking a razor’s edge between cosmic horror and human sanity.

- Award 12–15 XP with ongoing supernatural responsibilities — the burden of knowledge never ends
- The entity agrees to limit its feeding in exchange for periodic offerings — knowledge, souls, or reality itself
- PCs become mediators between the entity and the living — walking a razor’s edge between horror and sanity
- The University becomes a neutral ground for otherworldly negotiations — a place where cosmic law is rewritten daily
- Creates potential for future conflicts when the bargain is tested — every concession feeds the entity’s hunger

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. The cards are not random events, but manifestations of the entity’s will, shaped by the collective fears and desires of those who have come before.

10.1.1 Hearts - Emotional/Social Fallout

- Paranoia spreads among remaining scholars — trust becomes a luxury they cannot afford
- PCs turn on each other due to whispered suggestions — the entity speaks through their fears
- A trusted NPC reveals they’ve been compromised — their eyes reflect impossible depths
- Romantic subplot becomes complicated by supernatural influence — love and madness are indistinguishable
- Family connections are used against PCs by the entity — the past becomes a weapon

10.1.2 Spades - Harm/Escalation

- Physical manifestations of knowledge corruption — reality itself becomes a weapon
- Architecture shifts to trap or harm PCs — the university reshapes itself around their fears
- Corrupted scholars become hostile — their words carry the weight of cosmic knowledge
- Ancient defenses activate against intruders — protections that predate human civilization
- Reality distortions cause physical injury — the laws of physics are negotiable

10.1.3 Clubs - Resource Depletion

- Essential supplies become contaminated — food that tastes of ash and knowledge
- Communication with outside world is cut off — the university exists in a bubble of isolation
- Magical or technological aids malfunction — reality itself resists their intrusion
- Time pressure as the entity's awakening accelerates — every moment of hesitation feeds its hunger
- Allies become unavailable due to corruption or disappearance — trust no one

10.1.4 Diamonds - Magical/Spiritual Disturbance

- Forbidden knowledge reveals itself unexpectedly — truths that break the mind
- The entity manifests partially in the physical world — geometry that should not exist
- Ancient wards begin to fail — protections that have held for millennia crumble
- Reality itself becomes unstable — the laws of physics bend and break
- Supernatural entities from other dimensions take notice — the university is a beacon of cosmic significance

11 GM Tips and Advice

11.1 Atmosphere and Tension

Building Dread:

- Use lighting, sound, and physical environment to create unease — shadows that move independently, whispers that seem to originate from within the walls
- Describe sensations and feelings, not just visual details — the air grows thick with unspoken words, the silence between heartbeats grows longer
- Let silences and pauses carry weight — sometimes what is not said is more terrifying than what is
- Make the familiar seem alien and threatening — the university was built by minds that comprehended geometries beyond human understanding

Pacing the Horror:

- Start subtle and build gradually — the first whispers are almost comforting, like old friends speaking in the dark
- Vary the intensity - allow moments of false security — the university can be beautiful in its terrible way
- Use foreshadowing and ominous signs — symbols that shift when not directly observed, corridors that lead to places that should not exist
- Save the biggest revelations for climactic moments — the entity's true form is a geometry of madness that breaks the mind

11.2 Managing Fear and Sanity

Fear as a Resource:

- Fear should be a narrative driver, not a punishment — it shapes the story, not just the characters
- Let players feel powerful even when afraid — knowledge is power, even when it comes at a terrible cost
- Provide opportunities to confront and overcome fears — sometimes the only way forward is through the heart of madness
- Balance terror with moments of triumph — even in the darkest places, hope can flicker like a candle in the void

Sanity Management:

- Make sanity loss feel meaningful and personal — each loss is a piece of the character's humanity
- Let it change how characters perceive and interact with the world — reality becomes negotiable
- Provide ways to recover or adapt to mental trauma — some wounds heal, others become scars that define the character
- Avoid making characters useless when sanity is low — madness can be a form of knowledge

11.3 Narrative Techniques

Player Agency:

- Give players meaningful choices, even when options seem limited — every decision feeds the entity, but some feed it more than others
- Let their decisions have real consequences — the university remembers everything
- Provide multiple approaches to problems — sometimes the only way forward is through knowledge, sometimes through violence
- Respect their courage to face the horror head-on — bravery in the face of cosmic insignificance is its own form of heroism

Unreliable Information:

- Not all sources are trustworthy — the entity speaks through every voice
- Clues may be misleading or incomplete — knowledge is a weapon that cuts both ways
- NPCs might be lying, mistaken, or hiding crucial information — trust is a luxury they cannot afford
- Let players discover the truth through investigation and deduction — the university rewards those who seek understanding

12 Appendix: Additional Resources

12.1 Character Options

Recommended Backgrounds:

- Scholar of Fractured Truths (Wizard archetype) — one who has glimpsed forbidden knowledge and lived to regret it
- The Chronicler of Consequences (Bard archetype) — one who records the price of every choice
- The Caretaker of Cycles (Druid archetype) — one who understands that all things must end
- The Guild-Approved Shadow (Rogue archetype) — one who moves through darkness without being consumed
- The Border-Warden (Ranger archetype) — one who patrols the spaces between worlds

Useful Skills:

- Lore (Essential for understanding the entity) — knowledge that predates human civilization
- Investigation (Key for discovering clues) — the ability to see patterns in chaos
- Arcana (For dealing with supernatural elements) — magic that bends reality itself
- Insight (To detect corruption in others) — the ability to see the truth behind the mask
- Survival (For navigating the dangerous stacks) — the university is a maze with no exit
- Diplomacy (For dealing with NPCs) — words can be weapons more terrible than any blade
- Stealth (For avoiding corrupted entities) — sometimes the only way to survive is to remain unseen

Suggested Talents:

- Lorekeeper (Recall obscure history or magic) — memory is a form of immortality
- Backlash Soothing (Reduce magical Backlash) — some wounds heal, others become scars
- Silver Tongue (Persuade through speech) — words can reshape reality itself
- Battle Instincts (Re-roll failed defense rolls) — survival is its own form of wisdom
- Iron Stomach (Resist mundane poisons) — the body must be strong to house a mind that has seen too much
- Exceptional Coordination (Follower provides +4 assist dice) — trust is a luxury, but sometimes necessary

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. The stone whispers warnings in a language that predates human speech.
- **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. The salt burns with cold fire when the entity is near.
- **Prayer Book of the Steadfast:** Once per session, allows reroll of failed Spirit + Resolve roll and prevents 1 segment of Dread Clock advancement. The pages turn of their own accord, revealing passages that speak to the character's deepest fears.

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. The voices speak of things that should not be known, and their words carry the weight of cosmic truth.
- **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 SB. The mirror shows not reflection, but possibility — and some possibilities are too terrible to contemplate.
- **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. The shroud is woven from the dreams of the dead, and its wearer becomes a conduit for cosmic knowledge.

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. The university is a place where reality is negotiable and truth comes at a price that can never be fully paid.

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. The entity is not just a threat — it is a presence that reshapes reality itself, making the impossible seem inevitable.

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 SB, +1 Dread segment, disturbing information

Sacred Geometry Perception:

- Wits + Investigation (DV 4) to avoid comprehension effects
- Failure: 2 SB, +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. |