

A Covenant On Fire



Diabolism, Jealousy,
and Revenge in
Mythic Europe

An Ars Magica Playset for Fiasco

by Will Hindmarch

A Covenant on Fire

Credits

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Boilerplate

This playset is an accessory for the Fiasco roleplaying game by Bully Pulpit Games.

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"When you play, play *bard*." - Theodore Roosevelt

The Score

The Fires of Reason

The wizards of Mythic Europe dare to seek knowledge and wisdom in a perilous medieval world that wants them dead. The Church, the laity, the fay, and Hell itself seek to snuff out or abuse the magic of the Order of Hermes — the order of wizards to which you belong. For sanctuary against these threats, wizards gather together in castle-like covenants to study, experiment, and strive for a better world. Think of them as collegiate communities, castles of wisdom fortified against the world without.

Your covenant, Mistle Lake, failed at the wisdom part and burned down. Only one wizard survived—a young man called Veritius—and he lays dying in a nearby abbey. Now the local church's Inquisitor has come calling for answers from that lone soul whose testimony might shed light on the affairs of the covenant. So Veritius tells the Inquisitor the tale—or, at least, a *version* of the tale—of the covenant's downfall. He may be delirious, vengeful, hopeful, seeking absolution, or looking to cover someone's tracks.

We hear Veritius' tale from his sickbed, safe in a monastery, as he relates it to the Inquisitor. See the next pages for ways this wrinkles play to create a unique fiasco.

This fiasco is all about hindsight, perspective, and the nature of truth in a sordid world of zealotry and heresy. Also, lies.

Movie Night

The Name of the Rose, The Reckoning, Cadfael

How This Works

Hearsay and Heresy

To pull this off, observe some procedures special to this playset:

- Veritius cannot be any one player's character. Veritius isn't anyone's character, he's everyone's character.
- Whoever establishes the scene voices the Inquisitor for that scene. Do it by asking a question or demanding to know what happened when...
- Whoever resolves the scene voices Veritius for that scene, explaining how it all turned out the way it did.
- It's possible to play this story out by portraying Veritius and the Inquisitor only through their voices, like narration, to keep the emphasis on what happens *in* your scenes, not *between* your scenes. Try it!
- Veritius and the Inquisitor speak about the covenant in the past tense.
- Hearsay is a thing. Veritius can comment on or talk about scenes he wasn't present for, just as the Inquisitor can.

Omniscience and Lying Narrators

If you want, you can separate Veritius' narration from your descriptions of some or every scene to make it so that what you *play* is The Truth and what Veritius says to the Inquisitor is just what Veritius says to the Inquisitor.

The point is that you have two channels of information happening here: Veritius' narration (like a voiceover) and what happens "on stage" or "on screen" during play. Narration's at its most potent when it reports things we can't experience through the rest of the medium — interior thoughts, smells, hindsight, etc. — so use that to your advantage.

Ask yourself: What does Veritius share and why? What does he withhold and why? What does the Inquisitor want to know and why?

The impulse to surprise your fellow players can create an intriguing (and messy) combination of scenes and narration. That's okay. This can all be tricky to keep sorted, but tricky can be great fun.

Act One Smolders

In the first Act of this story, try to focus on what happens before the covenant catches fire — the simmering schemes and burgeoning bastardry of the place. You have the whole history of the covenant to play with, thanks to hindsight and hearsay, so feel free to flash back, set scenes weeks (or months, or years!) apart and get into all of the sordid dynamics and petty antics at work.

Let the knowledge of the forthcoming fire loom in Act One.

The Tilt Sparks

This playset has its own Tilt table and special procedures for the Tilt stage.

First, when Act One is over and it's time for the Tilt, whoever most recently voiced the Inquisitor should say either "Let's talk now about the fire and the end of the covenant" or something similar that reminds everyone why we're here. "Yes, yes, but what about the fire?" works, and so does "You're stalling, knave! How did the covenant come to burn?"

The standard Tilt table contains a lovely element (6.2) that reads "something precious is on fire." That's a given here. The covenant is precious and it'll be a smoking ruin by the end of all this. So that's not a Tilt element in this playset; don't count it toward this playset's Tilt. Instead, use the Tilt table in this playset to get your new elements for Act Two.

Act Two is on Fire

In Act Two, things fall apart. The actual fire might happen immediately, and thus be a backdrop for the whole Act, or it might not occur until the final scene — or sometime in between those extremes. That's fine. With the fire as a foregone conclusion, you might focus on *why* it happens or what happens as a result of it.

You're making a lot of it up as you go, so make the most of that freedom and of the iron-clad touchstones you have: the covenant burns, Veritius survives, and the Inquisitor's inquisitive.

But *why* is all that true? And *is* it, really? Maybe it turns out the Inquisitor doesn't really care, Veritius isn't really there or alive or who he seems, or the fire was metaphorical. Go nuts. Worst-case scenario is your tangled tale of hearsay and heresy turns into a knotted fiasco. Good times.

Relationships...

1 of the order

- ◻ The odd wizard and the conformist
- ◻◦ The transmuter and the crafter
- ◻◦◦ The fire-wizard and the water-wizard
- ◻◻◦ The creator and the destroyer
- ◻◻◻ Both out of favor with the Order
- ◻◻◻◻ Both rising stars within the Order

2 of learning

- ◻ The wizened master and the wary apprentice
- ◻◦ One had a theory, the other had practice
- ◻◦◦ Students of the same long-dead master
- ◻◻◦ Students of the same living master, Balthazar the Wise
- ◻◻◻ Secretly studied the same forbidden arts
- ◻◻◻◻ Each was aware of the other's dreadful secret

3 of mystery

- ◻ Both had a history with the fay folk
- ◻◦ Both had lost something valuable and not admitted it
- ◻◦◦ Both heard voices
- ◻◻◦ Each kept a spell secret from the covenant
- ◻◻◻ Both traded their mysteries for secret power
- ◻◻◻◻ Each kept their infernal contact from the church

4 of earthly bond

- ☐ Recruited into the Order by the same wizard
- ☐ Born of the same mundane father
- ☐ Widowed on the same day
- ☐ Indebted to the same mortal lord
- ☐ Cohorts in the same mundane hobby
- ☐ Both witness to the same mortal sin

5 of strife

- ☐ Survived an ill-fated expedition for magical artifacts
- ☐ Rivals for the same secret knowledge
- ☐ Allied by hatred alone
- ☐ Rivals for the attention of Balthazar the Wise
- ☐ Each used the grogs to spy on the other
- ☐ Rivals for the same wicked treasure

6 of danger

- ☐ One was wanted for the other's crime
- ☐ Allied by lust alone
- ☐ One's experiment hurt the other
- ☐ Each held half of an unholy artifact
- ☐ Bound together by a contract with the faeries
- ☐ One banished the other's demon ... for a time

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Needs...

1 of base mundanity

- • Such as drink and debauchery
- •• Such as romantic love
- ••• Such as material treasure
- •••• Such as platonic love
- ••••• Such as mortal forgiveness
- •••••• Such as carnal knowledge

2 for precious knowledge

- • Once thought lost
- •• Of artifacts kept hidden by the elders
- ••• Kept cloistered by the church
- •••• Of noble schemes against the covenant
- ••••• Of medicine and the flesh
- •••••• From hellish sources

3 for new power

- • Over the mortal world
- •• Over the covenant itself
- ••• Over the church
- •••• Over yourself
- ••••• Over death
- •••••• Over Hell's agents

4 for secret masters

- ◻ • Among the fay, who know your fate
- ◻ • Within the Order, like Balthazar the Wise
- ◻ • Of holy guise, who would burn your house
- ◻ • Of noble guise, who would pull your strings
- ◻ • Long thought dead
- ◻ • Such as the creature Agonex, what claims to be a demon

5 for betterment

- ◻ • Through holy absolution
- ◻ • Through wisdom and understanding
- ◻ • Through survival of mundane ordeals
- ◻ • Through survival of mythic ordeals
- ◻ • Through magical alteration of the self
- ◻ • Through survival of profane ordeals

6 of profane design

- ◻ • To deceive the pious and the priests
- ◻ • To found a new covenant atop this one's ruin
- ◻ • To salt the ashes of the church
- ◻ • To rule the nobility through magic
- ◻ • To serve no master ever again
- ◻ • To rule Hell from Earth

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Locations...

1 The outer covenant

- The covenant's gatehouse, guarded by grogs
- The feast hall, stinking of something burnt
- What was once meant to be a chapel
- The storehouse, stacked with sacks of grain
- The infirmary, smelling of mustard and blood
- The trophy room, lined with animal heads

2 The mortal world

- The market in the village
- The tavern near the bridge
- The orphanage, overseen by Sister Helena
- The Duke's celebrated castle
- The potter's field with two graves open
- The crossroads, marked by a crow's cage

3 holy ground

- The well-tended monastery at the edge of the county
- The village graveyard
- The handsome but weather-worn village church itself
- The land cleared for a cathedral yet unbuilt
- A reliquary guarded by a paladin
- A monk's cell, flecked with blood

4 The inner covenant

- The locked door of the library
- ◻ A laboratory for crafting charms and trinkets
- ◻ The observatory, its lens pointed at a telling target
- ◻ The herb garden, guarded by a monster
- ◻ A laboratory devoted to potions and poultices
- ◻ The sealed laboratory of Avarus, who never returned

5 sanctums and secrets

- Your sanctum, behind a hidden door
- ◻ A treasure vault, hidden by magic
- ◻ A private chapel, not as secret as you thought
- ◻ A faerie circle, ringed by fragrant mushrooms
- ◻ The Duke's hunting lodge, guarded by a beast
- ◻ A pit for binding devils

6 not of earthly purview

- The lair of a griffin, littered with bones
- ◻ The bones of a dragon, littered with coins
- ◻ A roost for a fiery bird
- ◻ A ghostly room where it is always night
- ◻ The mossy tower of Estellia of Fay, when it's visible
- ◻ A summoning circle ringed by an iron palisade

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Objects...

1 of the mundane world

- • A jug of dark oil
- • A golden goblet
- • A needle and thread
- • A phial of poppy juice
- • A riderless horse
- • A burning torch, one of many

2 of the martial world

- • Caltrops on the ground
- • A bright new dagger, streaked with blood
- • A banner meant to never touch the ground
- • A kite shield, bloody on the wrong side
- • A well-worn and familiar bastard sword
- • A helmet deformed by fire

3 thought sacred

- • A finely wrought cross on a simple leather cord
- • A wedding ring in want for a finger
- • A stained-glass window depicting a pious knight
- • A standing stone sacred to a vanished people
- • The drawings of a visionary's cathedral
- • One illuminated page depicting a priest denying temptation

4 of the fag

- One iron nail
- One gossamer wing
- A faerie hound eager to hunt
- A wordless song that never stops
- A flitting wisp of willful fire
- The hoof of a slain faerie steed

5 of magical origin

- The potion that rendered them silent
- The ring that saved a life
- The staff etched with spells
- The missing page
- A vision of a distant day
- The beast that used to be a man

6 from hell?

- A chain, red hot at one end
- A lie that cannot be unsaid
- Ashes on the wind
- An icy candle giving off darkness
- A horned human skull
- Agonex's flaming tongue

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Tilt Table...

1 mayhem

- ◻• A rampage without merit or mission
- ◻•• A frantic chase
- ◻••• A demon (perhaps metaphorical) gets loose
- ◻•••• Magnificent self-destruction
- ◻••••• A cold reckoning of a grudge boiling
- ◻•••••• Passion, misdirected

2 tragedy

- ◻• Death ordained by heaven
- ◻•• A death cheapened by happenstance
- ◻••• Pain most confusing
- ◻•••• Death as foretold
- ◻••••• Confusion most damning
- ◻•••••• An ugly strife, a gruesome demise

3 innocence

- ◻• Someone's innocence is found wanting
- ◻•• A neighbor wanders into the troubles
- ◻••• The wrong soul is thought innocent
- ◻•••• Fire spreads to someone undeserving
- ◻••••• Love rears its many heads
- ◻•••••• Chivalry worsens someone's pain

4 guilt

- ◻ A confession ignored or hidden
- ◻◦ A confession brought on by new conscience
- ◻◦◦ The wrong confession
- ◻◻◦ An invented confession
- ◻◻◻◦ Manufactured proof of evil
- ◻◻◻◻◦ A reckoning through a trial of combat

5 paranoia

- ◻ A stranger arrives from distant authority
- ◻◦ What might be happenstance is revealed as a scheme
- ◻◦◦ An unexpected meeting breeds conspiracy
- ◻◻◦ Scheming fates make a fool of a king, metaphorical or no
- ◻◻◻◦ Betrayal by a friend most trusted
- ◻◻◻◻◦ Someone who has been watching takes action

6 failure

- ◻ A foolish plan, executed masterfully
- ◻◦ A truth goes untrusted and thought a lie
- ◻◦◦ A mere ember ignites something terrible
- ◻◻◦ A good endeavor unravels
- ◻◻◻◦ Something thought buried rises anew
- ◻◻◻◻◦ Fear leads to a fateful failure

...for a Covenant on Fire

A Doomed Covenant's Insta-setup

Relationships Within the Covenant

For three players...

- * Of The Order: Both rising stars within the Order
- * Of Learning: The wizened master and the wary apprentice
- * Of Earthly Bond: Both witness to the same mortal sin

For four players, add...

- * Of Danger: Allied by lust alone

For five players, add...

- * Of Mystery: Each kept a spell secret from the covenant

Needs Within the Covenant

For three players...

- * For Betterment: Through holy absolution

For four or five players, add...

- * For New Power: Over the covenant itself

Locations Within the Covenant

For three or four players...

- * The Inner Covenant: The sealed laboratory of Avarus, who never returned

For five players, add...

- * The Outer Covenant: What was once meant to be a chapel

Objects Within the Covenant

For three, four or five players...

- * From Hell: A lie that can not be unsaid