

STRAW BOSS



JR EVANS

A WORLD OF
ADVENTURE FOR

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

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Straw Boss

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this
work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, real cultists, cult realists,
doomsday cultists, super-happy-good-time cultists, RPGs-are-the-Devil cultists,
or that pancake who totally looks like Elvis and is whispering blasphemies to
me right now, RIGHT NOW, is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.
Thank you. Thankyouverramuch.

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INTRODUCTION

Let's tell a story of sacrifice and corruption—our own and that of the world around us. Let's explore what happens when a myth or religion refuses to be forgotten, when an idea fights so hard to be remembered that it claws its way into reality. Let's meet the people who help these ideas become flesh, who make the angels sing and the demons howl. Let's hunt them down. We'll clean up the mess they leave behind and try to minimize the body count. Let's see how long we last.

Our characters were raised to do this. We were brought up by a cult dedicated to the idea that belief defines reality—and sometimes people believe in bad things. Each of us was adopted into the cult at a young age and immersed in its teachings. We are a family, and like any family we have our secrets. Outsiders are rarely allowed into our compound. We are seen as fanatics, extremists, and freaks. We are all of that and more.

The cult has cells all over the world, but ours keeps an eye on Middle America. The Heartland. The Bible Belt. Faith here is strong, but when people lose their faith, they sometimes become lost with it. They long to be part of something bigger than themselves again and may not care about the price that needs to be paid. When things get out of hand, our Covenant is sent out to make things right by whatever means we think are necessary. If we fail, the world becomes a little more unstable, as our beliefs get called into question. Also, a lot of people tend to die.



Straw Boss will help set up these stories, but the really twisted details will come from you. To get in the right mood you might want to read *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman or the *Preacher* graphic novels by Garth Ennis. Listen to some Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. Eat dinner at a gas station. Watch something burn... but don't get all weird on me. If you want to go the extra mile, you might also check out *Ribbons* by J R Evans, the novel that this setting is based on (available at Amazon.com or DriveThruFiction.com).

With all of that rolling around in your head, find some friends who like to tell gritty stories, who don't mind if their heroes take a little punishment from time to time. Pitch this game setting. If none of them give you the finger, then tear open a fresh bag of pork rinds and hand out the character sheets.

In *Straw Boss*, each player takes on the role of a Scholar. The Scholars of the Hieroglyphical Monad is a cult that has existed since John Dee started advising Queen Elizabeth I back in the 1500s. They follow the teachings of Dee and his particular blend of science, magic, and religion. Their main theorem—their driving force—is the idea that belief can bring about reality, and that there are patterns to belief that can grant great power. These patterns are called monads.

The Scholars aren't the only ones who have discovered these patterns. Priests, shamans, witches, and oracles, each may have stumbled onto something from time to time. Some may have even learned to expand their power and pass it on to disciples. But none of them have studied the nature of these patterns as deeply as the Scholars. And few of them understand how little control they actually have, until it's too late.

The Covenant is what binds our characters together. Before the Scholars send a team out into the world, they perform a ritual that acknowledges their sacrifice and recognizes that their lives are in each other's hands. They make an oath to one another, and that oath becomes a part of them. To help represent this, players will fill out a joint character sheet for their Covenant. Throughout the game it will represent how strong their bond is...or isn't. It will also have resources and aspects that any player character can call upon when needed. More on that later.

Characters are created following a similar process to *Fate Core*—except that the characters are each possessed by a demon. Well, something between an angel and a demon, anyway. The characters are going to need help as they go up against supernatural forces. The characters are bound to each other, but they are also each bound to a Familiar. They sacrificed...something...to entice the Familiar to work with them. They gave up some of themselves to tap into something greater. And it usually works for a while before taking its toll. To track that, we'll use a new skill called Control and a new mechanic called corruption.

Prepared as best they can be, the Covenant will be sent to investigate reports of situations and events that could have been the residue of myth or religion bleeding into reality. Stigmata, or the sacred heart appearing in scorch marks on toast, could be minor examples. When bodies start piling up, it's usually the result of something more substantial. The shades of dead ideas can get lonely. Sometimes they can reach out and touch somebody just as lonely as they are. They are called the Rephaim and they need to be dealt with.

That's where our story begins.

CREATING YOUR CHARACTERS AND FAMILIARS

The Scholars isolate themselves from the rest of the world, but they are not disconnected. They don't shun modern advances or technologies. In fact, they embrace them. They have been around long enough to accumulate tremendous resources, which gives them the freedom to allow their members to follow their natural talents and interests as far as they can. If there is certain equipment or rare materials needed to further a member's education or training, it can be delivered in a matter of days—as long as it's in service of the Scholars, of course.

That said, Scholars are expected to enter into a Covenant fairly soon after their training ends. They will be competent, but they will not have a ton of experience yet. Their background and relationships are also closely tied to their life on the compound. This is reflected in how characters are created in *Straw Boss*. The main differences from *Fate Core* are:

- **Aspects** are not related to the typical Phase Trio. Instead, they are created as players help each other tell the story of their life on the compound.
- **Skills** are the same as in *Fate Core*, with the addition of a skill called Control.
- **Stress tracks** are the same as in *Fate Core*, but characters will also have a corruption track.
- **Refresh** starts at 2, rather than 3. Instead of three free stunts, characters start with a Familiar and one free stunt.



Cult and Compound

Before you start digging into your characters, you'll want to describe the world they grew up in. We know they are part of a cult called the Scholars, and we know they grew up on a compound, but it may be more interesting if we create the details of the cult and the compound together.

We know some things about the cult already:

- It has existed since the 1500s
- It freely mixes science and religion
- It has cells all over the world, and your cell is in the southern United States
- It has enough resources to provide top-notch training and education to its members

With that in mind, make sure everyone at the table, including the GM, has a notecard to write on. Discuss the cult and its mission together. Brainstorm some broad concepts. When one of those concepts really excites you, write it down on your notecard. Once everybody has a concept written down, pass all the cards to the right. You should be looking at somebody else's notecard now. Read the concepts on that card, and flesh it out by adding your own details, just a sentence or two. If you don't have anything you'd like to add, just pass it on to the next player. Continue this until everybody has had a chance to expand on each idea.

When you get your card back, check everything over. If there are any elements you would like to veto or modify, make note. Then take turns summarizing these details to the group. Call out any changes you would like to make. You'll have final say over the details on your card, but check in with the group to see if anybody has any objections.

If you are having a hard time coming up with an idea or detail, here are some questions to use as inspiration:

- How does the cult isolate itself from the rest of the world?
- How does the cult stay connected to the rest of the world?
- What is the leader of your cell like?

Next, we'll do the same for the Compound:

- What US state is the compound in?
- What physically cuts off the compound from the area around it?
- Where does everybody gather in the compound for announcements or celebrations?

Once we have a strong foundation of where the characters come from, we'll move on to the aspects of how they dealt with life in the compound and their training.

Aspects

Each Scholar faces unique challenges and sacrifices before entering into a Covenant. That said, there are several shared experiences that the members go through and deal with that shape who they become. To flesh that out, we will explore some of what they face while living on the compound, expressing those experiences as aspects:

- **Accepting Your Fate: providence aspect**
- **Discovering Your Role in the Order: high concept**
- **Finding the Strength to Persevere: trouble**
- **Binding Your Familiar: sacrifice aspect**
- **Entering Into a Covenant: oath aspect**

Accepting Your Fate (Providence Aspect)

New members are always brought in as young children. They are adopted by a family who is already indoctrinated into the Scholars. Some children come from orphanages, some from foster families. Others may be brought in off the streets, or in some rare cases right after being delivered by their birth mother. Some of the adoptions are legal, perhaps with the aid of a well-placed member of the cult or a nudge from something more arcane. Others are brought in without a paper trail at all.

In most cases, though, there is a clear moment when a child steps out of the real world and into the world of the compound. For some this is scary, and maybe for others it is a relief. This first experience with the cult can fundamentally shape the child's relationship with the Scholars going forward.

Players, think about how young your character was when they came to the compound, and answer the following questions on a notecard:

- When the door to your bedroom closed, leaving you alone for the first time, what were your feelings?
- Did you cry yourself to sleep or did you find comfort in something or someone?
- Which other member of your Covenant did you meet first?

Once you're all done, read your answers to the other players. The Covenant member you listed as meeting first will reply with their first impression of you.

Think about how this affects your character today to come up with your **providence aspect**. This aspect should say something about your outlook on life as a Scholar, good or bad, and how you tend to tackle the challenges thrown at you.

Examples:

- "NEVER CRY TWICE FOR THE SAME REASON."
- "IF LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS, GIVE LIFE THE FINGER...STUPID LEMONS."



Discovering Your Role in the Order (High Concept)

The Scholars have been around a long time, and they have access to vast resources. Their lives on the compound are disciplined and sheltered, but they are also well supplied. The Scholars want highly motivated and highly skilled members. While learning the fundamentals of John Dee's research, students are encouraged to follow their own interests and talents as far as they would like to go. Students might go from feeding chickens in the morning to dissecting cadavers or writing code in the afternoon.

That said, it is expected that these skills will serve the cult in some way, and students are constantly reminded of the dangers they will face outside the compound.

Think about how you want to serve the Scholars and your role in the Covenant, then answer the following questions on a notecard:

- What do you excel at?
- What makes you a valuable member of the team?
- Which other member of your Covenant is the most critical of your skills?

Read your answers to the other players. The Covenant member you listed as being most critical will reply with their impression of your proficiency.

With this in mind, come up with your **high concept**. This aspect should say something about your expertise and how you get your job done.

Examples:

- ACADEMIC OBSESSED WITH JOHN DEE'S TEACHINGS AND THE DIVINE POWER HE CONTROLLED.
- ZEALOT TRAINED TO DEFEND HER FELLOW SCHOLARS WITH HER LIFE OR THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

Finding the Strength to Persevere (Trouble)

About a quarter of the children brought into the cult don't make it into a Covenant. We are all flawed, and the particular pressures Scholars face can amplify these deficiencies. A minor obsession with cleanliness could lead to obsessive-compulsive disorder, a hot-headed temper could explode into berserk rage. If we don't find a way to deal with these flaws, then our Familiars may exploit them.

Think about your character's main flaw and answer the following questions on a notecard:

- What has often gotten you into trouble?
- What gives you the strength to control this from getting out of hand most of the time?
- Which other member of your Covenant recognizes your flaw and helps get you back on track?

Read your answers to the other players. The Covenant member you listed as supporting you will reply with an example of when things really got out of hand and what they did to help.

With this in mind, come up with your **trouble**. This aspect should be something that is always tempting you or nagging at the back of your mind.

Examples:

- "I'D RATHER RISK MYSELF THAN MY FAMILY."
- "WHEN AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED—CHEAT."

Binding Your Familiar (Sacrifice Aspect)

Officially you are not a Scholar until you have bound a Familiar. It shows your mastery of John Dee's teachings and is the final test of your skill, knowledge, and will. It is dangerous, and not everyone survives it. Binding a Familiar is making an agreement with, and a commitment to, a supernatural entity. It agrees to live with you—and through you—for a time. It will lend you its power and expertise over its sphere of influence. It wants something in exchange, though. A sacrifice. This sacrifice isn't usually something you can touch or feel. It's something within you that is a vital part of you. *Or was*. It shows the Familiar that you mean business and that you are willing to give up part of yourself to seal the pact. The key is not to give up too much.

Think about your other aspects and everything that helped you get through your training. Then answer the following questions on a notecard:

- In what way are you still innocent?
- When things are tough, what pleasure do you take in life?
- What memory brings a smile to your face?

Read your answers to the other players. Choose a player to speak for your Familiar, who will give you a choice between two things it is willing to take as a sacrifice. These should be something valuable but intangible, like a corrupted memory or a particular joy drained out of your day-to-day life. You must agree to one of them.

Think about how this loss affects your character to come up with your **sacrifice aspect**. This aspect should be something that you feel missing every day and that you long to get back.

Examples:

- “MUSIC GIVES ME MIGRAINES.”
- “I REMEMBER HIS KISS BUT NOT HIS FACE.”

We'll flesh out the details of your Familiar later.

Entering Into a Covenant (Oath Aspect)

Before you go out into the world as a team of Scholar agents, you must first enter into a Covenant. The Covenant is a ritual and oath that binds your team together, and strengthens you toward a common cause. To help represent this, we'll track the details of your team's Covenant on its own sheet.

Think about your mission and its importance, then as a team discuss the following:

- What makes a good team?
- What makes us strong?
- Why are we necessary?

With that in mind, work together to come up with a single oath that each member of the Covenant makes when they join. It can be short and simple. This oath is an aspect shared by each member of the Covenant. Record it on the Covenant sheet rather than your individual character sheets.

Examples:

- “WE ARE THE KEEPERS OF SECRETS AND THE CUSTODIANS OF MYSTERIES.”
- “WE ARE THE DAM AGAINST THE RISING TIDE OF CORRUPTION, AND THE LIGHTHOUSE TO THE INNOCENT.”

Finishing the Covenant Sheet

Your team will also decide on the special training that you all went through together to help you prepare for the challenges you would face. To represent this, you can add a stunt to the Covenant sheet. This stunt can even be one of the new Control stunts described later (page 11).

Finally, the Covenant sheet shows how invested you all are in maintaining the strength of the team. The more invested you are, the more access your Covenant will have to its shared resources.

At the beginning of the game, to invest in the Covenant, each member places one of their fate points on one of the circles in the middle of the Covenant sheet. Add the fate points from left to right, one fate point per circle. There are five circles, but if the team is investing more than five fate points, stack the extras on the rightmost circle.

This track is a shared pool of fate points that any Covenant member can spend from at any time. Also, while a circle holds a fate point, the Covenant members gain the circle's benefit listed underneath it:

- Access to a Covenant aspect
- Access to a Covenant stunt
- -1 corruption at the end of each scene

As fate points are spent from and added to the shared pool during play, these benefits will lock and unlock. When you spend shared fate points, remove them from right to left. Spending a fate point from the shared pool also causes tension for the team somehow. The player who spent a shared fate point should describe how their actions caused or contributed to that strain. Maybe they used up team funds or broke protocol. Or maybe they're just getting on everybody's nerves.

You can add fate points back to the pool by playing a short scene where you help strengthen the team or relieve some of the tension you are all feeling, taking a personal fate point and adding it back to the Covenant sheet. These scenes should play out similarly to reflection scenes or recovery scenes as described in the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 63).

Skills


Your character sheet has two skill pyramids. One is right-side up, and is related to "Who You Think You Are." These are the skills your Scholar was trained in. The other skill pyramid is upside down. That one is for your Familiar. We'll fill in your Scholar's skills first.

You'll fill in these skills just like you would in *Fate Core*: you get four Average (+1) skills, three Fair (+2), two Good (+3) and one Great (+4).


On your character sheet, the slots to fill in are dark. Faded slots can be used later as your character advances. Feel free to leave some of your Average (+1) skills blank for now and fill them in during play.


Control


Control is a new skill available in *Straw Boss*. Where Will is a measure of your inner resolve and mental fortitude, Control represents your ability to project your willpower and beliefs on outside forces. To Scholars, belief is power, so the more strongly you believe in your ability to affect the arcane powers or supernatural entities you encounter, the more effective you will be.

 **Overcome:** When you roll a corruption die, calling on your Familiar to aid you, you must roll an overcome action using Control to prevent the Familiar from surging forward into your consciousness and taking over your body for the rest of the scene. The difficulty of this roll equals the number of marked boxes on your corruption track.

Control may also be used to manipulate psychic or supernatural energy, such as when binding a Familiar or removing the influence of supernatural entities like the Rephaim.

 **Create an Advantage:** Control may be used to place aspects on yourself that represent the preparation involved in performing a supernatural ritual or triggering the power of a monad. On its own, Control cannot be used to create aspects or cause magical effects unrelated to a ritual. For example, you can't use Control to spontaneously light someone on fire in the middle of a conflict. A spell or monad might be able to do that, but not Control by itself.

 **Attack:** Control doesn't cause harm on its own, but it may be used to determine the effectiveness of an attack based on a supernatural power, spell, or monad.

 **Defend:** Control is used to defend against supernatural attacks that try to influence your actions or perception by clouding your mind. It may also be used to defend against psychic attacks that try to inflict mental stress.

CONTROL STUNTS

Demon Heart: You are able to let your Familiar come right up to the surface of your body in order to gain access to more of its power. You hope you can force it back down afterwards. Mark a corruption box to use your Familiar's monad, paying any costs the monad might require, and then make a corruption roll to see if your Familiar takes over for a while.

Devil's Advocate: When facing great stress or harm, you are able to retreat into yourself and release control of your body to your Familiar. Let them deal with the pain—they probably deserve it anyway. Once per session, you can mark a corruption box to avoid taking a consequence. Then, you automatically fail your corruption roll.

Hell to Pay: You are able to funnel the stress and exertion of manipulating arcane forces back down to your Familiar instead of feeling the effects yourself. Some Familiars feed off it, others may repay you later. When you use a monad, you may pay for it by marking a corruption box instead of spending a fate point.

Creating Your Familiars

It's hard to say what a Familiar is, because every religion or legend may describe them differently. Demon, devil, angel, djinn, spirit, loa—most cultures have them. The Scholars classify them as divine servants, but that's like pointing to a dog and saying, "Hey look, it's a mammal!" Maybe the more important question is "Who is your Familiar?"

Your Familiar has agreed to travel with you for a time. You have agreed to its price. It demanded a sacrifice, but it also wants to experience the physical world. It sees what you see, hears what you hear, and feels what you feel. It knows your thoughts, at least the ones that bubble up to the surface. It will wait for its chance to take control for a while, and then spread its influence if it can. It may help you in your work, but it has an agenda of its own.

To find out what that agenda is, let's give your Familiar a few aspects.

Familiar Aspects

Your Familiar's first aspect is its **office**. A Familiar's office is its mission or agenda. Your Familiar thinks of this as its reason for being, and it is similar to your character's high concept. Look to your character's aspects for inspiration. What kind of angel or demon might be attracted to your character?

Here are a couple examples:

- I HAVE SUFFERED IN PURGATORY AND KNOW ALL FORMS OF TORMENT. I CAN EASE ONE'S SUFFERING OR BIND THEM IN CHAINS.
- I AM THE TREADER OF FORGOTTEN TRAILS. I LEAD PEOPLE ASTRAY OR LIGHT THEIR PATH AS IT PLEASES ME.

Each Familiar has two other aspects: a vice and a virtue. Since we're in the Bible Belt, we'll base these on the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Heavenly Virtues.

- Its **vice** is something your Familiar will tend to indulge in if it gets the chance.
- Its **virtue** is something your Familiar strongly wants to see more of in humanity.

Pick one of each, but note that certain virtues cannot be paired with certain vices.

| Vices | Virtues |
|----------|---|
| Envy | Kindness (cannot be paired with Envy) |
| Gluttony | Temperance (cannot be paired with Gluttony) |
| Greed | Charity (cannot be paired with Greed) |
| Lust | Chastity (cannot be paired with Lust) |
| Pride | Humility (cannot be paired with Pride) |
| Sloth | Diligence (cannot be paired with Sloth) |
| Wrath | Patience (cannot be paired with Wrath) |

Familiar Approaches

When your Familiar is in control of your body (page 21), it acts more out of instinct than any specific skill. To represent this, your Familiar uses the approaches from *Fate Accelerated* rather than skills:

Careful
Clever

Flashy
Forceful

Quick
Sneaky

Give your Familiar three Fair (+2) approaches, two Good (+3) approaches, and one Great (+4) approach.

Familiar Monad

Your Familiar starts with one **monad** (page 22), which it can use when it's in control. Your character and your Familiar share fate points. When your character is in control, you can only use your Familiar's monad if you have a stunt that lets you.

Familiar Name

Finally, name your Familiar. Here's a few ideas from some semi-ancient texts I found:

Agares
Beleth

Gremory
Marbas

Murmur
Valac



CREATING YOUR WORLD

We've taken a look at where our characters came from, as well as the training and trials that helped shaped who they are. By this point, we should have some strong relationships and motivations that help us draw the characters into the story. Next we need to know what they'll be up against.

The Vigil

Since we're telling a story about corruption and sacrifice, we'll want to describe the corner of the world that our Scholars keep an eye on. To help with this, we'll use the **Vigil sheet**.

Players, you'll work together to brainstorm interesting locations and people that you can weave in and out of your story. Your Scholars have taken an oath to monitor and protect this area from the corruption and influence of forces that seek to break it down. It's more than a job or assignment to them, it's their sacred duty. To help remind us of this, we'll call it our **Vigil**.

Because a Vigil may cross multiple cities and states, it's handy to name the territory it covers. The name can be anything you want, but hopefully it reflects the personality of the cult you've created. Once you have a name, write it down in the box labeled "Vigil Designation" on the sheet.

There's a map of the southern US on the Vigil sheet. Select three or four adjacent states and mark them on the map as the "Vigil Territory." You can also mark roughly where your cult's compound is located. In the box labeled "Cult & Compound," record all the information you came up with on notecards when you brainstormed the details of your Scholar cell.

Some of those details may have hinted at story hooks or seeds. It may be a good idea to review those with the group and discuss the kinds of trouble that may be brewing in the Vigil. Follow the process in *Fate Core* (page 22) to come up with your Vigil's **current issue** and **impending issue**.

Here are two examples:

Current Issue: THE FAITHLESS ARE VANISHING WITHOUT A TRACE

Impending Issue: REVEREND BILLY SAINT'S CORRUPT TENT REVIVAL IS GROWING

Current Issue: THE STIGMATA MURDERS

Impending Issue: THE UPCOMING DEATH SENTENCE OF CULT LEADER LORETTA VANCE HAS TOWNS DIVIDED.

You'll also add **faces** and **places** as you would in *Fate Core*, including additional details describing the face or place's **corruption** or **sacrifice**.

Each location in the Vigil should be slowly—or maybe not so slowly—eroding at the edges. At least, that's how the Scholars see it. The less people care about a place, the less they believe it can be salvaged. The level of a location's decay is a sign of how it may be fading from communal significance and how susceptible it may be to supernatural forces.

To represent this, in each location under “Faces and Places” you'll include some details about its degree of corruption, both physically and spiritually. Spiritually? Yes. In *Straw Boss* a place can be so rooted in the events of its past that it seems to radiate the emotions or trauma people have experienced there. In some cases, a location must be cleansed before other, more-sentient forces can be dealt with. We'll see this later in *Going to Work* (page 24).

Here's an example place:

The I44 overpass near the water treatment plant

Aspect: WHERE JUNKIES GO TO DIE

Corruption: Sometimes the people who call this place “home” experience missing time.

People can be corrupt too, of course. Maybe it's related to one of the issues that drives them, or maybe they've spent too much time in a corrupt place. Often, as a result of dealing with this corruption, people need to sacrifice something to keep themselves going. As we've seen, the Scholars themselves have done this. Most of the important people the Scholars will be dealing with have either lost something that still haunts them, or they have given up something in order to survive. Adding a few notes about their sacrifice will help guide their motivations and actions.

Here's an example face:

Shoeless Joe

Issue: BECAME HOMELESS HIMSELF WHILE TRYING TO HELP THE HOMELESS

Sacrifice: Society is dead to me. Am I a man or a monster? A troll pretending to be a person or a person pretending to be a troll?

Hell Is Other People

As a Scholar, you have a job that'd be hard enough just dealing with corruption and its aftermath in your Vigil. Unfortunately, that's not going to stop things from getting worse. To do that, you're going to have to deal with more than just your average assholes and psychos.

Practitioners

Most of the people in the world have never heard of the Scholars, and if they've heard of John Dee at all, it was most likely as a curious footnote in the history of Queen Elizabeth I. That doesn't mean that nobody else has access to the power that the Scholars devote themselves to. Shaman, witches, wizards, even that crazy cat lady down the street, they all have the potential to draw power from their beliefs. Most don't, but sometimes something strengthens their conviction and crystallizes belief into something more substantial.

The Scholars call these people "Practitioners." They are seen as potentially very dangerous since they've somehow tapped into the mysteries of the universe without any real training. Oh sure, Practitioners may have their complex ideology and precise rituals, but the Scholars see that as a makeshift dam holding back a potential flood.

If you want to add a Practitioner to a location in your Vigil during world-building, or if you want to add one during a scenario, there are a few details that would be good to jot down in addition to the typical stats:

- **Belief:** A summary of the Practitioner's ideology, how they see the forces that shape the universe, and where do they fit in.
- **Intention:** What the Practitioner intends to do with their power. What are their goals and desires?
- **Resolve:** How the Practitioner deals with the corruption in their location. Do they fight it? Do they feed it?

What separates a Practitioner from an everyday fanatic is their access to supernatural power. Each Practitioner gets one or more monads that they can draw on. They will probably call them spells, or prayers, or rituals, rather than monads, but they work the same. Their cost and duration are also the same: 1 fate point and lasting through the end of the scene.

If you are adding Practitioners as part of world-building, you can even create their monads as a group. GMs, if you're creating one on your own, then you will need to add both of the limitations yourself.

Practitioners in your Vigil can vary in importance and complexity, but are generally supporting NPCs or main NPCs as described in *Fate Core* (pages 218–220).

Grigori

Many cultures have the idea of a shepherd watching over mankind or a custodian sent to test us. A wise crone who can see the future. A trickster who sets traps to teach us a lesson. Sometimes they are sent to protect us and we call them angels; sometimes they are sent to run us through a crucible and we call them demons. The Scholars in the Bible Belt refer to these watchers as the Grigori, citing quotes and anecdotes from scripture or the Book of Enoch.

Unlike Familiars or Rephaim, the Grigori are flesh and blood. Their bodies are human, although they can often bend the laws of physics and seem to be more or less immortal. They can bleed and feel pain, but if their bodies are destroyed they tend to turn up again soon or later. They can also call upon supernatural power on par with John Dee's monads.

Most Scholars believe that the Grigori were divine or supernatural entities who have taken physical form. Whether that was a choice or an assignment by some greater power is unknown. Many have been on earth so long that they have become jaded. They've seen all of our good deeds and bad repeated over and over again. They can get bored, or callous, or just plain pissed off. They each have their own agenda and often act as allies to the Scholars, but there's usually a price.

When adding the Grigori to a Vigil, it's good to note the following:

- **Reckoning:** How the Grigori will test or judge mankind. What are they interested in learning?
- **Convictions:** The Grigori's beliefs after having spent generations and lifetimes watching over us. What do they assume about us?
- **Price:** What it will take to gain the Grigori's aid. What do they need in order to forward their own agenda?

A Grigori's power typically relates to its reckoning, but it could also be related to the Grigori's job or station before taking on an earthly body. A fallen angel may have a fondness for pillars of holy fire, while a trickster fox spirit may lean more toward shapeshifting. In most cases, create these powers using the same process you would for creating monads.

Grigori are rare and formidable, both as allies and as enemies. Treat most of them as main NPCs, as outlined in *Fate Core* (page 220), and it may be helpful to record their stats using a regular character sheet. There's an example of a Grigori in the included adventure, *The Thief on the Cross* (page 28).

Rephaim

In the Old Testament, Sheol was described as a place of darkness where all dead things went. It was a place where spirits waited for...whatever came next. The inhabitants of Sheol were called the Rephaim. The Scholars use this term to describe divine or supernatural beings that may once have held power over the living, but have since faded and become forgotten to most. Most, but not all.

Rephaim may have been powerful *ideas* rather than flesh and blood. They could be forgotten gods, or myths, or even urban legends. Lilith, the woman who existed before Eve, could make for a powerful Rephaim. So could Bloody Mary, or Slenderman. The key is that people believed in them once, even if it was only in a nightmare, which brought them to life.



Unlike Familiars, Rephaim seek to enter the world without binding themselves to someone. They typically wait for a person to sink into such despair that they desperately need to believe in something—anything—in order to keep from losing it completely. The Rephaim offer them something to believe in, filling their head with promises and conviction. Giving them a purpose again and a reason to live. The Rephaim create fanatics and use them to erode the world around them. If they make a big enough hole in reality, perhaps the Rephaim can claw their way back in. It's a Scholar's duty to prevent this by any means necessary.

Dealing with one of the Rephaim may be the focus of a scenario or a whole campaign depending on its influence. They typically work through people rather than physically walking the earth, although it's quite possible that they could be encountered face-to-face in a "Thin Spot" someplace in between. We'll take a look at that in "*Cleansing a Lair*" (page 25).

It's good to note:

- **Legend:** How the Rephaim was known or may still be whispered about. What are they remembered for?
- **Agenda:** What the Rephaim wants from the living. How do they plan on getting it?
- **Corruption:** How the Rephaim affects those it comes in contact with. What part of the Rephaim rubs off on them? How does it affect the world around them?

Since most Rephaim haven't fully entered our world, they rely on their followers to carry out their plans. To help them, the Rephaim can channel their powers through their followers. Their powers are created following the same process for creating monads. GMs, it costs you 1 fate point to channel a Rephaim's monad through a follower.

The Rephaim may even take over the body of a follower for a time, much in the same way that a Familiar may take control of a Scholar. GMs, it costs you 1 fate point to give the Rephaim control of a follower for the remainder of the scene.

If you don't have a fate point to spend on channeling a monad or possessing a follower, you may give the follower a moderate or severe mental or physical consequence instead. This represents the Rephaim forcing its way into the follower and taxing their mind or body.

Rephaim are significant adversaries. Create them using the rules for main NPCs from *Fate Core* (page 220). Use approaches rather than skills, the same way you do for Familiars. Their followers can span the range of NPC types. Some could be disposable and work together in mobs, while others may be recurring characters requiring more detail. All followers should have at least one aspect that helps define their connection to the Rephaim.

The included adventure, *The Thief on the Cross* (page 28), focuses on a Rephaim and the chaos his followers can cause.

CORRUPTION AND DOMINION

The Scholars don't really distinguish between angels and demons. They classify both as "divine servants." If you ask the right way and pay the right price, both do pretty much the same thing. Both are vain, both are righteous, and both are willing to get their hands dirty. That makes them useful. You just need to negotiate with them. A little give and take. Corruption and redemption.

Divine servants can become Familiars. It's like entering into a contract with one. The angel or demon—or gremlin, or whatever—will give you a backstage pass to its specific sphere of influence: its **office**. In exchange, it can ride you around like a pony if it wants to. You have to be strong or you will be its plaything.

All Scholars have Familiars. It's their last test before entering into a Covenant. They don't all pass this test, though. Some fall into a coma. Some die. And some need to be tackled to the ground before they snip off the tips of their fingers with gardening shears.

But you have all of your fingertips, so you're probably fine. For now.

The Corruption Die

When you need an edge on your next roll but don't want to spend a fate point, you can roll the **corruption die**. I like to use a green fate die for this, but feel free to use whatever other corruption-y color you have available. Place the die on your Covenant sheet until you need it, to remind everybody that it's available.

To add the corruption die to your roll, you'll need to mark a box on your **corruption track** on your character sheet before you roll your dice. These boxes are marked from left to right. They don't have values like physical and mental stress boxes; all that matters is whether there's an empty box to mark.

Once you have marked a corruption box, roll the corruption die along with your other four dice on your next roll. Describe how your Familiar is helping you with your action. The description could be subtle, or not so much, depending on the nature of your Familiar. Each Familiar has a sphere of influence, its office, but it also has a virtue and vice. On top of that, they are badass demons. Typically, they can find a way to help in most situations if you let them. Choose the best four of the five die results, even if the corruption die wasn't helpful. Use that total for the value of your roll, and return the die to the Covenant sheet.

You need to get into the VIP section at a club, but the bouncer won't let you past. You're not so good at talking your way around guys like this, but your partner is. You decide to create an advantage to make it a little easier. While your partner starts bullshitting, you lock eyes with the bouncer and put on your best "I'm a badass too" face. You decide this is pretty important, so you let your Familiar out just a little bit. You describe this as a slight rippling under your skin and a barely audible threat that the bouncer's not sure if he heard or not. You mark off a box on your corruption track, and add the corruption die to your roll.

Whenever you mark a corruption box and finish resolving the effect for which you marked the corruption box, you must make a **corruption roll** to see whether you've been corrupted enough to let the Familiar gain control for a while. Total up the number of marked boxes on your corruption track, then roll an overcome action using your Control skill (page 11) against that total. No you can't add a corruption die to this roll, but yes you can invoke aspects. If you tie or succeed, you're fine. Everything's fine.

If you fail, the demon comes tumbling out. Immediately rotate your character sheet so that "The Thing Inside" is at the top. Play the rest of the scene as your Familiar.

Playing as Your Familiar

Transitioning to your Familiar can be pretty abrupt, but your fellow players will help you get into character. Each time you rotate your character sheet, go around the table asking each player to give you a detail of your transformation. This could be a subtle physical change, like your pupils dilating just a bit too much, or a thought running through your head based on your Familiar's vice or virtue. It could also be a lightbulb burning out nearby or the roll of thunder in the distance, some special effect signaling the arrival of your Familiar.

Once you've transformed, follow your office, virtue, and vice. These aspects can be invoked and compelled just like any other. And remember that you have entered into a contract with your Familiar. It will act on its own, but it doesn't want to see you locked away either. Probably.

You'll see that you have a new stress track that replaces all of your others. It's called **Dominion**. It is your only stress track, so both physical and mental stress get absorbed by it. This track has stress boxes equal in number to the corruption you took before you flipped out. Now, when you take stress, erase boxes on this track instead of marking them. Like on mental and physical stress boxes, the number on each box represents how many shifts that box can soak up when you use it. You also don't take consequences. Nor do existing consequence affect you. You're a badass demon!

When you can no longer take Dominion stress, the demon retreats, and you are taken out. You're a competent Scholar though. Whether you get taken out or not, you'll start the next scene with no corruption boxes marked, back as yourself, or at least Who You Think You Are.

Monads

To John Dee, **monads** were a way of viewing and understanding divine patterns in the world around us. Everything could be said to originate from the Primary Monad, and Dee's book, *The Hieroglyphical Monad*, was a study of this original pattern as an attempt to better understand the universe. John Dee had only one lifetime to learn what he could with these patterns, but the Scholars have been around for many generations.

In *Straw Boss*, monads are like magic spells or rituals. They represent the mastery of a small part of a much greater divine pattern, and typically relate to a force or natural law that shapes how we live. They break down these laws and allow the Scholars to bend the rules, hopefully in their favor.

Scholars aren't the only ones to understand these patterns. In fact, Familiars have a monad at their disposal related to their office. With enough control, a Scholar might even be able to access this monad without letting the Familiar run loose.

As a Scholar you can learn a monad at the cost of 1 refresh. You can't start the game with more than one monad, but you may be able to use your Familiar's monad with the right stunt (specifically, Demon Heart). You will have the option of purchasing another monad with refresh when you reach a major milestone.

Using any monad costs 1 fate point.

Players, to create a monad for your character or your Familiar, state a natural law, then state how you can control this law for the remainder of the scene. Then go around the table and ask each other player to come up with a **limitation** to your control. Pick one of these limitations. Give your monad a name.

GMs, you can add your own limitation as well as details of how the monad fits into the game system. If the monad seems too powerful or doesn't fit in with the theme of your game, you may veto it. You may create monads used by NPCs. Those monads should follow a similar pattern, but the limitations are up to your discretion without player input...we'll let it be a surprise!

SUGGESTING GOOD LIMITATIONS

Keep an eye on the themes that have come up so far during character creation and while describing the cult and compound. These themes are good indicators of how gritty or over-the-top your group will want to go with their stories in *Straw Boss*. The limitations on monads you suggest should help reinforce those themes.



Part of your character's job as a Scholar is keeping up on the latest rumors in your Vigil and talking to the witnesses of unexplained phenomena. You think that talking to the living will be very limiting because they are all so caught up in boring stuff like paying rent and taking selfies.

You decide it would be useful for your character to have a monad that would let you talk to the dead. Working with your group, you state a natural law and how you intend to break it with your monad: "The dead cannot speak, but I can give them voice." Then you ask for suggestions on limitations. You get back some good ideas:

- "The dead can only whisper."
- "The dead can only speak using your mouth."
- "The dead must speak in riddles."
- "The dead stop speaking again once they realize they are dead."

You decide to go with "The dead can only speak using your mouth." The GM nods, and then smirks while adding, "And you must consume a small piece of their body."

Sounds great! You give the monad a name and add the following to your character sheet:

Grave Words: The dead cannot speak, but I can give them voice. If I spend a fate point and partake of their flesh, they can speak using my mouth until the end of the scene.

GOING TO WORK

Now that we've set up a rich setting, full of challenges for our characters, we get to see how much punishment they can take, and whether or not they can make the world just a bit safer. Maybe they'll find something along the way to patch the tiny holes in their souls so they can keep fighting a little longer.

Inquisitions

A Covenant spends most of its time keeping an eye on its Vigil, patrolling known points of corruption to make sure things aren't getting worse, and taking action to clean things up when possible. The places and faces you came up with together can help inspire these player-driven goals and actions.

Sometimes a situation will develop that escalates quickly and needs immediate attention. In these cases the Scholars send out a Covenant on a mission called an inquisition. This is usually in response to a clear and imminent threat. While the cause of the threat may not be pinpointed yet, there is at least a starting point for an investigation. Because the threat is "clear and imminent," this often means there's already a body count associated with it.

In game terms, an inquisition may be a focused adventure or investigation that lasts one or two sessions. These could be highlights or turning points in a greater campaign or maybe a one-shot adventure to introduce people to the setting. While an inquisition doesn't necessarily follow a set structure or formula, it does focus on a problem that needs to be resolved before it escalates. This often involves an incident that was brought to the attention of the Scholars and an investigation to uncover what caused it. Is it a Practitioner taking on more than they can handle? Or maybe a Rephaim trying to break into our world? Whatever it is, it should either escalate one of the Vigil's issues or, if it's not taken care of, add a new issue.

An example inquisition is found in *The Thief on the Cross* (page 28).



Cleansing a Lair

Supernatural forces like Rephaim spend a lot of time wearing away at a person or location before they are able to actively influence it. They create a “Thin Spot” between our world and the limbo they are trying to escape from. This Thin Spot starts to take on characteristics of the Rephaim as its influence grows. It’s very hard to get rid of a Rephaim without taking care of these influences first—the Scholars call this “cleansing.”

As we’ve seen, a Rephaim can inhabit one of its followers to take action in our world. However, taking out a follower doesn’t take out the Rephaim. To do that, you need to meet it in its own environment. Visually this environment will be a mix of the real world and the world the Rephaim came from. For instance, the urban legend of Bloody Mary may need to be confronted in the mirror world she is summoned from. The spirit of a witch who once lured people off the forest trail may turn a house basement into twisting maze of trees growing up through the foundation.

To enter a Rephaim’s lair, you just need to find the Thin Spot it exists in, the place in our world where the rules of physics start to bend and break. This change may be gradual, becoming more obvious the closer you get to the Rephaim itself, or it could be jarring, like opening a door to another world. Some people may slip in and out of a Thin Spot without even knowing it, attributing half-seen visions to a trick of light or maybe having one too many beers. Others may be lost in a Thin Spot forever.

The lair itself can act against the characters once they find it, and its aspects may be invoked by itself or by the Rephaim who created it. Like other situation aspects, the lair’s aspects may be compelled by others as described in *Fate Core* (page 58). A lair’s skills may be nonstandard to help describe the actions it may take against the characters. It uses Control to defend against both physical and magical attacks.



The characters might deal structural damage to the lair by using standard skills, or they might deal more metaphysical damage by using Control. As the lair is damaged, though, it doesn't take consequences. Instead, the lair will lose aspects. Each aspect works like a consequence slot, able to absorb stress just like mild, moderate, and severe consequences.

Each time the lair loses an aspect, the GM should describe the change to the environment. Once all of its aspects are gone, the lair is cleansed, allowing its Rephaim to be harmed directly.

Here's an example lair:

The Space Behind the Mirror (Bloody Mary's lair)

ASPECTS

- 2 Mild:** LEFT IS RIGHT, UP IS DOWN
- 4 Moderate:** THE WALLS OF LOST CHILDREN
- 6 Severe:** SHE'S ALWAYS RIGHT BEHIND YOU

SKILLS

- Great (+4):** Confuse
- Good (+3):** Shoot Shard of Glass
- Fair (+2):** Control, Decoy

Binding a Rephaim

Once a lair is cleansed and the Scholars face off with a Rephaim, total destruction isn't the only option. In fact, to the Scholars, it may be the least desirable option. Far better to bind and control a powerful spirit than to simply wipe it from existence, right? Right?

Maybe. But the option is there to negotiate with the Rephaim if you want. To do so, you must propose an agreement. As Scholars, you've each had experience doing this with your Familiars. Each one of you has enticed a powerful divine servant to enter into a binding contract sealed with a sacrifice of some sort. You just need to do that again—with something probably a bit more dangerous, which will become your new Familiar.

Whoa, does that mean a Scholar can have two Familiars? Nope. You must break your contract with your current Familiar before you can bind a new one. Demons typically don't like being jerked around, so you can expect some opposition. In fact, since this negotiation typically occurs in a Thin Spot, your Familiar may decide to show up in order to argue the point.

If it does so, set up a contest, as outlined in *Fate Core* (page 150), between you and your Familiar. The GM will represent the Familiar and will use the approaches you have associated with it. Each of you are trying to convince the Rephaim on a course of action. You will want the Rephaim to agree to a contract, and the Familiar will try to convince it to fight instead. The Familiar can invoke its own aspects but must spend fate points from the GM's pool to do so.

If the Familiar wins the contest, the situation could escalate to a physical conflict with the Rephaim if it has any fight left in it. For the rest of the scene you won't be able to use the corruption die or any other powers your Familiar may provide you. The other Scholars and their Familiars are not affected, but they cannot try to bind the Rephaim themselves either.

If you win then contest, then the Rephaim agrees to your new contract and your old contract is broken. Depending on the nature of your current Familiar, that could be bad. Or maybe you're sick of each other. Either way, you'll replace your sacrifice aspect with a new aspect representing how the contract ended and any expected consequences of its ending.

After Janine cleanses The Space Behind the Mirror and convinces Bloody Mary to enter into a contract with her, her Familiar Valac isn't content to return to the limbo she pulled him from. Instead, he decides to remain in the Thin Spot, and though it is cleansed, it's still connected to mirrors all over the Vigil. He steps backward into a mirror, with a parting jab: "I'll be seeing you every time you see yourself..."

Janine replaces her MUSIC GIVES ME MIGRAINES sacrifice aspect—that's the least of her worries now—with MY REFLECTION IS A NIGHTMARE.

Then, update "The Thing Inside" on your character sheet with the Rephaim's approaches and monads. Its office aspect should be based on the Rephaim's legend. Players and GM, you'll work together to determine its vice and virtue aspects.

Assuming you survived, congratulations on a job well done! Your Vigil is a little less corrupt, your Covenant is a little more experienced, and your corner of the world is a little safer. Isn't it?

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Let's take a look at how an inquisition might go down. This adventure could take a couple of sessions to get through, and it's a good introduction to the types of challenges and conflicts a Covenant might face.

Each location in this adventure has a series of cues to stimulate play. Some of these cues ask open-ended questions that the group can answer together. Some of the cues point out leads or opportunities to learn relevant information about the inquisition. For each location you might see:

- **What just happened**—events or actions that took place at the location right before starting the scene there, giving it some momentum.
- **Location aspects**—to help give the location some flavor and opportunities to invoke and compel.
- **Questions to answer during the scene**—cues or opportunities to give out information or to help flesh out the story. If the adventure itself doesn't give an answer, then it's up to the group to come up with one.
- **A challenge**—a suggestion for a conflict or contest that could take place while the Covenant investigates the location. Of course, there could be others.
- **Information or leads**—things that the Covenant can learn at the location to help them puzzle together what's ultimately going on and how they should deal with it.

Please note that this adventure has some Judeo-Christian references. They are used to convey a feeling of how things might go terribly wrong if certain beliefs are wildly misinterpreted. No disrespect is intended. If you've seen movies like *The Prophecy* or *Dogma*, then you may have an idea of what to expect.

Koliah Jones and the Electric Jesus Semi

Koliah Jones is a truck driver—FOR THE LORD! He's always been a religious man and has found comfort in the Bible during his long treks across the United States. But it wasn't always enough. He had been living a rough and lonely life, and wasn't sure he wanted it to continue.

The first time he heard *the voice*, he was about ready to let his rig run right off the road over a cliff. It came through as bursts of static over his CB. He called Koliah by name and told him he had an important message for him. One that would change his life. The voice never gave a name but he called himself "a Thief," and he said that he saw "the Light" while crucified and waiting to die.

That's when Koliah strung Christmas tree lights across the grill of his rig in the shape of a cross. He christened his rig the "Electric Jesus" and rode the highways with his hand on the knob of his CB, constantly monitoring the airwaves for new sermons and divine guidance.



Slowly the Thief on the Cross worked his way into Koliah's heart and then into his soul. He gave Koliah a new purpose and inspired him to start preaching. At first folks called him a Jesus freak, dismissing him with the wave of a hand and the flick of a cigarette. But eventually something clicked into place. People could tell that Koliah's sermons were inspired by more than just too much to drink. They started to pay attention.

Last night, Koliah had some unfinished business at JT's Gas Haven. There were some sinners there that needed a fist full of salvation. He knew this because he used to be in business with some of them. Billy and Tocho were two. Koliah used to run meth for them pretty regularly. In fact, he still had some in his glove compartment, hidden in emptied-out bullet casings. He also used to do business of another sort with Tara. She made his stopovers a little less lonely—for \$200 an hour.

But they were shown a new path last night. The Thief on the Cross spoke through Koliah about how he had hung from the nails in his palms next to two other criminals, waiting to die. One of them was a murderer who killed a man in a drunken rage. The other was called the "King of the Jews" by some and the "Son of God" by others. The murderer repented his sins with his dying breath, and the Son of God said that he would be welcome in Heaven. The Thief never did repent and is still paying for it to this day.

The flock at JT's was moved by his words. Some people more than others. That's when things started to get out of hand.

Chuck Bridges couldn't sleep at all that night after hearing Koliah's holy message. The preachings kept running through his head over and over again. To take his mind off it, he tried to carve a hole in his palm with a roofing nail. It didn't help much.

The next day, Chuck went to his job as a security guard at the local mall. He could barely concentrate between the words in his head and the pain in his palm. He almost went home. Probably should have.

The owner of the Hot Topic at the mall called in an incident. A teen had just stolen a pair of pentagram earrings and was last seen over by the Cinnabon up on level two. When Chuck saw him, he freaked the fuck out. He beat the teen bloody and dragged him to the railing overlooking the fountain on the first floor. Somebody had triggered the alarm, and the police arrived in time to hear Chuck yelling nonsense at the boy. They tried to talk him down but he wasn't listening. He lifted the boy up, ready to throw him over the edge.

A crowd of people watched as the police opened fire on Chuck.

The Morgue

This is where the Covenant's investigation will begin. Depending on how you want to frame the story, it may not be the first scene with the player characters. Your group may have gone through some interesting world-building to define their cult and compound, and it may be more fun to start there with them learning of their newly assigned inquisition. In either case, the morgue will be their first lead to follow up on. After that, there is no single trail that the Covenant needs to follow in their investigation.

This scenario assumes that there is a Grigori called Jube who is a known ally to the Scholars. If there's another NPC that makes more sense in your Vigil, feel free to substitute. Jube has many jobs, but her favorite is working at the morgue. There's plenty to learn there. Especially when you can speak with the dead.

Aspects

- THE SICKLY SWEET SMELL OF DEATH
- YOU CAN FEEL THE HEAT DRAINING FROM YOUR BODY
- DULL METAL AND DIM LIGHTS

What Just Happened

- Jube alerted the Scholars of the incident at the mall earlier today. She is a night clerk at the morgue and has arranged to get them in.
- To keep the security guard busy and out of their hair, Jube has asked him to check on something she heard in the parking lot. That should give the Scholars some time to investigate.
- Chuck is dead on a slab, having been shot multiple times by the police at the mall.
- Jube can help the Scholars interrogate Chuck, but of course she wants something in return. A Scholar may already have the power to speak with the dead—if so, Jube's price should reflect just getting them in to see the body.
- Jube will take the sheet off Chuck's body and open his mouth. She will cut her own thumb with a scalpel, suck off a drop of blood, and then spit it into Chuck's mouth. A few seconds later, his eyes will open and he'll look around suspiciously.

Questions to Answer During the Scene

- What price will the Scholars pay Jube in order to interrogate Chuck?
- Which of the Scholars' Familiars knows of Jube and hates her?
- Why did Chuck attack the shoplifter?
- Where did Chuck meet the preacher, Koliah Jones?
- What was Koliah preaching about?

Challenge

The Scholars will have to get any information they can out of Chuck before the security guard comes back—also before Chuck realizes he’s dead and freaks out. Run this as a series of overcome actions following the escalating sequence of events below.

Overcome #1: Chuck is suspicious and wants to know what the hell is going on.

- **Goal:** Convince Chuck that you’re here to help, you just need some information—or intimidate the shit out of him.
- **Success:** Chuck will answer one of your questions, but wants some answers himself.
- **Failure:** This is too weird—Chuck’s not gonna say a damn thing yet.

Overcome #2: Chuck tries to get up and notices the hole in his chest. He starts to panic.

- **Goal:** Keep Chuck calm enough to answer your questions.
- **Success:** Chuck will answer one of your questions, but he’s pretty sure he needs a doctor. Badly.
- **Failure:** Chuck forgets your questions, stands up stark naked, and starts checking all the other wounds on his body.

Overcome #3: Chuck realizes all the things he’ll never be able to do. Despair hits him like a punch to the gut.

- **Goal:** Get Chuck to focus on helping the living.
- **Success:** Chuck will answer one last question, but he wants you to pass a message on to Tara: *“Tell her it’s not too late to turn away from a life of sin. At least one person loves her...or loved her, I guess.”*
- **Failure:** The realization is too much for Chuck. He starts to shut down and is reduced to a mumbling mess until life fades from him again.

GMs, if things aren’t going well for the Scholars and they aren’t getting the info they need to continue their investigation, you may allow them to succeed at a cost. The cost could be a complication, like the security guard arriving, or maybe Jube steps in to help them out and the Covent gains the aspect **WE OWE JUBE A FAVOR**. At a minimum, the Scholars should have a lead on JT’s Gas Haven by the end of the scene. All other critical details can be learned in other scenes.

Information

- Chuck found the light of God through the preachings of Koliah Jones.
- Chuck heard Koliah preach two nights ago at JT’s Gas Haven, a truck stop on the edge of town.
- Chuck went to JT’s Gas Haven to talk to a woman named Tara and see why she blocked him from her cam site on CamSlammers.com.
- The preacher drives a semi rig with an electric cross on the front.
- Koliah preached about redemption and salvation through knowing God from the cross.
- Chuck felt like he was on a righteous path to help others redeem themselves, and he wanted to help that shoplifter find God...quickly.

Chuck Bridges, mall cop and recent corpse

ASPECTS

I AM THE HAND OF THE RIGHTEOUS; SHIT, I'M GONNA BE LATE FOR WORK; "THAT'S A BIG HOLE IN MY CHEST...SEEMS LIKE IT SHOULD HURT MORE."

SKILLS

Good (+3): Notice

Fair (+2): Provoke

Average (+1): Fight, Empathy

STUNTS

Body-Language Reader: You can use Notice in place of Empathy to learn the aspects of a target through observation.

STRESS

Physical **1****2**

Mental **1****2**

Jube, Grigori night clerk

ASPECTS

DEATH BRINGS TRUTH; ALL SCHOLARS ARE CORRUPT

SKILLS

Great (+4): Empathy

Good (+3): Will

Fair (+2): Rapport, Lore

Average (+1): Resources, Contacts

STUNTS

Indomitable: +2 to defend with Will against Provoke attacks that use intimidation and fear.

STRESS

Physical **1****2**

Mental **1****2****3****4**

NOTES

Reckoning: Jube is interested in knowing how people will act once they realize their life is about to end. Will they finally be honest with themselves, or will they cling to their lies to the bitter end?

Convictions: People waste their lives and don't really deserve to live. Truly selfless acts will surprise her. She has never been surprised.

Price: Jube wants some proof that people can see the value of life. She will ask the Scholars to spare a life that they might otherwise have to take, and then let her know who it was.

JT's Gas Haven

JT's Gas Haven stands like an outpost at the edge of town, the same town or city in your Vigil with the mall and the morgue. This is where the Thief on the Cross last spoke through Koliah Jones and set in motion a bloody chain of events. Koliah is long gone, but the owner, JT, is still trying to make sense of the sermon. He closed up shop the night Koliah left, and hasn't opened it up since. He's currently scrubbing the place from top to bottom with wine vinegar, the same drink the Son of God was given before he gave up his last breath...the first time, anyway. Cleanliness is close to Godliness, and JT feels the need to get closer to God.

If it were open, the Gas Haven would offer an oasis of roadside services to the weary traveler. While it doesn't have hotel rooms, it has plenty of parking for any rig that decides to stay the night. Coin-operated showers are available twenty-four hours a day, and the diner usually stays open pretty late, especially if there's a game on TV. There's a convenience store that tends to have most items you might find of use during long road trips. And of course, there's gas.

Aspects

- EVERYTHING'S GREASY
- LEAVE YOUR ROAD RAGE AT THE DOOR
- STUCK IN THE PAST

What Just Happened?

- JT has been cleaning all day and all night, and the whole place smells like vinegar.
- JT hasn't heard anything about the incident at the mall.
- A jukebox is playing, but it sounds broken because it's playing songs just a little too slow.

Questions to Answer During the Scene

- Why is the Gas Haven closed, and why is JT cleaning so vigorously?
- What happened the night the preacher came?
- Who else was there?
- Which of the Scholars does JT see as "unclean"?

Challenge

JT might need some convincing to answer the Covenant's questions. For some reason he thinks one of the Scholars is "unclean" and wants to know why. He'll want to help cleanse the Scholar by hearing the Scholar's confession and sharing a drink. The drink is the same fluid he's been using to clean the diner: wine vinegar. If the Scholar agrees, they'll need to roll Physique against Good (+3) difficulty to keep interrogating JT instead of running for the bathroom.

Information

- JT gassed up Koliah's semi the night before the mall incident. He had been around before, but it had been a while.
- As he filled up the tank, JT overheard Tara trying to talk to Koliah, but Koliah wasn't paying attention to her. Instead, he was listening to his CB. JT didn't hear anybody talking on the radio, just strange static.
- Koliah came in for a meal and that's when Billy and Tocho sat down to talk to him for a bit. They seemed angry.
- Later, Koliah bought a round of drinks—almost a full box of wine! As everybody drank, he started preaching about the crucifixion, but he wasn't telling the story of the Son of God. He was talking about somebody else who was crucified at the same time. Some criminal. He didn't say his name.
- Billy and Tocho left during the sermon, but Tocho didn't seem like he wanted to.
- Tara went to the bathroom round back, and she came back upset. She said that somebody had broken into the preacher's rig. The passenger-side door was open, and the overhead light was on.
- That's when the preacher left, but not before talking more with Tara. He rubbed something on her forehead.
- Billy and Tocho have a cabin just outside of town.
- JT doesn't know where Tara lives, but sometimes she can be found on CamSlammers.com.

JT Barnes, owner of the Gas Haven

ASPECTS

CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS...AND WE ALL NEED TO BE CLOSER TO GOD; "DON'T ASK. DON'T TELL. DON'T CARE."

SKILLS

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Empathy

Fair (+2): Provoke, Notice

Average (+1): Will, Physique

STUNTS

Lie Whisperer: +2 to Empathy rolls made to discern or discover lies, whether they're directed at you or someone else.

STRESS

Physical **1** **2** **3**

Mental **1** **2** **3**

The Cabin

Billy and Tocho have been partners in crime since high school. They never really planned it. Bad ideas kept falling into their laps and they just went with it. Their latest doomed venture was to start cooking meth in the cabin Tocho inherited from his uncle. It was far enough outside of town to go unnoticed, but close enough to still get cable TV. They even found somebody to help deliver their product across state lines—Koliah Jones. But that was before he went and strung up his electric cross.

After hearing Koliah preach at JT's, Tocho saw the light too. He wanted to repent and start doing God's work. Billy did not. Koliah's sermons affected Billy in a different way: instead of basking in the righteous fury of the Thief on the Cross, Billy saw hell waiting for him just as he always suspected. Instead of opening himself to divine inspiration, he slipped backwards out of reality. His encounter with Koliah and the Thief on the Cross have convinced him that he must be some sort of demon, and this belief is so strong that has found a way to show people visions of hell.

Aspects

- WHY HASN'T THIS PLACE EXPLODED YET?
- A THIN SPOT BETWEEN REALITY AND DREAM
- NOTHING HERE IS EVER QUITE FINISHED

What Just Happened?

- Billy took a nail gun to Tocho to shut him up. Now he's in the middle of getting rid of the body, piece by piece, in the septic tank out back. What's left is in the bathtub, which is about half of Tocho from the waist up.
- Billy will have plenty of warning when the Scholars come down the long driveway. Lots of time to hide and plan an ambush.
- To start the party right, Billy left some crystal meth cooking on the stove.

Questions to Answer During the Scene

- What's that smell?
- What's that *other* smell?
- Where is everybody?
- Where's the rest of Tocho?
- What was stolen from Koliah's rig?

Challenge

Billy will attack once the Scholars start to look around. He will unleash The Stuff of Nightmares on the first one he sees, and then start taking power tools to the rest. He won't stop until he's dead.

Information

- Billy has the stuff they stole out of Koliah's glove box in one of the bedrooms.
- Koliah had a map of the United States with several marks on it. The location of the closest mark is just a couple of towns away. Each mark has a number listed next to it: 024.1246 MHz, 024.4240 MHz, 024.0031 MHz. These are CB frequencies.
- Other things of Koliah's: a .357 Magnum, a gun permit, and a box of bullets, which secretly contain crystal meth instead of gunpowder.



Billy Pittman, accidental practitioner warped by the corruption of the Thief on the Cross

ASPECTS

MORE METH THAN BREATH; I KNOW I'M GOING TO HELL

SKILLS

Great (+4): Will

Good (+3): Shoot, Stealth

Fair (+2): Fight, Physique, Notice

Average (+1): Athletics, Stealth, Contacts, Lore

MONAD

The Stuff of Nightmares: By spending a fate point, you can bring a childhood fear to life as a mental attack, rolling Will opposed by Will.

STRESS

Physical **1****2****3**

Mental **1****2****3****4**

Tocho Cody, the dead guy in the bathtub

ASPECTS

I'M ONLY HALF THE MAN I USED TO BE; "THIS IS SOME BULLSHIT RIGHT HERE!"

SKILLS

Great (+4): Lore

Good (+3): Contacts

Fair (+2): Will, Empathy

STUNTS

Pharmacy Specialist: You get a +2 to all Lore rolls related to pharmacy.

STRESS

Physical **1****2**

Mental **1****2****3**

CamSlammers.com

It would be limiting to refer to Tara as a prostitute. She is talented and motivated, and has branched out into a number of related services. She prefers the term “sex worker.” Tara, of course, isn’t her real name; it’s more like her brand. She also never brings clients back to her apartment, so it will be very hard for the Scholars to track her down in person.

Most days, if she doesn’t have appointments with her regulars, she can be found entertaining a throng of anonymous users on a webcam site called CamSlammers.com. She has built a loyal following there as “Tara Tart,” and offers a variety of adult entertainment options. Sometimes a generous tip will get you a chance to spin her Wheel of Licktastic Delights, other days she may be more in the mood for cosplay. Today she’s offering something new. Visitors have the chance to pay for a confessional. After you purchase a private session, first she’ll listen to your confession, then she’ll tell you one of her own.

Aspects

- DISTRACTING ADS CONSTANTLY IN YOUR FACE
- TIME IS MONEY, MONEY IS TIME
- WHERE EMOJIS GO TO DIE

What Just Happened?

- One of the Scholars had to create an account and enter a credit card number to join the site. What username did they choose?
- Tara is flirting with a user named AnimalStyle, trying to get him to pay for a private session. There are about a dozen other users, but not much tipping.
- Users can see and hear Tara, but they can only type messages unless they go into a private session where they can turn on their mic and camera.
- Right now she is wrapped in a white silk robe, but some may notice a tiny red spot over her left breast. It seems to be soaking through the robe like blood.

Questions to Answer During the Scene

- Why is there a spot of blood on Tara’s robe?
- What did Koliah talk to Tara about at JT’s?
- Where was the preacher heading after leaving JT’s?

Challenge

Tara will only talk to the Scholars if they can get her into a private session. This isn’t much of a challenge, but AnimalStyle has the same idea. Succeeding on a Resources or Rapport roll against Fair (+2) difficulty will convince her to talk to them first. Otherwise, they may have to wait for a while.

Information

- Tara will give details about Koliah's sermon that the Scholars may have already heard from Chuck or JT.
- Tara will show the Scholars that she keeps the scriptures close to her heart... carved into her skin over her left breast: "Luke 23:42." She also carved three crosses. The cross on the left is filled in red with blood.
- Investigating the Bible chapter and verse for Luke 23:42 will give the Scholars this quote: "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."
- Koliah didn't say exactly where he was going when he left JT's. He did mention having to "go north to rekindle a holy flame under some laughing fools riding steel horses."
- It will take some investigation to learn that this could refer to a motorcycle club in the area called the Burnt Jesters. If the Scholars have Koliah's map from the cabin, they will notice that one of his CB markers is roughly over the location of the Burnt Jester's club house a couple of towns away. An internet search will reveal that it's an old roadhouse called "The Broken Sign."

Tara Tart (Jenny Harrison), sex worker

ASPECTS

YOU SEE WHAT I WANT YOU TO SEE; I KEEP THE SCRIPTURE CLOSE TO MY HEART

SKILLS

Great (+4): Rapport
Good (+3): Empathy
Fair (+2): Contacts
Average (+1): Will

STUNTS

Best Foot Forward: Twice per session, you may upgrade a boost you receive from rolling Rapport into a situation aspect with a free invocation.

STRESS

Physical **1****2**

Mental **1****2****3**

The Broken Sign

Technically the Burnt Jesters are a “motorcycle club.” Calling them a “gang” would be silly—especially in person. That means “The Broken Sign” isn’t a *roadhouse*, it’s a *club house*, and they don’t have to let you in if they don’t want to. Right now they aren’t in the mood for guests.

The Broken Sign has seen better days, but those days must have been a long time ago. The roof leaks, the paint is peeling off, and of course, the sign over the door is broken. Behind the bar is a banner: a flaming skull wearing a jester’s hat. It’s the same logo that’s stitched onto the back of each Burnt Jester’s jacket. It’s also the first image that comes up on their Facebook page. When the Jesters aren’t taking care of club business, they crash here.

“Business” usually means selling meth. That’s how they know Koliah. The Broken Sign was one of his distribution points. He delivered the supply from Billy and Tocho, and then the Jesters sold to the local customers. That was last month. Things have recently changed. After leaving JT’s, Koliah made his way here. In fact, the Electric Jesus is parked around back. The Jesters could be a powerful addition to Koliah’s flock, spreading the teachings of the Thief on the Cross far and wide. He even brought them to the Place of the Skull to hear the sermon firsthand. Now the Burnt Jesters are ready to start spreading the gospel...with their fists.

Aspects

- ALWAYS A WEAPON WITHIN ARM’S REACH
- EVERYTHING IS KINDA BROKEN BUT WORKS IF YOU GIVE IT A GOOD WHACK
- THE SMELL OF BLOOD FROM A HUNDRED BAR ROOM BRAWLS

What Just Happened?

- The Burnt Jesters are waiting inside for Koliah to return from the Place of the Skull.
- There’s a radio playing strange static in the background. As soon as the Scholars enter the roadhouse, the radio will squawk.
- One of the Scholars will hear their own Familiar speak over the radio. Then another voice, the voice of the Thief on the Cross, will say: “Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” That’s when the Jesters start breaking bottles and pulling out weapons.

Questions to Answer During the Scene

- Where is Koliah?

Challenge

The Scholars will have a full-on brawl with the Burnt Jesters.

Information

- To get to Koliah and the Thief on the Cross, the Scholars will have to enter the Place of the Skull.
- The gateway to the Place of the Skull is in the trailer of the Electric Jesus semi.

Goodson, leader of the Burnt Jesters

ASPECTS

FEAR IS A TOOL, AND I'M GOD'S MECHANIC;
WE ALL SIN, BUT I DO IT REALLY WELL

SKILLS

Great (+4): Provoke

Good (+3): Shoot

Fair (+2): Will, Notice

Average (+1): Physique, Fight, Drive

STUNTS

Armor of Fear: You can use Provoke to defend against Fight attacks. If you take stress, however, you cannot use this stunt for the remainder of the scene.

STRESS

Physical **1****2****3**

Mental **1****2****3**

Guardrail, gang enforcer

ASPECTS

EVEN MY EYELIDS ARE TATTOOED;
"REPENT, MOTHERFUCKER!"

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Physique

Fair (+2): Athletics, Shoot

Average (+1): Notice, Provoke, Drive

STUNTS

Heavy Hitter: When you succeed with style on a Fight attack and choose to reduce the result by one shift to gain a boost, you instead gain a situation aspect with a free invocation.

STRESS

Physical **1****2****3****4**

Mental **1****2**

The Burnt Jesters—Two Dog, Pope, Shoebox, and Fender

ASPECTS

HOLY ROLLERS ON STEEL HORSES

SKILLS

Average (+1): Fight, Drive

STRESS

Physical **1****1****1****1**

Mental **1****1****1****1**



The Place of the Skull

The doors to the rig on the Electric Jesus semi open up onto a vision of Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, where Jesus was crucified as told in the Bible. Three huge crosses stand at odd angles at the top of a hill. The sky boils with rust-colored clouds. Koliah stands next to the cross on the left. The translucent form of a broken and bleeding man hangs from this cross, but the others are empty. Faceless, shadowy figures huddle around the base of the hill, some calling for death, others weeping. This is the domain of the Thief on the Cross, and it must be cleansed before he can be dealt with.

Aspects

- **2 Mild:** THE CRUNCH OF BONES UNDER FOOT
- **4 Moderate:** CHEERS AND WEeping
- **6 Severe:** NOBODY IS LEAVING UNTIL BLOOD IS SPILLED

Skills

- **Great (+4):** The Feeling of Crushing Despair
- **Good (+3):** Thrown Rocks from the Faceless Crowd
- **Fair (+2):** Control, The Gut-Wrenching Smell of Death

What Just Happened?

- Koliah will demand that the penitent kneel before their savior.
- The Thief on the Cross will ask the Scholars why they've come.

Questions to Answer During the Scene

- Will the Scholars recruit or destroy the Thief on the Cross?
- If they recruit the Thief, which Scholar will give up their current Familiar?
- How will that Familiar react?
- What will happen to Koliah Jones?

Challenge

The Thief on the Cross cannot take stress until his lair, the Place of the Skull, has been cleansed. If the Scholars don't repent their sins and kneel before the cross, Koliah will advance on them with his spear. The faceless masses will rise up to help defend their domain, and the Thief on the Cross will start preaching from where he hangs.

Each round, the following happens:

- The Place of the Skull will take an action.
- Koliah Jones will physically attack with his spear.
- The Thief on the Cross will mentally attack with his Infectious Belief monad.

Once it has been cleansed, the Place of the Skull will no longer act against the Scholars, the faceless masses will fade away, and the Thief on the Cross will pull free of his nails to face the Scholars directly.

Information

- Koliah is a fanatic follower of a Rephaim known as the Thief on the Cross, the nameless criminal crucified next to Jesus who refused to repent and was barred from heaven.

The Thief on the Cross, Rephaim of a forgotten sinner

ASPECTS

I'VE SUFFERED FAR MORE THAN THIS; "I EXIST BETWEEN SIN AND SALVATION."

APPROACHES

Careful: Good (+3)

Clever: Fair (+2)

Forceful: Good (+3)

Flashy: Great (+4)

Quick: Fair (+2)

Sneaky: Fair (+2)

MONAD

Infectious Belief: People's thoughts and beliefs are theirs to change, but I can flood their minds with overwhelming visions of their past sins until they do. I'll offer them a path to salvation if they repent their sins and help others do the same. When I do this, I can spend a fate point to perform a Forceful mental attack opposed by Will. Any mental consequences should represent my influence.

STRESS

Physical **1****2**

Mental **1****2****3****4**

NOTES

Legend: The Thief on the Cross is the legend of the criminal crucified next to Jesus who refused to repent and was barred from heaven. No name for him is mentioned in the Bible, although other sources sometimes refer to him as "Gestas" or "Gesmas."

Agenda: The Thief on the Cross thinks he can redeem himself by teaching others about his mistake and helping them find God by facing their sins. If they refuse, he will force them. Once enough souls have been saved, they will surely help open the gates of heaven for him.

Corruption: The sermon of the Thief on the Cross is infectious. It plagues those who hear it with visions of their own sins and the dread of not being forgiven for them. This may affect people in different ways, but none will have rest until they find their own path to redemption.

Koliah Jones, fanatic truck driver for THE LORD

ASPECTS

PROPHET OF THE TURNPIKE; "I WILL BURN THE WORLD DOWN IN ORDER TO FIND THOSE WORTHY OF HIM."

SKILLS

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Provoke, Will

Fair (+2): Physique, Fight, Empathy

Average (+1): Notice, Drive, Lore, Crafts

STUNTS

Demagogue: +2 to Rapport when you're delivering an inspiring speech in front of a crowd.

STRESS

Physical **1** **2** **3**

Mental **1** **2** **3**

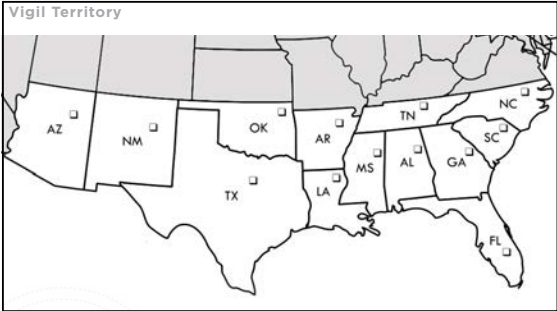
NOTES

If Koliah is encountered outside the Place of the Skull, then the Thief on the Cross will be able to act through him and use his Infectious Belief monad.



YOUR VIGIL

Vigil Designation



Issues

Current Issues

Impending Issues

Cult & Compound

Places & Faces

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

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Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

Name

Issue/Aspect

Corruption/Sacrifice

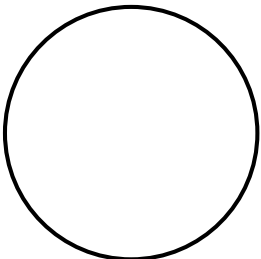
Name

Issue/Aspect

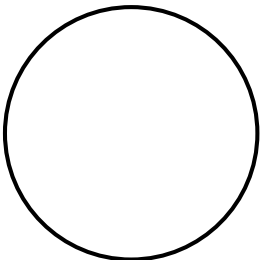
Corruption/Sacrifice

C O V E N A N T

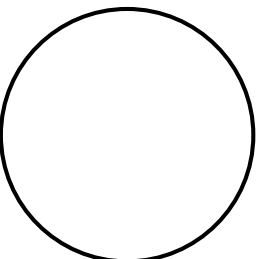
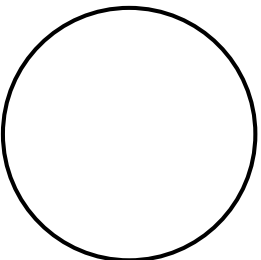
Aspect



Access to
Covenant
Aspect

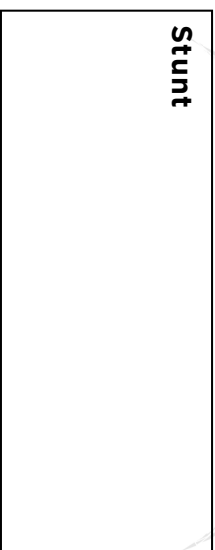


Access to
Covenant
Stunt



-1 Corruption
at the end of
each scene

Stunt



WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE ...

Name

Description

Refresh



Aspects

Providence

High Concept

Trouble

Sacrifice

Physical Stress

Mental Stress

Consequences

Mild

Moderate

Severe

Skills

Great(+4)

Good(+3)

Fair(+2)

Average(+1)

Fair(+2)

Good(+3)

Great(+4)

Stunts

Approaches

Corruption

Dominion

Monads



Monad

Virtue

Vice

Office

Aspects

Name

THE THING INSIDE ...