

Virtues and Vices

James Sterrett

Each of you is a member of a Church Group. Begin by deciding what the church is, and what kind of group it is (Bible Study Group, Community Youth Group, Ice Cream Social Committee, Holy Week Outreach Group....)

Pick a name for your character. In addition, select a primary Blessing you exhibit, an Opposed Vice you combat, and a Secret Vice you're trying to overcome your attraction to. There's no need to stick to the standard list of 7 Sins and 7 Graces: "Always Cheerful" is a perfectly good Blessing, "Does Not Dote on Puppies" is a perfectly good opposed vice, and "Prefers Deer Hunting to Church" a fine Secret Vice, especially if you hunt out of season. You get an extra two dice for any rolls in which your Virtue or Opposed Vice come into play, and two dice will oppose you when facing your Secret Vice.

You should discuss your Blessings and Vices with the GM, who has final say on their appropriateness. Virtues should not be too broad, and Vices should not be too narrow. "Inspires all others to Goodness" is far too broad a Virtue. "Sneers at others when nobody is looking" is far too narrow a vice.

Then go around the circle and introduce yourselves. "Hi, I'm John Jones, and I humbly worship our Lord. I joined this group because...." Tell us why you joined the group. Then tell us how you know the player to your left. Then confess what you did to get a single point of Sin: something minor and embarrassing related to your Secret Vice. Confess your Secret Vice to the group, because we're all here to help you overcome your mortal failings.

At the end of this process, you should all know a bit too much about the other characters' vices, and you should know how you met the other characters in the group. Now it's time to play.

The game is played in Scenes.

A Scene is much like a Scene in a movie; if a new Scene would begin (in a movie or TV show) for the next thing that's going to happen, then the Scene ends, with the player-characters temporarily suspended in it until one of them is again activated for a Scene.

You'll need a Token of some sort to indicate who currently Sets the Scene. This Token moves amongst all the players and the GM, shifting clockwise (not widdershins!) by one person at the end of each Scene.

When a player or GM gets the token at the beginning of a Scene, they must Set the new Scene. The player or GM must choose a character (players may choose other players' characters) as the main character for the new Scene, and Frame the Scene up to the point where any kind of reaction (physical or emotional) is required from that player's character. Normal play takes over from this point on until the end of the scene.

A Scene should be set up to produce a conflict between Virtue and Sin for the main character.

Keep continuity in mind when starting new Scenes. For example, if a character ended one Scene in jail, then the framing for the next scene should either leave the character in jail or narrate an explanation for their departure from jail. If there's any potential for dramatic events in the departure which would constitute a Scene of itself, then that should be played first, unless all players and the GM agree to skip the scene.

Within the constraints of continuity, as explained above, characters may join a Scene in progress at any time by one of two methods:

- By player consent, either because another player requested the player-character's presence, or because the player wishes their character to be present.
- By request of the Scene Setter: roll the Scene Setter's Virtue against the other player-character's Sin. The GM rolls the requested character's Virtue. The winner decides if the character appears in the Scene or not, and uses winning dice to dictate facts about the character's arrival or failure to arrive; the loser narrates the arrival or failure to arrive.

In addition, the other players may introduce non-player characters instead of their own characters.

A player can introduce a non-player character that will help another player's character. If the supported player character's side succeeds in the Scene, then the introducing player's character gains a point of Virtue. If the supported player character fails, then the introducing player's character gain a point of Sin.

A player can also introduce a non-player character opposed to another player's character. If the non-player character's side succeeds in the Scene, then the introducing player's character gains a point of Virtue for avoiding the debacle. If the player's character succeeds, however, no extra Sin is gained.

The various challenges the characters face are overcome using the Task Resolution Mechanics:

Use whatever dice you like. d10, d6, d53, d17... in God's eyes, all dice are the same.

You have two statistics: Virtue and Sin. Both of these begin the game at 1. (If you think you are without Sin, you are Proud. Your Sin starts at 2.) Virtue can never go below zero; Sin can never go below 1. Neither has a maximum value.

Your Blessing, Opposed Vice, and Secret Vice all begin the game at 2.

The basic contest for all actions is your current Virtue versus your current Sin: you roll dice equal to your current Virtue, while the GM rolls dice equal to your current Sin. In contests between players, the GM will decide which players roll Virtue and which players roll Sin; it is possible for both players to be rolling on their Virtue or both to be rolling based on their Sin.

When both sides have rolled, look for the highest die. The player or GM with the highest die is the winner, with a number of successes equal to the number of dice higher than the other sides' dice. (Thus, if one side rolled 10, 9, 7, 6, 5, 3; and the other side rolled 10, 9, 7, 7, 7, 2; then the second side will win with 5 dice. The 10s, the 9s, and the first 7 are tied, and the second and third 7s are greater than the first side's next highest roll of a 6.)

The *winner* of the die roll uses each winning die to either:

- state one, very specific, fact about the outcome
- or
- save the die to be an extra die rolled in a related future contest
- or
- increase their character's Virtue by one

The *loser* of the contest narrates the outcome, incorporating any facts from the winner. Narration continues until either: 1) a new conflict is reached, which you'll know because another player or GM will challenge you on some aspect of the narration; or 2) you reach the point of needing a physical or emotional reaction from another player's character.

Note that this means that nobody can ever kill your character except you, because you will always narrate all failed tasks for your character, including self-defence.

The number of dice can be modified by:

- Add dice to a player's pool in any contest in which the player can invoke the support of their Blessing equal to the number of points in that Blessing.
- Add dice to a player's pool in any contest in which the player is opposed to an Opposed Vice, equal to the number of points in that Opposed Vice.
- Add dice in opposition to the character in any contest where the character is attempting to overcome the temptation of their Secret Vice, equal to the number of points in the Secret Vice.

- The GM may add in dice for good role-playing at the GM's discretion.
- A player may always add as many dice as desired to any roll in exchange for gaining an equal number of Sin points. The player must narrate the Sin or Sins in proportion to the points spent.
- A player may always add any number of dice in exchange for losing an equal number of Virtue points. When spending Virtue in this way, the base Virtue for the die roll is based off the Virtue total before any Virtue is spent. If you have 7 Virtue, and spend 4 of them on a roll, you'll have an effective Virtue of 11 during the task resolution, and be left with 3 Virtue afterwards. Of course, if you succeed, you can spend some of the successes to regain your Virtue. The player must narrate the Virtuous acts undertaken in proportion to the points spent.

Combat: There is no combat mechanism. Jesus did not "Kick Ass for the Lord", and neither do you. Like Jesus, you will Turn the Other Cheek. If somebody gets violent, they are allowing you to experience a tiny fragment of the suffering of Jesus. You will gain Virtue for that experience. However, to Turn the Other Cheek, you must successfully roll your own Virtue against your attacker's Sin. If you fail, you gain Sin equal to the number of dice by which you lost. As the loser of the contest, you must also narrate the way in which you Sinned.

Note to GMs: Players who narrate insufficiently interesting Sins after losing a contest should be given extra Sin, because they have fallen into the sin of Pride.

To deal with Sin, you must perform Penance. When you are in charge of Setting the Scene, you may declare that you wish to do Penance. The GM, in consultation with the other players, assigns the exact nature of the Penance and sets the Scene. Penance comes in the form of new tasks in the name of God, which you perform without hope of greater Virtue: you're working off your Debt of Sin. You can, of course, get more Sin.

Don't start down the Thorny Path of Sin. It's much harder to leave it than it is to get on it. Be good, do Penance for your Sins, and you'll make it into Heaven.

Helping Each Other to Stay on the Path of Righteousness

We are all Sinners, and we all need assistance in avoiding the Thorny Path of Sin. Therefore, players must assist their fellow characters by pointing out their Sins so they can make proper Penance for them and be assured of going to Heaven.

Each player, and the GM, must be constantly alert to the Sins committed by other players' characters during the narration of events. If, by the end of a scene, any players have failed to inform the GM of a Sin committed by another player's character, the GM must assign a point of Sin to those players' characters, for failing to assist their brothers or sisters towards the Path of Righteousness: we all need a helping hand, and if we are not aware of our sins, we cannot mend them. For every player who informs the GM of a Sin committed by another player's character, the Sinning player's character gains one point of Sin. In addition, every player's character that points out another character's Sin gains a point of Virtue.

If players disagree over the Sinful nature of an act, roll dice equal to the total Virtue of the players asserting it is a Sin, against the total Virtue of players asserting the act in question is not a Sin. The winners in this contest gain Virtue points equal to the number of dice by which they won, spread out among the combined winning players, with dice that cannot be divided equally going to the player accused of Sinning or the first player to accuse another of Sinning. The losers gain Sin equal to the number of dice by which they lost, with dice that cannot be divided equally going to the player accused of Sinning or the first player to accuse another of Sinning.

Changing a Character's Stats:

Between any scene, all of the following are possible for any character:

With the GM's approval, a character may gain a new Secret Vice in exchange for 2 Sin. This new Secret Vice must play a part in the next Scene in which that character is involved.

With the GM's approval, a character may gain a new Blessing at the cost of 2 Virtue points.

With the GM's approval, a character may gain a new Opposed Vice at the cost of 2 Virtue points.

After a scene in which a character overcame the Temptation of a Secret Vice, the player may choose to spend Virtue in order to remove the Secret Vice. The cost is 5 virtue per point of the Secret Vice.

In addition, the GM must alter a character's stats after a scene in which:

After a Scene in which a Character fails to overcome the Temptation of a Secret Vice, the GM must increase the Secret Vice by one point.

After a Scene in which a character failed to resist a Temptation directly opposed to an Opposed Vice, the GM must decrease the Opposed Vice by one point. If the Opposed Vice is already at zero, and is reduced further, the Opposed Vice is removed.

After a Scene in which a character failed in the use of a Blessing, the GM must reduce the Blessing by one point. Blessings reduced below zero are removed.

Credits and thanks: To Vincent Baker for kpf, since the notion of turning kpf on its head inspired this. To Ron Edwards and Clinton Nixon, since many of the mechanics come from Sorcerer and Donjon. To Paul Czege for My Life With Master, which has been in the back of my head during this. And to Corinne Mahaffey, who gained much Virtue by pointing out my various egregious editorial Sins.