

A USEFUL LIE

A Quickstart Scenario for The Ascended

SCENARIO PREMISE

No Man's Mercy takes place in the dry borderlands between the Ogallala Collapse and the Territories. A refugee settlement has tapped into one of the last functioning sections of the Ogallala aquifer. Water flows here where none should exist. The players arrive just before the situation collapses into chaos.

WHY THE PARTY IS HERE: THE KANSAS DEBT

The party has been hired by a contact in Kansas to collect an outstanding debt. The debtor is an Aetherion Tolerant grifter named Caleb Morrix who fled before repayment. He uses subtle Aetherion abilities to alter his appearance and avoid identification. The party has tracked the debtor to this settlement but does not know what they currently look like.

LOCATION

The settlement lies in a dry, depopulated region between the Ogallala Collapse and the Territories. Water scarcity defines life here. A pre-Fall pumping station still draws from the aquifer beneath the settlement.

FACTIONS PRESENT

The Holdfast — Refugees built around the well.

Vaygus Detachment — Providing protection and humanitarian aid.

Church Recon Operatives — Undercover and operating beyond their mandate.

SCENARIO FLOW

The scenario unfolds in phases: investigation, pressure, discovery, chaos, and collapse. The GM should allow players to drive the pace while maintaining background pressure.

INVESTIGATION & PRESSURE

As the party searches for the grifter, they learn about the well, the Vaygus detachment, and the settlement's reliance on the pumps. Church operatives are present but undercover. At least one Church operative should be interacted with during investigation.

The GM should periodically request Perception checks and describe subtle environmental stress: vibrations in the ground, fluctuating pressure, unusual sounds. These are atmospheric, not diagnostic.

THE COLLAPSE CLOCK

No NPC understands aquifer collapse. Collapse is not common knowledge. The GM rolls a Collapse Chance Die (1d6) every 30–45 minutes of in-game time or after major stress events. On a result of 1, collapse begins and the ground starts to break down slowly but violently into a sinkhole.

Rare Insight Exception

On a critical success to a Perception check directly related to environmental stress from pumping, a player may realize collapse is possible, but not certain. This insight does not reveal timing, severity, or solutions.

Collapse Levels

Level 0 — Hope: Water flows normally.

Level 1 — Strain: Vibrations and pressure fluctuations.

Level 2 — Denial: Warnings ignored, tension rises.

Level 3 — Panic: Visible failure signs and chaos.

Level 4 — Collapse: Structural failure and disaster.

COMBAT TRIGGERS

- The grifter is discovered and flees.
- Any visible Aetherion ability is used – church operatives will accidentally slip and become combatants.
- The grifter turns the settlement against the party.
- Church operatives are exposed.
- Collapse begins early (everyone rolls initiative).

When collapse begins, the situation is treated as combat even if no one is hostile. Environmental hazards act each round.

KEY NPC: CALEB MORRIX / EVAN COLE

Caleb Morrix is an Aetherion Tolerant grifter posing as Evan Cole, a pump mechanic. He has used Aetherion to convince the settlement of his competence. He is terrified of exposure and will flee or manipulate others to survive.

SETTLEMENT NPCs

Mary Holt — Settlement Organizer

Mary Holt is the pragmatic organizer keeping the settlement functional. She prioritizes stability and will escalate hostility if the pumps or water access are threatened.

Jonah Ricks — Pump Hand

Jonah Ricks works directly with the pumps and believes Evan Calder saved the settlement. He is emotionally volatile and easily weaponized against outsiders.

CHURCH NPC

Sister Alia Verne — Undercover Recon Operative

Sister Alia Verne is a Church operative posing as a traveling archivist. She gathers evidence quietly and escalates instantly when doctrine is violated.

VAYGUS NPC

Captain Irena Vos — Vaygus Detachment Commander

Captain Vos leads a small Vaygus relief detachment. She prioritizes civilian safety and will fight the Church if exposed.