



Phelantar's Guide
to
The Guild of White Knives
for
The 13th Age Roleplaying Game



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Introduction

Where civilization and communities of people exist, there also exists corruption, inequality, hunger for power, oppression, and injustice. No matter the race, no matter the kingdom, and no matter the laws or claimed goals of those in charge, such problems are inevitable and must be redressed. In an ideal world, the people of the community would resolve these problems and continue on until the next one cropped up. However, in many places the balance of power is such that those causing the inequity can keep the situation going on indefinitely with no redress for those affected by it.

This is why the Guild of White Knives exists. Assassins. Thieves. Saboteurs. They fight in secret to bring down the problems that plague a society and the people who are causing them. They are ruthless and bloody in their efforts to bring down corrupt politicians, power-hungry merchants, tyrannical nobles, bullying guards, and anybody who supports them. No tactic is too dishonorable for the guild and they do not hesitate to kill, blackmail, steal, burn, or destroy in the name of restoring equality and bring down those who create it. This causes many to label them as terrorists, bandits, or merely another sort of thieves guild. This dislike is not merely limited to those targeted by the White Knives and even those people who they are attempting to help will speak out or fight back against them.

The Guild has existed for hundreds of years, or so the common knowledge goes. Even isolated villages have heard of the Guild and know of some of the things they have done. Bards, minstrels, history books, and travelers have spread the word across the known world and even into the planes beyond. The line between myth, legend, and fact has been so completely blurred that at times merely the rumor of the Guild setting up a cell in an area has been known to prompt the resolution of the problems that would have drawn the Guild there in the first place. However, on some occasions, the rumors of the Guild being involved has lead to brutal crackdowns on suspected members that has often made things worse for the community involved. This in and of itself sometimes draws the Guild's attention, but on some occasions the community has suffered for many years before the oppression has let up.

But, despite their legendary status, the Guild is not without their own secrets and dark side. Despite their best of intentions, their history is checkered and those with power within the organization are not immune from the corruption that they fight in the world. Few realise how often blood is shed within the guild as it attempts to remain pure, but those who do wonder if the Guild is qualified to judge anybody for their faults.

Organization

The Guild of White Knives is organized with a decentralized structure that allows maximum flexibility and autonomy for the local cells. However, decentralized doesn't mean that there is no structure. The Guild of White Knives is guided at the highest level by a group called the White Conclave. This group handles high level strategy and dispatches agents to areas which they feel require investigation or intervention. The White Conclave has had as many as nine members, but as few as three depending on the needs of the organization. Ultimately, every member of the Guild must answer to the White Conclave and they have broad discretion to do with problems or problem members as they see fit.

The danger of a member being turned against the Guild exists at all levels, but the amount of knowledge that the Conclave has about operations across the world makes them even more important to ensure their loyalty to each other and the organization. Powerful magical oaths, sworn on blood, family, and gods, are sworn by every member of the Conclave and they cannot speak about Guild activities outside of a limited set of circumstances.

The Conclave meets three times each month at the new moon, full moon, and half-moon for 3-4 hours. Communication done outside of these three meetings is done through spirit couriers which travel through the ethereal plane to deliver messages. Each member of the Conclave has a magical item which can teleport them to the headquarters and back again. Even the Conclave members do not know where the headquarters is. Only the handful of permanent staff which lives there knows the exact location and they are forbidden to discuss it with anybody else. All that is known about the headquarters is that it was a large shrine to a forgotten god located high in the mountains and it is referred to as Whitehold by the Guild. The permanent staff are specially trained and recruited members who have all the typical skills one might expect out of a Guild member as well as additional training in logistics, organization, and management. They handle the day to day necessities of the Guild under the direction of the Conclave, though their direct interactions with individual regions or cells is limited.

Whitehold is intended to survive in the event of any Conclave member or area becoming compromised and contains everything the Guild might need to begin again. Extensive written records of Guild activities written in complicated ciphers as well as numerous useful texts from outside the Guild fill the library. The armory is well stocked with both mundane and magical weapons, armor, and equipment. Arcane labs and tools for craftsmen like smiths are more limited, but still exist within the headquarters. A vault contains tremendous amounts of gold, silver, and copper coins from numerous kingdoms as well as other forms of wealth such as gems, art, and jewelry. The Guild can be rebuilt from total obliteration from these resources and there are hints that it has happened on at least one occasion.

Conclave members wear white masks enchanted to move and emote as though they were an actual face as well as all-concealing robes or cloaks. In different ages, the Conclave has given each member a color that was used to distinguish each other more easily, but just as often the

Conclave has allowed each member to wear whatever they would like so long as their identity is largely concealed from one another. Conclave members are forbidden to attempt to learn the identity of other members, under pain of death, but it has been known to happen as the members attempt to check each other's powers and influence. The exact identities of permanent staff at headquarters are also kept secret from the Conclave to help preserve the secret of the location of Whitehold. Only their first names are known.

The emphasis on secrecy continues throughout the Guild. Each designated area has a duo of leaders referred to as Mother and Father which report to the White Conclave and are in turn reported to by the cells located in the individual communities. They are referred to by their controlling region, so they might be "Mother Redcrown" for the area of Redcrown or "Father Silverlake" for the regions surrounding Silverlake and are typically addressed as such by those above and below them. Mother and Father do not know each other's identities, but are intended as checks against one another to keep them pure and free of corruption. Members of the White Conclave know the true identity of either a Mother or Father in each region but never both.

In turn, the Mother and Father of each region know mutually exclusive cells. Mother will never have the full information about the same cells as Father and vice versa. Mother and Father can command or interact with all cells in their region, but only one of the two knows the identity of the leader of the cell and has the full breakdown of that cell's activities. This structure continues down all the way to the newest initiate. Cell leaders know the identity of all their members, but the individual members do not know the identity of their leader nor their fellow members.

If a member of the Guild is compromised, the damage to the organization as a whole is limited to a single member, cell, or region. Numerous times throughout history, a kingdom or opposing organization has been able to take down some of the Guild, but only once has the Guild as a whole been threatened. Even that lone threat was facilitated by elements within the Guild who genuinely felt that they were working towards the good of the Guild as a whole and likely would not have progressed as far as it had without the insider elements. Still, although a threat to the Guild has not occurred often, battles within the Guild has been more common, typically between a Mother and Father who feels that the other is working in their own interests or against the interests in the Guild.

When a member of the Guild goes rogue, the Conclave meets to decide the course of action. Usually, a special team is called up with members from several cells and areas and they are sent to capture the offender and bring them to headquarters for a trial. These trials heavily use magic to bring forth the truth and when magic fails, more extreme measures are taken. All guilty members are summarily executed, no exceptions. When capture isn't feasible or possible, the rogue member is outright killed by the team with no thought to collateral damage or incidental deaths. When possible, the now-dead target's body is turned to ashes and scattered to the winds or otherwise utterly destroyed to prevent any sort of resurrection magic from being employed.

Goals and Methods

The Guild of White Knives has goals that are generally simple to understand. When there is oppression, inequity, or tyranny, they will set up a Guild cell to begin operations in the area with the intent of eliminating the problems that drew them there. This means wiping out the perpetrator or ruining them in such a way that they can't cause problems again. In general, the Guild doesn't target children or innocent dependents who are unaware of the ill deeds being performed, but if the cell leader feels that it must be done then nobody is safe. The White Conclave generally discourages this sorts of root and branch methodology, but it nevertheless remains a potential tool in the arsenal of any cell leader that deems it necessary.

If the source of the oppression is a local family of nobles, this might mean that the adults of that family will be slaughtered. If the problem is caused by a merchant concern gouging their customers or exploiting their workers, then the Guild might rob warehouses and caravans, then distribute the goods to the people who are being taken advantage of. Thieves guilds which dominate a town or city would find their members hunted down and their hideouts burned to the ground. The exact nature of the response depends, to some extent, on the situation at hand. A non-violent situation will frequently garner a response that targets money and property, whereas blood and violence will lead the Guild to escalate in kind.

The typical Guild methodology is to start small and make minor moves against their target or targets to gauge reactions, defenses, and abilities. Against a thieves guild, the White Knives might beat up a sneakthief and take his money to see what the thieves might do in response. The Guild might break into the house of a corrupt guardsman and obviously steal something to see who that guard might run to in order to report it. The Guild might arrange a direct attack through hired thugs against the evil archwizard to see what sort of immediate defenses he has against assassination attempts. From these small learning attempts they will make their next move, bigger and more dangerous each time. These small actions also serve as ways to train the new local initiates. The Guild rarely will send an entire cell to an area that needs attention. Instead they will send an experienced operative and an assistant, who will recruit 5-10 locals to be trained and learn the skills and secret abilities of the Guild.

In some cases, complete elimination isn't possible, in which case the goal becomes to reduce it as far as possible and set up a smaller continued presence to maintain control over the situation. With nobility, this is often the necessary tactic as there is no guarantee that any new ruler will be any better than the previous ones. It's also likely, though not universal, that solving one large problem in a town or city will let another problem or set of problems to bubble to the surface. If adventurers are bullying and controlling a town, when the Guild kills them or drives them off, the nearby bandits or monsters might find the town easier pickings. If the Guild crushes a trading company that has been dominating a region, the economy of the region might suffer greatly until others can step up to rebuild the trade there. The White Conclave often considers this an unfortunate but necessary cost to their operations.

Example Personalities

These example Guild members can be used as-is, tweaked to suit your game, or as inspiration to create your own. They are not to be considered any kind of “canon” unless you want them to be.

Amina Soto, member of the White Conclave - Soto came up through the ranks, beginning as a rank and file initiate in an area where the nobility was levying crushing taxes and making up the difference in dark and unsavory ways from the populace. Soto was recruited to the Guild and cut a bloody and terrifying swath through the local nobles that earned her the nickname Death's Bloody Daughter. Even after she pushed upward, becoming a regional Mother and then member of the Conclave, she typically advocates for the most violent resolution for any situation, pointing out how the Guild's reign of terror in her area has largely solved any problems for almost 20 years.

Mark Labon, member of the White Conclave - Lawson is one of the rare people at the top of the Guild who has not been jaded and tainted by the bloody and dirty Guild business. Lawson joined up to help take down a mercantile circle which was secretly using slave labor and hiring bandits and monsters to take down rivals and Lawson has carried the sense that he was a part of doing the right thing all the way up to the Conclave. He is a voice of reason and attempts to keep the Guild's goals and methods pure, but is often disappointed by the reality of the situation.

Laura Blackbow, Mother of the Broken Gate region - When a new noble took control of the Broken Gate area and began to harass the young women of the area, Blackbow grumbled but knew she couldn't do much to help. When the nobleman began to take more extreme measures against the women who resisted his advances, Blackbow expected the Guild to make an appearance. When they did not and the situation only continued to worsen, Blackbow took matters into her own hands and “founded” her own part of the Guild, which began to harass and attack the nobleman and his retainers in direct retaliation for his own actions. The White Knives took notice of this unauthorized cell and sent a team to eliminate the false Guild members and evaluate the situation. However, the Guild found a hardened and very dangerous group waiting for them and after several bloody, but inconclusive, fights an accommodation was reached. Blackbow and her group would be trained and made official and the Guild would acknowledge that they should have been in the area to assist. Blackbow has since risen in the Guild, bringing a different perspective and approach to Guild issues that worries more conservative members, but has solved problems that might have been more difficult or bloody with a traditional approach. Blackbow is expected to be a serious candidate when a new member of the Conclave is chosen, which might trigger infighting within the Guild.

Gareth Rediron, White Knife assassin - Rediron is something that is actually quite rare within the White Knives: a complete remorseless sociopath. Rediron is a specialist, called in when the Guild absolutely needs someone dead with no regard towards subtlety. Rediron is terrifyingly

dangerous even compared to the others within the Guild and he is no longer allowed to live outside of Guild control. He is kept in magical stasis and mind-altering spells are used to keep him pacified and under the illusion that he's living a normal life outside of guild requests. Before joining the Guild, Rediron was a notorious bandit, murderer, and assassin for hire who had killed hundreds of people in his life. The killings ranged from long distance shots with a customized crossbow to boarding up the windows and burning a house down, shooting down anybody who managed to escape the inferno. Rediron is a weapon that the Guild unleashes only when necessary because they know that it might go out of their control at any time.

Tuia Korok, White Knife initiate - Korok joined the Guild after her brother, a blacksmith, spoke out against the local Tradesman's Guild and was killed in an "accident" shortly thereafter. Her thirst for vengeance was finally sated when the man who ordered her brother's death lay crying as his lifeblood spilled away and now she seeks to do more work for the Guild in new areas. She's a big believer in preventative moves and argues that more effort should be made to find problems people and situations before they become a problem. Her regional Mother and Father argue that they don't have the resources to take that sort of stance, but Korok continues to push for it.

Duach Hobel, Guild Steward - Hobel is one of about two dozen Guild members who live permanently in Whitehold and has been there as long as anybody can remember. He is an old human man, built like old weathered oak and still going strong despite his advanced age. He is unfailingly polite to all Guild members and is so competent at managing the day to day Guild business that crosses his desk that the other stewards joke that they don't know what they would do without him. What nobody, not even the Conclave, knows is that Hobel has been in Whitehold for hundreds of years. He has been bound, body and soul, to the castle and may only leave for a few hours at a time before immense pain and horrible visions begin to plague him. Hobel suspects that his death might unleash something horrible in the depths below Whitehold that only he knows exists, so he quietly goes about his life and avoids risking himself more than necessary. A difficult task in an organization full of very dangerous people.

Iseult Pols, Guild "consultant" - Pols is a priestess of the goddess of justice and mercy who unwittingly got involved in Guild business when she was investigating the assassination of several figures of note near the shrine where she currently was doing work. She uncovered a web of corruption, murder, and dark magic that tied those people, and more, together. She also uncovered the Guild team working against the conspiracy and managed to make enemies out of both of them. Her faith, her magic, and her swinging arm were sufficient to fend off attackers for a while, but the Guild team eventually kidnapped her to uncover what she knew about them and their foes. Reluctantly, Pols assisted them in burning the conspirators out of their hiding places, literally, and has been brought into Guild business on several occasions since. She finds the Guild often the lesser of two evils, but has made no secret that she thinks the Guild should be brought to justice itself. Despite that, her skills and magic are often too useful for the Guild to pass up and the people the Guild fights are often worse than the Guild itself.

Initiation and Abilities

With few exceptions, all recruits into the White Knives are given intensive training in combat, stealth, infiltration, information gathering, and other useful skills that will make them a useful asset for the Guild. They are given basic training in ciphers and handsigns, but nothing that would be too dangerous if they are captured and compromised. They're taught to blend in with both the environment and with the community on different levels. This training is comprehensive and effective, but entirely mundane.

When the recruit has been deemed worthy, they undergo a special initiation ceremony carried out by the cell leader. The leader draws a mystical circle with salt and ashes from holly or oak before cutting their finger and putting a drop of their blood at all four cardinal directions on the circle. The circle then glows with faint silvery-white magic as initiates step inside. Each initiate makes it glow brighter until it burns as bright as full daylight.

The history of the Guild is passed on in an abbreviated fashion and then an initiate drinks a specially brewed potion which leaves them paralyzed and numb, but still fully conscious. They recite oaths to the guild as the leader deeply carves a symbol onto the palm of each hand with their white knife. These symbols cannot be seen by anybody who does not have the same symbol except by certain magical spells and are used as marks of recognition when necessary, especially when faces are concealed.

More importantly still than these symbols, the cell leader cuts along the vein in the forearm, all the way to the bone. The torrent of blood drips onto the floor in the circle, but otherwise behaves oddly. It pools, then turns the same silvery-white as the mystical circle surrounding them. The leader removes his knife from the initiate's arm and does the same with the other arm. The two pools of blood seek each other and when they combine the initiate stops bleeding from the arms. The leader passes his knife through the pool of blood and within moments a new white knife is on the ground where the blood used to be. The initiate often passes out at this point.

When they wake, they find that they're more than just the owner of the white knife which gives the Guild its name. The ceremony has awakened other magical powers within them. The ability to blur their outline and to cloud the minds of those who look at them in the face, as well as to stab someone, even themselves, and use the blood as a weapon. Some form swords or axes of blood and wield them like they would any other weapon, others turn the blood poisonous and fling bolts of it as their foes. The limit is only that of the user's imagination and the blood supply available to them. One of the typical calling cards for the Guild is to stab someone with the white knife, drain all of their blood, and leave the completely dessicated corpse in that pool of blood. This makes some suspect that the Guild is made up of vampires or other life-draining creatures, but most people recognise it for what it is: a warning that the Guild is active nearby.

Using The Guild of White Knives

The Guild is one of those organizations which makes the perfect ally or the perfect enemy. Or, better yet, to leave the players wondering which. The Guild has, at least in theory, good intentions. Fight corruption. Fight oppression. Fight tyranny. Take power and money from those who abuse it and give it to people who will not. In this respect, they're often on the side of the player characters whether either side realises it right away or not. If the player characters are fighting against an evil noble, the Guild can probably be counted on to help them. The Guild might break them free of jail, set up a distraction so the characters can accomplish some mutual goal, or give them information through a third party. This all might be a direct cooperation with the adventurers or it might be completely hidden, making the adventurers question where the mysterious help is coming from.

However, The Guild isn't exactly all white hats and good guys. They're not averse to taking extreme measures to reach their goals. If that means burning down a hospital that their target is after, then they might do that regardless of the innocent lives taken in the process. Even if the players or their characters want that bad guy out of the way, they might have to fight off the Guild to protect the others from them. Not knowing where the Guild stands on anything should be an important part of using them. Even if they are helping the characters, they should wonder at their motivations and thinking that the Guild might turn on them at any time. Keep the Guild mysterious in their interactions with players. Don't give out names, don't let the characters easily see faces, and don't have the Guild announce why they're helping. Humanize any White Knives the characters interact with in small ways, like nodding to a character in thanks after that character fends off a mutual foe or buying the characters a round of ale before disappearing into the night. Remind the players that the Guild is working with the best of intentions, even if their methods might be unacceptable to the characters.

Then there's outright using the Guild against the party as adversaries from the get-go. If the Guild thinks that the adventurers are a threat, either to the Guild itself or their operations, they'll take direct and indirect actions against them. A character with a tavern might find it burning down around their ears one night as the Guild takes a shot at them. A character's family might be kidnapped or outright killed. The Guild will attempt to take resources away from characters by doing things like hiring thugs to rob their room and take their gold. The Guild might strike directly right away, but they're likely to recognise that adventurers are a danger and will work on wearing the party down, striking around them, and then finally making a direct attack once the characters are beaten up and out of options. The Guild coming after the characters might clue them in that something about their current situation needs further investigation, which then might turn them against their employer or change their current course of action.

Alternatively, the Guild might turn to the characters in an internal struggle. Outside agents untouched by a strong opinion is a desperate move for someone within the Guild, but would draw the characters into a web of shadows that they would have to fight free from.

White Knives stats

White Knife Initiate

Level 3 Trooper (Humanoid)

Init: +5

Blade Dance +8 vs AC - 10 Damage

Natural 16+ hit - Half of the damage becomes Ongoing

Miss - 4 damage

Blurred Outline - The first attack against an Initiate each turn must roll 2d20 and take the lower of the two rolls.

AC 19

PD 16 **HP 42**

MD 14

White Knife Veteran

Level 5 Wrecker (Humanoid)

Init: +8

C: Blood Whip +10 vs AC - 12 damage and 6 ongoing poison damage.

Natural Even Hit - The target is moved to a nearby location of the Veteran's choice. If this is a dangerous area, the target get a normal (11+) save to avoid it.

Natural 1-5 miss - The Veteran takes 7 damage

Precision - Veterans crit on an 18-20 roll

Blurred Outline - The first attack against a Veteran each turn must roll 2d20 and take the lower of the two rolls.

AC 21

PD 18 **HP 68**

MD 16

White Knife Recruit

Level 2 Mook (Humanoid)

Init: +3

Blackened Dagger +7 vs AC - 5 Damage

Strength in Numbers - +1 to attack rolls for every Recruit engaged with a target

Quick to Run - When fewer than half of the Recruits in a mob remain, the Recruits now move twice as far with a single move action.

AC 18

PD 16 **HP 10 (mook)**

MD 12

Mook: Remove 1 Recruit for every 10 damage done to the mob

White Knife Sniper

Level 5 Archer (Humanoid)

Init: +7

R: Blood Bolt +12 vs AC - 18 poison damage. The sniper takes 6 damage every time it uses this attack.

Natural Even Hit - The target is Hampered (save ends)

Natural Even Miss - Deal 6 damage to a nearby enemy

Long Slice +10 vs AC - 12 damage and the next Blood Bolt attack causes no damage to the Sniper

Blurred Outline - The first attack against a Sniper each turn must roll 2d20 and take the lower of the two rolls.

AC 21

PD 16 **HP 62**

MD 18

White Knife Spectre

Level 4 Spoiler (Humanoid)

Init: +7

White Blade +9 vs AC - 10 damage and the target cannot use the Escalation Die until the start of the Spectre's next turn

Miss - 5 damage

C: Blood in the Eyes +8 vs PD - The target is Dazed (save ends). Usable as a Quick action once per turn.

Slippery - The Spectre gains a +2 to disengage checks

Blurred Outline - The first attack against a Spectre each turn must roll 2d20 and take the lower of the two rolls.

AC 21

PD 18 **HP 68**

MD 16

White Knife Saboteur

Level 3 Caster (Humanoid)

Init: +5

R: Gore Bomb +8 vs AC against 1d3 nearby targets - 8 acid damage

Natural Even Hit - 4 ongoing acid damage and allies gain a +2 damage vs the target

Natural 1-5 Miss - Make another attack roll against a nearby ally and the Saboteur takes 6 damage.

Blurred Outline - The first attack against a Saboteur each turn must roll 2d20 and take the lower of the two rolls.

AC 19

PD 18 **HP 51**

MD 12

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