

Die Kreuzritter

Ö20 Society Supplement

A Knife in the Dark

The Bishop took another sip of wine as he looked over the paper. Swirling the red liquid around his mouth, he savoured the taste of the fine Falisci wine, one of the perks of his high position. The clerk had done his task well and gathered all the relevant papers concerning the ownership of the small fief. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately the Bishop guessed, the clerk has no idea that he had given the only copies of the papers to the one man who should not have been allowed them. Standing up and reaching forward with the paper, the corner dipped into the flame of one of the candles at the edge of his desk and the dry parchment quickly started to curl and blacken. Orange flames slowly spread along its edge as the corpulent churchman walked over to the fireplace. As he watched, the last incriminating piece of evidence slowly disappeared in his hand and with one final flick he tossed the burning remnants in to the fire.

“Well, so much for that, the peasants should be grateful for the benefices of the Mother Church. We, after all, have their best interest in mind for the organisation of their lands...”

The bishop sat back down in the chair with a sigh, the creaking of protest from the furniture masking a slight rustle of the curtains by the closed window. Even before he knew it, a knife appeared at his throat. With a startled cry, the Bishop dropped the goblet and the dark claret spread out across the stone floor.

“What is the meaning of this!”

The hooded stranger did not reply, but started to mumble something quietly. To the Bishop’s horror, he recognised the

litany given to someone about to die. Gasping and struggling against the grip of the assassin, the desperate mark spotted the small black cross suspended on a chain from the neck of his assailant.

“It can’t be... your order is supposed to be dead.”

The candlelight caught the face of the shadowed figure.

“Betrayed perhaps, but certainly not dead. You on the other hand...”



Introduction

The ancient Order of the Black Crosses were founded in 308AV by an Eisen crusader in the Crescent city of Zafara. Tending to the wounded, when the city fell to the Thean army a hospital was established which stands there to this day. From this start at the Hospital of the First Witness, the group expanded to police the city and then further abroad. In 347AV their work was recognised by the Hierophant, leading to the Order acquiring its emblem of the Black Cross of a white tabard.

The Order grew powerful and wealthy over the following centuries as donations were granted by the Church and nobles who wished to gain favour or prestige. Unfortunately this secular power drew the attention of Imperator Arvid I, who used his leverage over the puppet Hierophant Logan III to have the group suppressed. At Tannenburg in 1411AV, the Order faced the forces of the Emperor and fought to the last man. As far as almost the entire of Theah is concerned, that battle saw the final chapter in the story of the Kreuzritter. However, in reality Logan warned the Order and a number of Knights escaped the purge to the church stronghold of Castille. Today, the Order serves a very different purpose and operates in absolute secrecy. Always defenders of the Faith, the exiled Knights in Castille made a discovery that would

New Feat: Dead to the World

Many Knights fake their own deaths in order to serve the Order, this necessitates developing skills in bluffing and acting out a new persona. Any tie to their old life is usually excised and the penalties for contact with old friends and family are among the harshest in the Order.

Prerequisites : Membership - Kreuzritter

Benefit : Bluff and Disguise are considered class skills regardless of class. If these are already class skills, you receive a +2 competence bonus to all checks. All Gather Information checks made against you have +10 difficulty.

forever change the nature of the group, an ancient city was uncovered below the monastery granted to them by Logan. In the alien ruin, they found a number of artefacts that granted their wielder unusual powers and revealed the existence of a shadow world known as the Dark Paths. It is here that they were thrust into an ancient feud between Synchron races exiled millennia ago behind a magical barrier and desperate to get back through to rule over Theah. These Strangers, as they are called, have already infiltrated certain nations and organisation, but their greatest victory was the Bargain with the ancient Numan senators that led to the forms of sorcery known today as Porté, Sorté, El Fuego Adentro and Zerstückung. All of these black arts damage the magical barrier and bring the final battle one step closer, a battle that the Black Crosses have sworn to stop from happening at all costs.

Membership

The Order values its secrecy above everything else. Theah is simply not ready to learn of the truth about the Bargain and the existence of the Strangers. Prospective members are watched in secret for an extended period before being approached. If the person accepts then they usually fake their own death to break all ties with their past life and take a new identity in the Order, although a few Knights maintain a former position if it of use to the aims of the group. As they join in secret, most Black Crosses also die the same way and the only mark of their passing is a small memorial in the Castillian monastery.

State of the World

The turbulence of the last year has worried the leaders of the Black Crosses like few others. The rising of Cabora represents a tangible threat of the ancient Synchron societies that they face on a regular basis. Elsewhere there have been a mixture of victories and brewing concerns.

Avalon

The scholars are still uncertain as to how Glamour affects the Barrier, although the Sidhe are certainly not a force to be trusted. In order to gain more knowledge, Knights explore the island kingdoms and have focused particular attention on the O'Bannon, who has shown himself to have some knowledge of the existence of the Order. With the fall of Elaine and the coming of the Sidhe War, the Order has sent more agents to Avalon to deal with this threat.

Castille

While the Church is the mother of the Order, the actions of the Inquisition worry the Order considerably, although the recent sightings of El Fuego Adentro mages around eastern Castille is of far more immediate concern. The Order had thought that the sorcerous art was all but extinct. Soon the mages may wish that it was.

Crescent Empire

The Black Crosses still maintain the Hospital in Zafara as well as guarding dozens of Synchron sites across this nation. This gives the Order an unrivalled knowledge of the Crescents, it is also a monopoly that they are very interested in maintaining. Encroachments by the Explorers and the Rose & Cross are being closely watched by the Guardians.

Eisen

The true home of the Order has seen increased activity from the group over the year as the situation in many of the kingdoms deteriorates. Freiburg remains in a delicate balance, while the stories from Heilgrund have many worried and seeking more information. The arrival of Montaigne emigres in Wische was a great annoyance to the group, although they have been hesitant to act against them since they bring a new wealth and stability to the kingdom.



Montaigne

The Montaigne Revolution had a little help from the shadows in order to fulfil a long-term goal of the Order, the overthrow of the Empereur and the Porté-using noble classes. The Order had an extra incentive to act since they are the only group that knew that it was Leon who killed the last Hierophant. Since the Revolution, the Knights have moved their focus elsewhere, although some still track down rogue Porté users. The restoration of the monarchy under Montegue is being closely watched, to make sure that it does not see a return of the sorcerous upper classes.

Ussura

So long as the group maintain the embargo on sorcerers entering the winter kingdom, Matushka will tolerate their presence. However, following the withdrawal of the Montaigne, the rest of the people of Ussura are perhaps not so kind towards outsiders. The Order is also concerned about the stability of the Gaius and some have never felt comfortable with their arrangement with Matushka.

Vendel / Vestenmannavnjar

The Order continues to investigate the nature of Lærdom and its effect on the Barrier. The recent tales of 'Living Runes' of great power has interested the scholars involved in this work and they have sent a number of Knights in secrecy to find out more. Until they are certain of the nature of the sorcery, they will be unlikely to take sides in the brewing war between the Vesten and Vendel.

Vodacce

Since the sinking of Caligari's Isle and the war with Alcide Mondavi, the use of Sorté has increased as the remaining nobles struggle to maintain their position. The Order lacks the resources to affect the conflict to any great extent and some caution about becoming too involved in a nation that prizes the Great Game of intrigue above everything else.

Explorer's Society

The Black Crosses are one of the many groups that has grave concerns about this new Age of Exploration, although unlike the others they have the means and will to act. A number of

Explorer ships have disappeared or been burnt to the waterline a day before they sail. Many in the Order have suggested chartering their own ships in order to find whatever is out West before anyone else does.

Invisible College

Luckily for the inner circle of the College, the Order remain unaware of the true nature of their Blood Science, else a number of prominent scientists would find themselves quickly targeted for a midnight visit. Until that time, the Order remains watchful but mostly disinterested.

Knights of the Rose & Cross

The high profile that the Knights enjoy is a constant reminder to the Black Crosses of the sacrifices that they made. Some of the Knights most outspoken opponents have ties to the Order, although the Order itself has tended to be ambivalent towards the Knights. This attitude is quickly changing as the Rose & Cross unwittingly encroach on Tannen and take a fresh interest in the Crescent Peninsula. The situation may soon become bloody and they may find themselves in a very viscous and damaging shadow war. While many believe they could easily win any conflict with their former brethren, certain senior members are more cautious in their assessment of their potential adversary.

Los Vagos

The Order has assisted the Vagabond on occasion from the shadows in its opposition to the Inquisition. While some Castillian members still press for more open activity with the group, the leaders are still very concerned about revealing the existence of the Order to outsiders.

Rilasciare

The troublemakers of the Rilasciare got a bit too close to the Order over the last few months, especially during the Montaigne Revolution. A number of activists have since been found face down in the Sineuse river, although for the moment their deaths have been put down to political rivals in the new government. The Order was also growing very concerned about the depths that the Jacob Society had gone to in controlling Montaigne and were considering taking action when Montegue reappeared in the picture.



Sophia's Daughters

Although the Order remains unaware of the Daughters, they came close to uncovering one of their strongholds in Inismore and remain in search of what they think is a natural passage to the Sidhe land of Bryn Bresail. If the Order was to find out about the group, their response would be quick and deadly.

The Hidden Blade

While the very existence of the Order is hidden from most of Theah, there are secrets that the Kreuzritter hide even from those in the Church that know of them. The darkest of these is the sorcery known as Nacht which was found in the explorations of the ancient underground city (*see the Nacht Sorcerer prestige class in the Swashbuckling Adventures core book for details*). This allows Knights to step onto the Dark Paths, where the war against the Strangers takes on a shadowy aspect unseen by all. Without the protection granted by the Black Cloaks, the Knights of the Order are in danger of shadowburn as they patrol the path, or meeting one of the denizens of the realm such as the strange creatures of the Barrier or the dark twisted versions of the Knights of the Order known only as Nights (*see page 54 of Heroes, Villains and Monsters of Theah*).

The other ability gained by the Order from the city are the Nightblades, a sliver of shadow that projects from the palm

Reprinted Feat: Nightblade

You have been chosen to wear the Black Glove and so may call forth a Nightblade from your palm.

Prerequisites : Membership - Kreuzritter

Benefit : You gain the ability to create a knife of shadow in your hand as a free action, which leaves no visible wounds on those you stab with it. The process leaves a black spot in the centre of your palm. The Nightblade deals damage as a normal stiletto but passes through non-living objects, meaning that armour bonuses do not count and also that it cannot be used to parry. The blade can be dispelled as a free action, it is also dispelled by direct sunlight and any other thing that cancels the effect or sorcery or spell effects.

New Feat: Shadowburn

Exposure to the Dark Paths without mystical protection causes an icy chill that slowly kills the Knight. Even a Knight that survives the effect and returns to the real world does not soon forget the sensation.

Benefit : You gain a +1 *profane* bonus to all saves made at night but a -1 *profane* penalty to all saves made in the daylight. This feat can be taken up to three times.

Special : This feat may be given for free to a character after exposure to the Dark Paths at the GMs discretion.

of any Knight who has worn the Black Glove. This is the ultimate tool of the assassin as it penetrates armour and flesh alike, leaving no wound to suggest foul play. If the Order's supporters were ever to find out about these abilities, it is likely that official sanction would quickly evaporate. While the Order relies less and less on the Church, especially in the face of the growing power of the Inquisition, this is a situation that they will take any step to prevent even if it means the death of agents of the Church itself. The Strangers that the Order fight against are the ancient Surneth race known as the Thalusiai by the Explorer's Society. A number have successfully made it through the Barrier, which was created by the Sidhe to trap the Thalusiai, and have infiltrated society. However, mainly due to the close watch by the Order, none have so far made it into influential positions where they could have major effects on Theah and forward their ultimate goal of conquest.

Wolf in the Fold

Incorporating a Black Cross into a adventuring party can be difficult, since they cannot reveal their true nature to anyone without breaking their strongest Oath. Given their nature as assassins and people who do whatever is necessary to complete a task, they also do not make very good team players on the whole. The two most likely situations for a Black Cross player character are in a party consisting of all Kreuzritter characters or else forming a cover identity to interact with the other members. A full Kreuzritter campaign can be an interesting game to run, exploring the darker and more dangerous side of Theah as the Knights fight the

shadow war against the Strangers and take care of all the nasty tasks that true heroes would shy away from.

A lone Knight working within a group puts themselves in a difficult position, which usually entails them coming up with a convincing cover identity. The most obvious may be an Eisen mercenary or perhaps even a member of another Secret Society, such as the Explorer's, that the Order has infiltrated. This is a dangerous game to play as the character may take actions behind the backs of the other players or have goals that directly conflict with theirs. If the other players find out, it can quickly cause any form of group cohesion to disintegrate.

One possible solution to this quandary is to set up the Kreuzritter as a deep cover character, that is they are instructed by the Order to maintain the appearance of whatever group or organisation they are observing and to simply gather information but take no covert actions. Such characters are unlikely to possess Nacht sorcery or any other feature that would make them obviously different from what they are pretending to be. This gives the character a secret agenda without it being too much at odds with the actions expected of a heroic player character. The character may have a greater insight on certain evil creatures or artefacts, but is not called upon to perform assassinations or other actions that would mark them down as a criminal in the eyes of the rest of Theah.

Feature Characters

The following NPCs are important members of the Order and can serve a number of roles as superiors or even timely assistance. For groups without a tie to the Order, they may be a public face of the group with an agenda that may help or hinder the players.

The General

Gunther Schmidl, Eisen Fighter 2 / Noble 3 / Wanderer 1 / Nacht Sorcerer 1 / Unabwendbar 5; CR: 12; SZ M (humanoid); HD 4d8+8d10-26; hp 50; Init+1 (Dex); Spd 30ft; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +7 udp, +1 panzerhand); Atk +10/+5 rapier (melee) or +15 pistol; SA Seduction, Sneak Attack+1d6; SQ Concentration, Friends in High Places, Lead by Example, The Dark Paths,

Schooled in Command, Take and Give Orders; SV Fort+9, Ref +5; Will+12; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 20, Wis 16, Cha 13; AL LN; Skills: Bluff+7, Diplomacy+14, Gather Information+16, Hide+18, Knowledge (Economics)+18, Knowledge (History)+15, Knowledge (Local)+10, Knowledge (Mathematics)+10, Knowledge (Nobility) +11, Knowledge (Philosophy)+15, Knowledge (Religion)+9, Knowledge (War)+13, Listen+8, Move Silently+18, Perform (Dance) +5, Perform (Oratory)+10, Profession (Spy)+7, Ride+10, Search+6, Sense Motive+11, Speak Language (Eisen, High Eisen, Montaigne, Théan), Spot+8; Feats: Comforting, Exotic Shield Proficiency (Panzerhand), Expertise, Improved Unarmed Strike, Informant, Leadership, Membership (die Kreuzritter), Orders, Parry, Skill Focus (Economics, History, Philosophy), Stealthy, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner), Weapon Focus (Pistol), Weapon Expert (Pistol)

Background

The man that the Order refers to as Gunther Schmidl is in actuality the famous Eisen General Helmut Stauss. The General witnessed a Kreuzritter Knight stepping out of the Dark Paths during the war, he used his connections to find out what he saw and the Order were faced with a dilemma. Kill the General for what he knows or bring him into the fold, fortunately for them once Strauss had been told of the enemy that the Order now faced he quickly agreed to fake his own death and join the crusade. Rising quickly through the ranks, he is now one of the most efficient and beloved Hochmeisters in the history of the Order.

Under the leadership of Schmidl, the Order has expanded into all areas of Theah and made great progress in uncovering the nature of sorcery. The fall of Montaigne was in part added by the Order, which had been gravely concerned about the use of Porté. Like with all matters that the Order concern themselves, the decision to plunge the nation into the chaos of revolution was a difficult one. However, the thousands of lives lost must be weighed against the millions that would be lost if the Barrier was breached. It is this thought alone that keeps Schmidl sane and rational as he oversees the Knights and their duty.

Using Gunther Schmidl

The Hochmeister of the Order is a man of two natures, as the head of the Tannen Academy he appears as a grandfather figure who cares deeply for all the Knights under his care. He has a very calm and reasoned nature, which is often at

odds with the fiery nature of some of the other senior Knights. However, at his core Schmidl is still a soldier himself and has been known to go out on missions alone to show younger members just what it means to be a member of die Kreuzritter.

Characters who train to be Knights will likely come across the Hochmeister, if only during the various ceremonies that mark progress in the Order. He could also be the one sends the group out of a mission, knowing perhaps that this could potentially be the last time anybody sees them alive.

The Enigma

Grandmaster Kazi, Kanuban Fighter 4 / Ranger 3 /

Wanderer 4 / Opahkung 4: CR 15; SZ M (humanoid); HD 11d8+4d10; hp 71; Init+3 (Dex); Spd 30ft; AC 21 (+3 Dex, +8 udp); Atk longbow +15/+15/+10/+5 (ranged) or *lan* quarterstaff +12/+7/+2 (melee); SA Favored Enemy (Thalusai)+2; SQ Evasion, Invest Weapon, Reduce/Increase Lan/Nal, Tradesman, Transfer Lan/Nal, Uncanny Dodge, Ward of the Albatross; SV Fort+12, Ref+12; Will +10; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 12; AL NG; Skills: Climb+6, Craft (Arrowmaking)+15, Craft (Painting)+16, Craft (Traps)+12, Heal+16, Hide+20 (+23 against considerably higher opponents), Jump+11, Listen+17, Move Silently+21, Profession (Skinning)+8, Speak Language (Kanu, Montaigne, Théan), Spot+17, Survival+20, Swim+14, Tumble+15 (+17 against considerably higher opponents); Feats: Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Exemplary, Expertise, Faith, Membership (die Kreuzritter), Parry, Rapid Shot, Run, Side Step, Small, Stealthy, Track, Two-weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner)

Note - Kazi's *lan* imbued quarterstaff does d6+1 damage and causes magic nullification for 50 rounds

Background

The swarthy skinned Grandmaster of the Order is something of an oddity in Theah, being a native of the small island of Kanuba deep in the Midnight Archipelago (see page 26 of *Islands of Gold* for more details). Having journeyed to the mainland, he was rescued from the sea just off San Felipe. He came to the notice of the Order a few years later, when he rescued two Knights from the Musketeers without any knowledge of who exactly he was assisting.

Since then he has served the Black Crosses by training many of the current Knights with his incredible skill in stealth and tracking.

Using Grandmaster Kazi

Kazi could be a respected mentor to any Kreuzritter character, having trained him in the essential arts of deception that allow a Knight to act in the field. The Grandmaster is looking to retire and return to his island home, but before that he must find someone to take up his enchanted spear and his task of training the next generation of Knights. If someone could prove their worth to him, he could view them as his protege and potential replacement. With his unparalleled skills in going unseen, Kazi would also make an excellent companion on a very important mission for the Order, or if the characters are not members he could be the one sent to reclaim some secret information that the group just happen to have found that could damage the Order or has been deemed too dangerous to ignore.

The Silent Knife

Inga Danziger, Eisen Pirate 3 / Topman 2 / Nacht 1; CR 6; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d10+3+2d6+2+1d10+1; hp 40; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 18 (+2 Dex +1 Canny Defense +5 Unarmored Defense Proficiency); Atks: Cutlass +6 (melee) or pistol +6; SA Ambidexterity, Two Weapon Fighting, Seasoned, Eagle Eye, Canny Defense, Sneak Attack+1d6, The Dark Paths; SV Fort+8, Ref+8, Will +4; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 12, Char 11; AL NG; Skills: Balance+8, Climb+8, Gather Information+3, Intuit Direction+5, Jump +6, Move Silently+6, Performer (Acrobatics)+4, Profession (Sailor) +10, Sense Motive+3, Spot+8, Swim+4, Use Ropes+8; Feats: Reckless, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Firearms), Pirate Trick (Death from Above), Lightning Reflexes, Membership (die Kreuzritter), Skill Focus (Profession: Sailor), Unarmored Defense Proficiency (beginner)

Background

Regardless of nationality, every ship needs a good topman and Inga Danziger is one of the best. This friendly Eisen sailor has travelled across most of Théah on ships of every nation, usually only staying with a ship for a short time and then moving on. Despite this, long experience has made her a Master of the Tops and one of the most skilled riggers to sail the seas. Combined with her willingness to face any odds, her skills make her a welcome sight to any captain. When she was only eight years old, she signed on as a cabin girl onboard a Guild ship for several years. While in Kirk, she witnessed a battle between a pair of Eisen noblemen and

several muggers in an alley. When one of the nobles fell in battle, she leapt upon the muggers from behind and scattered them, despite her size. Impressed with her courage and agility, the surviving noble sponsored her in the Academy in Tannen. She remained for only a few years before the lure of the sea drew her back.

Today, Inga is a short, blonde woman of twenty who wears her long hair in braids to keep it out of her eyes and always dresses in sailor's clothing. She is always willing to lend a hand to those less fortunate than herself and often literally throws herself into danger without thought for her own well-being.

She has few enemies and only one rival worth mentioning. Once while serving on the *Crystal Cutlass*, under the command of Vincenzo di Lucca, a storm brewed up. Despite the danger, Inga insisted on lowering the sails to prevent their destruction, and a tall red-haired Avalon topman named Meg remained aloft to help her. Amidst torrential rains and timber-shattering lightning strikes, they completed their tasks. Meg is the only sailor to ever match her fearlessness and Inga longs to best her.

However, the Eisen Master of the Tops is more than she seems. The nobleman she assisted as a child was actually a member of die Kreuzritter fighting against an Outsider and his minions. Seeing potential in the diminutive girl, he recruited her into his organisation. Now she primarily serves as a courier and a spy for the Order, keeping her eye on the numerous ships and ports across Théah and searching for any signs of Outsiders. Her Nacht sorcery is extremely dangerous to use at sea, so she rarely relies on it.

Using Inga Danziger

A typical Knight in the field, Inga could be called on as a contact or friend-in-need by another Kreuzritter member. In her role as courier, she could also be a very common figure as she brings messages from the higher ranks to the group, sending them on missions and ferrying any messages or dangerous artefacts back to the Order.

The True Enemy

The Kreuzritter fight a secret war against a myriad of strange and powerful creatures that continue to try and break

through into Theah. The most obvious of these are the Strangers, the ancient race known by the Explorer's as the Thalusiai and those responsible for the sorcerous powers of the Bargain. However, there are a wide range of other strange and unusual creature apparently behind the Barrier, which on occasion can cause havoc in the real world. The Black Knights are tasked with dealing with these incursions and try to make sure no-one else finds out about the dangers that strike from the shadows. A selection of these Outsiders appear in detail in the *Heroes, Villains and Monsters* sourcebook.

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