



Ghosts in the Snow

This campaign revolves around a band of assassins in the snowbound arctic city-state of Whitehold, where winter has just begun, which means one thing to Whitehold's citizens: they won't see the sun again for months. Just days before Last Sunset, one of Whitehold's highest holidays, a small and disparate group of people from all walks of life receive cryptic messages inviting them to a secret meeting in an obscure location to take place on the night before Last Sunset. They are young and old, rich and poor, among them drunken brawlers, sly thieves, dire vigilantes, and rakes and cads from well-connected political circles. But as dissimilar as they all may seem, they all share a few things in common: they have few or no strong ties to anyone in the city, they have never met each other before, they have a particular talent for skirting the law and enforcing their own, ... and they are all found dead on the night of Last Sunset. Rumors begin to spread that they were murdered by agents of the government for unknown political purposes, and when public officials start turning up dead under mysterious, seemingly impossible circumstances, the people begin to whisper of the Ghosts of Last Sunset taking their revenge.



Themes

This is a campaign of secrecy and political intrigue, with some elements of Gothic horror. The enemy is the government of Whitehold, in whatever form that may take: authoritarian monarchy, greedy oligarchy, repressive theocracy, etc. You could even play the “bad guys” if you want, and play to overthrow the benevolent republic. Aesthetically, the setting is more modern than a typical fantasy, more similar to the Romantic era than the medieval. Even though Romanticism and industrialism often go hand-in-hand chronology-wise, this is NOT a steampunk campaign, and technological items are to be avoided. The aesthetic is Romantic, but the mechanics are medieval. Early firearms may exist if you desire, but are not very reliable, and would only be used by select military forces or the extremely wealthy. This should also be a more “mundane” campaign, meaning that supernatural elements should also be avoided; the goal is to have the plot be driven by people and their actions, rather than by extraordinary influences. Gods, demons, planes, werewolves, vampires, etc. should not exist in this campaign (or at least, the fact of their existence should not have any tangible effect on the game), though people who believe in such things, such as clergy, cultists, and the superstitious, may play an integral role. Magic still exists, but in this setting magic is treated more like an arcane branch of science than as a divine power, and can only be performed by those who study it rigorously (i.e. magic in this setting is similar to quantum physics in our own world: most people are aware of the concept and understand that it is part of nature, but regard it as something nearly mystical, often have misconceptions about it, and would be unable to apply it practically). Divine spellcasting classes can still be played for mechanical purposes, but they gain their powers by daily study of the arcane forces of the universe, rather than by daily prayer or meditation. Divine or extraplanar

races and creatures should be avoided, as should spells, traits, feats, etc. that rely on the existence of planes and deities.

For Players

Your character has just been inducted into a secret society of assassins by a mysterious figure known only as the Leader. Your death has been faked by the Leader, by means they will not fully explain, nor that you are sure you really want to know. Additionally, they have forged some vague documents to make it appear as though your “death” was politically motivated. The Leader has promised that if you follow their instruction, they will teach you to become one of the world's finest assassins, and guide you on the path to taking down the hated government of Whitehold. Your goal, other than to accomplish the tasks set for you by the Leader, is to not be discovered by citizens or government agents. Given that Whitehold is a very large city, and now perpetually in darkness, it shouldn't be too difficult to avoid detection as long as you avoid the areas you frequented when you were “alive,” especially given that you were mostly a loner. The more difficult thing will be to not get caught in the act of committing a crime. The other important thing is to stoke and maintain the narrative of the Ghosts of Last Sunset. If the superstitious citizens of Whitehold believe that your actions are committed by a righteously vengeful ghost, they will not only take your side, but also not look very hard for a physical perpetrator. But this means that you must take extra effort to make your actions, when they will be noticed, seem mysterious: a politician found with a knife in his back, door busted open and guards slain will not be convincing for the ghost narrative, but a politician found dead with no physical marks, behind a locked door, and guards who report no sights or sounds will get people talking, and convince them of a supernatural cause. Emulating the manner in which your own deaths were faked upon your targets will be strongly indicative of just revenge.

For the DM

You not only control the world and NPCs, you are also the Leader. If you wish, create a backstory for this character, and share as much or little of it as you want with your players. The Leader has connections all over the city, some nefarious and some legitimate, from which you get lots of information useful to your assassins (think of Varys from Game of Thrones), such as maps detailing guard positions and patrols, the habits of certain targets, secret passages through the city or into certain rooms or buildings, etc; information, in this setting, is just as useful and deadly as a sword or a spell. However, the Leader is NOT omnipotent, and you must be careful to separate what your character, the Leader, knows from what you know as the DM. Each session or arc should begin with the Leader assigning a mission to the assassins, and end with the assassins returning to report to the Leader on the outcome (as a general outline; feel free to change up the format as you see fit for some variety, or for narrative purposes). During these interactions, which are in-game and in-character, you may or may not choose to provide hints and tips as to how to accomplish the mission, and you may give advice on where to allocate skill points or which feats to take, which the assassins may choose to heed or ignore. Remember though, that this is the Leader advising the assassins, not the DM advising the players. Also remember that as the Leader, you want the assassins to succeed: you hand-picked each one, and put a great deal of care and effort into recruiting and training them;

their success is your success, and their failure is your failure. To keep the game interesting though, there must be elements that the DM plans which would be a surprise to the Leader. This is why it is essential to keep careful track of what information the Leader knows and does not know, and how much the Leader is willing to share with their assassins.

Setting

The city of Whitehold and its surrounding areas are unique in many ways. For one, it is always cold; most days in spring and fall, the temperature hovers around 0°C, and between 5 and 10°C above or below 0 in the summer and winter, respectively. There is always a stiff breeze blowing in from the sea and down from the mountains, which can occasionally become a biting wind. The extremes of temperature range up to 15°C on hot summer days, and down to -30°C during the harshest winter storms, though even the hardiest natives of the frozen city don't dare venture outdoors for more than a few minutes at a time when the temperature drops below -20°C. The city is also quite large, with hundreds of thousands calling the place home, rivaling the large cities in other parts of the world. This may seem odd, given the climate; surely not so many people could want to live there. Indeed, there were not always so many. Whitehold was originally a small frontier town, one of many stretching across the North, but none of the others were as prosperous. Whitehold's unique access to resources, and the thriving economy that came with them, drew in people from the smaller frontier towns. As their own populations dwindled, the remaining residents of these smaller towns began to lack the man-power to maintain their settlements, and were faced with a choice: move to Whitehold like the others, move back down south, or likely freeze or starve when winter came. Most chose to join their friends and families in Whitehold; this mass immigration from various different towns and regions gives Whitehold a unique multiracial and multicultural populace. It is the city's location which gave it such advantage over all the other old frontier towns. Whitehold is situated on a natural port which gives access to the sea to the north, wide and deep enough to accommodate many large ships for trading, and the waters just beyond are good for whaling and fishing. To the west of the city is the tundra, snowy plains where polar bears, reindeer, arctic foxes, winter hares, and ermines hunt, graze, and burrow. The city itself is nestled into the first foothills of the mountains which lie to the east, where mountain lions, lynxes, rams, and eagles make their homes, and from which stone and ore are mined. These exotic pelts and meats, along with whale oil and fish, sustain the city and its people, and are traded by sea routes to southern states in exchange for fruits, vegetables, and grains to supplement the mostly meat-based diets of the citizens, and lumber for building and crafting (though there are some wooded areas among the lower hills, mostly pines stalked by elk and wolves, local wood is a scarce resource, and hardwoods absolutely must be imported; most fires are fed with the oil, grease, fat, or blubber of various animals, though wealthier individuals can afford to burn wood fires, and prefer them for their aromatic properties). Whitehold therefore has a rich and diverse economy of hunters, trappers, fishermen, whalers, miners, seamen, merchants, and craftsmen. A river runs down from the mountains through the city, from which fresh water is drawn upstream, and into which waste is deposited downstream. The other interesting thing about Whitehold is its lack of a military or militia. It has no political enemies near enough to warrant any army or navy (though surely it wouldn't be difficult to raise one if there were a need, as many of the world's finest

hunters and sailors make their home there), and its economic importance to its allies ensures that they will come to the city's aid if the need ever arises, an eventuality made even more unlikely by the harsh and isolated nature of the city's location. Similarly, there are no high walls around the city, since there is no need to be protected from military threats. There are shoulder-high walls of loose stone around the city to break the wind and to deter the more curious or desperate animals which are not frightened off by the light and sound of the city, but no ramparts or battlements as surround other large cities. Any real threat to Whitehold would likely come from inside the city itself.

Factions

The Ghosts of Last Sunset - Your friendly neighborhood assassins. The Ghosts consist of the PCs, the Leader, and, if you wish, a supporting cast of NPC assassins. These NPCs would exist for the purposes of doing things which are essential to the guild, but not exciting enough to make the PCs do, such as staking out meetings between government officials, tailing potential targets to make note of their habits, milling around the market to hear the current gossip and rumor (and sometimes providing their own), following paper trails, etc. In early game, it may be useful to give some of these low-risk, less exciting missions to the PCs to boost their experience and to establish some elements of setting and introduce NPCs, but at later levels, these sorts of things should be done by the NPC assassins "off-screen". (killing off one of these NPCs could also be an effective way to establish the stakes of the game.) These auxiliary assassins are one of the many avenues by which the Leader receives information.

Politicians - This faction is fairly flexible, depending on what form the government takes in a particular campaign; e.g. they could be elected representatives, wealthy oligarchs, members of the monarch's court, etc. In any case, there should be three sub-categories within this faction: those who genuinely care for the people they govern; those who are fairly neutral, content with the status quo, and, when push comes to shove, ultimately self-interested; and lastly, those who only seek to personally gain from their position, with no regard for the citizens, other politicians, or even the law. In a campaign where the PCs are the "good guys", someone from the third group should be in the position of highest power within the government.

Citizens - The citizens of Whitehold play an important part in the campaign. Your goal is to influence their attitude toward the government. When you target a corrupt official, you not only want them dead, you want them exposed and humiliated as well; you want the citizens to start talking about the things they did, and you want them to go down in local history as a disgrace to the city. And as the rumors spread that the Ghosts are the ones trimming the fat, the people will come to your side. Whitehold also has a rich folklore, and many citizens are genuine believers. They therefore have a disposition toward superstition, so the idea that the Ghosts are actually just that, incorporeal beings bent on revenge, and spirits of justice, should readily take hold in the city. However, this also means that the citizens know exactly what's NOT a ghost when they see it. So perhaps it would behoove you to let some average Joe catch a glimpse of you magically passing through a wall outside a palace just before a politician turns up dead, but it would equally hinder you to be seen scaling said wall instead.

City Guard - While Whitehold has no need of a military, no place is immune to crime, and it is the job of the City Guard to prevent and punish it. Guards patrol the city in pairs or small groups on regular routes, and are posted stationary around prominent landmarks and other busy public areas. They have a keen eye for anything criminal or unusual, and are well armed and armored, always ready for a fight. Unless you're intentionally trying to draw attention to yourself, it's probably best to avoid any sort of interaction with the Guard. However, if you feel lucky or extremely generous, it's likely that most Guards can be convinced in some way to look the other way when you come around, perhaps by befriending them, bribing them, threatening them, etc.

Characters

Rjor - (like R'yore) if ever there were a man who could be described as "lupine", Rjor is it; strong, but not broad, quick, but not lanky, clever, but not terribly intelligent in a bookish sense, of average height, with shaggy black hair and dark blue eyes which appear kind to his friends and piercing to his enemies. the look is completed with a grey wolf pelt cloak, which fastens at the shoulder with a clasp made from the jaw of the very same wolf. his heraldry, which he commissioned himself, even bears a black wolf rampant on a field of green and silver. Rjor is a hunter and merchant, and leader of both the hunters' and fur traders' guilds. He is one of the very few people of status within the city who have truly earned their wealth through their own work. he was born to a lower class family, but not a desperate one; one that could always afford to stay fed and warm, but little else. his father worked on a trading ship, and was often gone, and his mother kept a house for a lesser merchant (what we would call upper-middle class), cooking, cleaning, and keeping the fires lit. one particularly harsh winter, his mother lost an ear to frostbite. the merchant family she worked for, fearing the social embarrassment they would face if their houseguests were confronted with such grotesquery, fired her, and it was impossible to find new work that paid as well. to help make up the difference, Rjor began hunting to save the cost of buying meat in the market. after discovering his knack for hunting, and the price that a high-quality pelt could fetch, he never looked back. Rjor is almost universally hated among the ruling and merchant classes. they will say it's because of his gruff disregard for the pomp and etiquette of official city business, or his tendency to show up to high-class functions with blood still under his fingernails from skinning the day's catch, but everyone knows it's really because of his low birth. but as much as they may despise him, Rjor must be tolerated, because any piece of meat, skin, or fur in the city has to go through him one way or another, and those are things no one can go without. Rjor has never forgotten his roots, and has more than once been the sole factor preventing a rise in the cost of meat and fur, which would have spelled disaster, or even death, for many in the poorer classes. this, as well as his rags-to-riches past, has made Rjor something of a living folk hero for the city's destitute and downtrodden, which of course only fuels the hate of the rich and powerful. but for all his effort, one man can only do so much, and incremental taxes, fees, mercantile policies, and guild bylaws continue to slowly raise the prices on resources necessary for survival, and the poorest and most vulnerable citizens won't be able to survive much longer at this rate. perhaps the thought has crossed Rjor's mind that something more direct and permanent than economics and politics might be required to solve this problem...

Locations

The Undermarket - Located in an underground cistern accessible by a few secret entrances, the Undermarket is where the city's seedier elements come to do business. Each entrance is monitored by a lookout, who holds the end of a string which runs through a sewer grate or access shaft to a small bell in the Undermarket. There are no permanent stalls or stands in the Undermarket; business is done out of small chests or large sacks, so that if the alarm bell is sounded, indicating City Guards or sewer workers are approaching, the whole bustling market can be packed up and evacuated as if no one was ever there in a matter of minutes. In addition to buying drugs, poisons, various fenced goods, and rare, exotic, enchanted, or alchemical equipment, Undermarket patrons can also employ services, such as thieves, blades for hire, sex workers, and a few individuals known as spiders, who will find and provide information in exchange for gold (and lots of it) or a secret of equal value, like a sort of private investigator. PCs seeking extra gold or XP may choose to sell goods or information or contract their services in the Undermarket.

Feats/Traits

A list of feats and traits which may be particularly useful in this setting.

Feats: (feats in bold are especially useful to all players in this setting; DMs should consider granting these feats to all players as mission rewards early on)

Associate

Betrayer

Black Marketeer

City Sprinter

Cold Celerity

Connected/Guild Partner (identical)

Convincing Persona

Cosmopolitan

Criminal Reputation

Dampen Presence

Darkness Trick

Deadly Troupe

Deceitful

Diplomatic Ruse

Edge Runner

Experienced Vagabond

Exquisite Sneak

Go Unnoticed

Guild Emissary

Hellcat Stealth

Hide-out

Masked Symbol

Nameless One (and subsequent feats)

Night Stalker

Pass For Human

Roof Runner

Rugged Northerner

Sinister Reputation

Sly Draw

Stealth Synergy

Street Smarts

Team Pickpocketing

Underworld Connections

Urban Forager

Walking Sleight

Traits:

Addict

Ambush Training

Antiquities Smuggler

Bandit

Bounty Hunter

Child of the Streets

Cold Resilience
Confidante to the Oppressed
Convincing Liar
Criminal
Dealer
Dusk Agent
Dusk Dancer
Expert Smuggler
Friend in Every Town
Friends in High Places
Friends in Low Places
Frostborn
Gallant Imposter
Guide of the Streets
Hidden Hand

Influence
Instigator of Rebellion
Keeper of the Veil
Local Know-It-All
Nonchalant Thuggery
Rabble Rebel
Secret-Keeper
Shadowsight
Silent Hunter
Smuggler
Snowbound
Snowstride
Suspicious
Winter Warrior
Without a Past

Items/Equipment

The following items and equipment may be particularly useful in this setting.

Cold-Weather Outfit
Pickpocket's Outfit
Tear-Away Clothing
Ice Skates
Snow Shoes
Liquid Blade
Mask (various types)

Pocketed Scarf
Reversible Cloak
False Jewelry
Poison Pill Ring
False-Bottomed Chest
False-Bottomed Cup