



NIGHT WITCHES A GAME BY
JASON MORNINGSTAR

НОЧНЫЕ ВЕДУМЫ





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A GAME BY JASON MORNINGSTAR

Эта игра посвящена женщинам 588-е,
при всем уважении и восхищении.

*This game is dedicated to the women of the 588th,
with all my respect and admiration.*

No it's not the huts that are burning
It is my youth in the fire.
Young women are going off to war
Looking like young fellows.

Yulya Vladimirovna Drunina



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JASON MORNINGSTAR

**WRITING, DESIGN,
CARTOGRAPHY &
ADDITIONAL LAYOUT**

**STEVE SEGEDY
SALLY CHRISTENSEN**

EDITING

**RICH LONGMORE
CLAUDIA CANGINI**

ART

BRENNEN REECE

**LAYOUT &
VISUAL DESIGN**

We'd love to hear about your experiences with *Night Witches!*
You can reach us and find out about our other games at
www.bulypulpitgames.com

This book is set in Tex Gyre Schola (*derived from Century Schoolbook by Linn Boyd Benton, 1894*), Franklin Gothic FS (*Morris Fuller Benton, 1902*) and League Gothic (*derived from Alternate Gothic No. 1 by M. F. Benton, 1903*). All of these typefaces are legally available free of charge.

THANKS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Night Witches is based on *Apocalypse World* by D. Vincent Baker, with cool bits cribbed from *The Regiment* by John Harper and Paul Riddle, *Sagas of the Icelanders* by Gregor Vuga and a little bit of *The Warren* by Marshall Miller for good measure. The effortlessly lucid text of Avery Mcdaldno's *Monsterhearts* was particularly inspirational.

Apocalypse World <http://apocalypse-world.com/>

Monsterhearts <http://buriedwithoutceremony.com/monsterhearts/>

Sagas of the Icelanders <http://redmoosegames.tumblr.com/soti>

The Regiment <http://www.onesevendesign.com/regiment/>

The Warren <http://www.bullypulpitgames.com/games/the-warren>

The best parts of this game are lifted more or less intact from these games, trust me.

Since the advice for teaching the game and starting your first session in *Monsterhearts* couldn't be improved on, I've repeated it here with Avery Mcdaldno's kind permission.

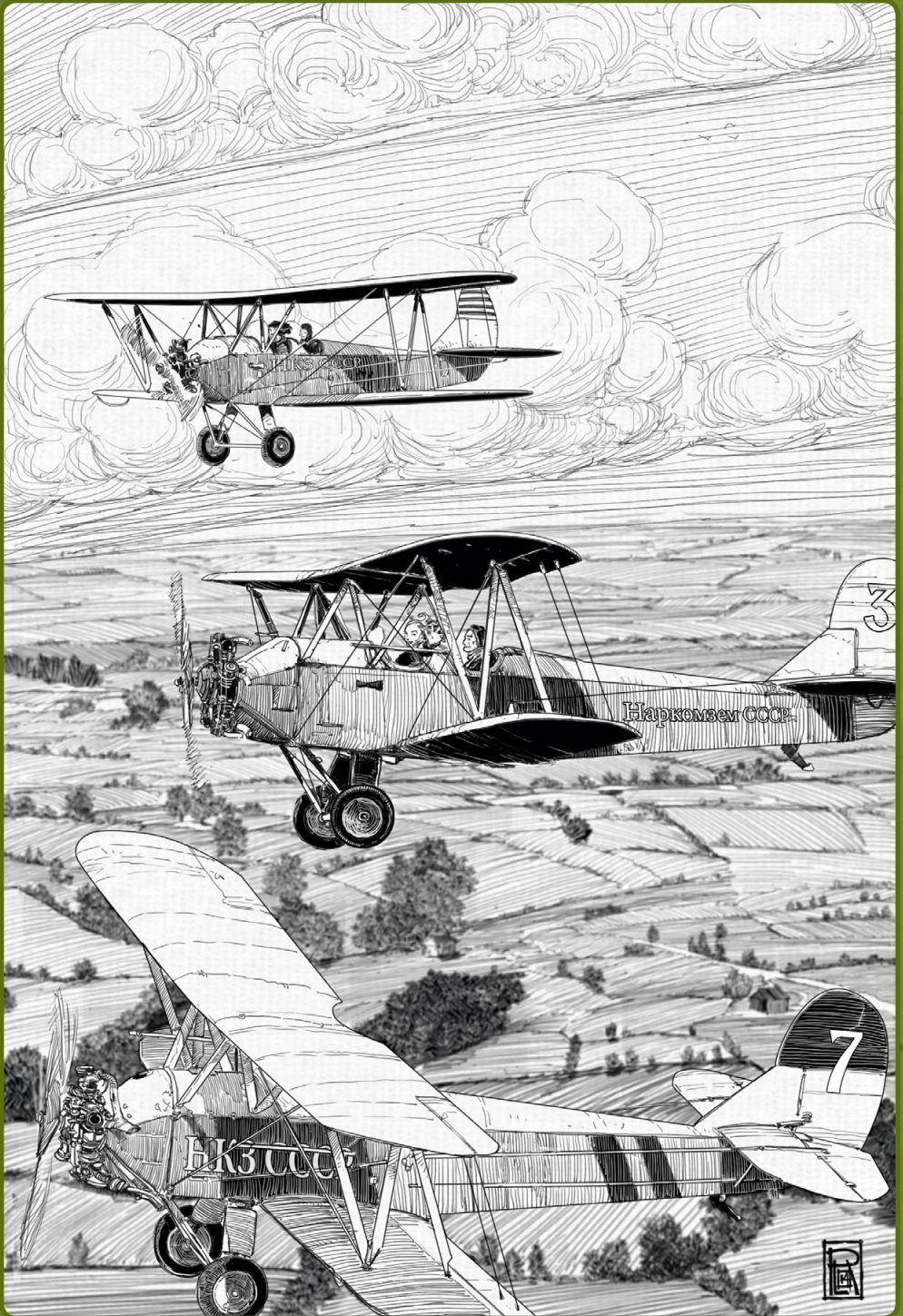
There's a book by Bruce Miles and a comic by Garth Ennis called *Night Witches*. This game is also a work of fiction and has nothing to do with either.

If you are interested in learning more about the Night Witches there's a bibliography in the back (see page 156). If you want to get a visual feel for the time and place, track down Yevgeniya Zhigulenko's film *In Flight Are the Night Witches* (В небе Ночные Ведьмы) on the Internet.

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It is a well-known fact that the Soviet Union has achieved exceptional successes in drawing women into the active construction of the state. This accepted truth is not disputed even by our enemies.

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

ORIENTATION

WHERE TO BEGIN

IF YOU'VE PLAYED BEFORE AND ARE READY TO GO

...jump straight to “The Setup” on page 69 and get ready to fly!

IF YOU ARE NEW TO ROLEPLAYING GAMES

...please read on. If it seems complicated at first, know that the core of roleplaying is playing—and if you are having fun with your friends it's hard to go wrong. These rules will support you!

IF YOU ARE A SEASONED TABLETOP GAMER

...pay close attention to the structure of play, which differs in subtle ways from both “traditional” and typical “indie” procedures. There's a very satisfying interplay between what you have your character do and how the game's systems feed back into the fiction. These rules will support you!

IF YOU ARE A VETERAN OF “POWERED BY THE APOCALYPSE” GAMES

...you'll find much of this to be comfortably familiar. There are a few fiddly differences, so pay attention to Regard, Marks, Mission Pool, and the ways in which Moves and advancement differ.

WHAT THIS IS

This is a game you're going to play with your friends. You'll all create characters and, for a while, inhabit them. As you talk about your triumphs and disasters, the rules will always be there to guide and inform the conversation. It's the rules that inject chaos and uncertainty and interesting choices, keeping the story both surprising and constantly in motion.

These characters that you create are going to be young women—sometimes very young. They are citizens of the Soviet Union who have answered the call of the Motherland in her darkest hour. Their enemies are twofold: the German invaders, of course, but also their own Red Army, which is eager to see them fail. Can they do their duty and strike blow after blow against the fascists? Can they overcome discrimination and outright sabotage and rise above—or best—their sexist comrades? Are there limits to patriotism—or endurance? There's the game. That's the story. If this particular situation doesn't grab you, *Night Witches* isn't the game for you.

While *Night Witches* lets you evoke the extraordinary exploits of the 588th Night Bomber Regiment, it isn't really a game about war. Much of the story takes place between missions and between people. Although the characters fly and fight an extraordinary amount, we abstract that into the most harrowing moments. The really interesting stuff happens on the ground, in the tight spaces between pure hell.

The rules will bend your story toward tragedy and melancholy. The planes are more fragile than the women who fly them, and every moment is fraught with danger. Your characters will be marked by war and death, and some of them will never go home.

These rules are based on Vincent Baker's brilliant *Apocalypse World* and inspired by the many offshoots already on tables everywhere—*Monsterhearts*, *Sagas of the Icelanders*, and others. If you've played any of these, *Night Witches* will fit like a pair of comfortable old tapochki.

WHAT YOU NEED

To play *Night Witches* you need a few friends—you plus two, three, or four. Four total participants is probably the sweet spot. Three or five will work just fine. Six or more at once is probably too many for everyone to have a good time, although the game handles absent players and drop-ins seamlessly.

One of you will start the game as the Game Master (GM), the person responsible for the Regiment and its enemies. Since you are reading these rules, you will probably start as the GM, but others can take on the role over the course of the game (See page 72). Everyone will have a character.

The game accommodates varying lengths of play time well. The episodic nature of *Night Witches* means you can have a satisfying session in two hours, or play for four if you have that luxury. You can follow the Regiment across the entire Second World War, a literal campaign that will take many hours of play over weeks or months, or you can choose a single Duty Station and use it to frame a compelling one-shot. (For more on one-shots, see page 73.)

You'll need some supplies, as well: dice (six-sided, two per person), pencils, playbooks, and handouts, as well as a few tokens for the Mission Pool—coins work just fine. You can find the handouts at <http://www.bulypulpitgames.com/games/night-witches>.

ADULT CONTENT

As you assemble your group of friends, keep in mind that this game is for adults. It deals with mature themes, including sex and death at their most poignant, stupid, and horrible. It is written using coarse language that befits the subject matter and time and protagonists. It is about real people, some of whom are still alive.

HISTORICAL CONTENT

This game is thoroughly rooted in real history, but don't worry about "getting it right." While you're given enough information to anchor the game in gritty reality, the game takes vast liberties with the facts anyway. The following summary should give you enough context to get started with *Night Witches*.

The Soviet Union was aviation crazy between the World Wars. Aviators—including all-female aircrews—were celebrities and Socialist folk heroes. Countless young women eagerly learned to fly.

In the thirties, the USSR was wracked by a paranoid madness known as the Great Purge. No one was safe from accusation, incrimination, and execution. Hundreds of thousands died and the purges touched everyone. The military officer's corps was especially hard-hit.

One echo of the Great Purge was the political officer—the Politruk—that was a part of every Regiment. Answering to the dreaded NKVD secret police, the Politruk was always alert for spies and wreckers, even finding them where none existed. In many ways, their own totalitarian state was as big a threat to the women of the 588th as the Germans were.

When Hitler invaded in 1941, the Red Army was gutted and demoralized. But early disasters bought time for the Soviets to retreat and reorganize, digging in for a hard fight. The Germans, too confident, had overplayed their hand. A long, brutal war was the result.

At first, women were excluded from the Red Army Air Force. Soon casualties mounted, and Stalin himself ordered the use of female volunteers. Three Regiments were formed. The last of these, the 588th, was almost an afterthought. The 588th got the worst equipment and, as the only Regiment containing no men at all, bore the brunt of Red Army sexism. Many wanted it to fail as an object lesson to ambitious women everywhere.

The mission of the 588th was night harassment, close to the front lines. They flew Po-2 biplanes, aircraft almost twenty years out of

date. Each night they would bomb well-defended German positions, often flying five or more missions before dawn. It was some of the most dangerous flying of the war and casualties were appalling.

For more detail on the history of the Soviet Union before and during the Great Patriotic War, see the historical overview beginning on page 123.

GENDER CONTENT

Night Witches is, at its core, about women and their experiences during a cataclysmic war. How you parse this is up to you, but it is, very specifically, not a game about people in wartime—but women.

The dominant military narrative has always been reductively masculine, and it's easy to view war through this lens. When sex and gender enter the story—if they enter the story—it is rarely important and never central. This game is different. By playing women, you'll get a chance to think about that traditional narrative critically, as you explore characters who fall on its uncomfortable margin.

The soldiers and airwomen of the 588th found a middle way between competing gender narratives, and a big part of this game is striking that balance yourself. The rules will intentionally pull you in both directions, as will the GM's Principles, Moves, and especially Threats.

If you find the sexist and discriminatory treatment of women in the setting distressing, it won't hurt the game if you simply remove the cultural and legal baggage, and treat men and women—and everything in between—with complete equality and equanimity.

For more information on the role of women in the Soviet Union before and during the Great Patriotic War, see the historical overview that begins on page 123.

QUEER CONTENT

There will be some queerness in your *Night Witches* game. It is a thing that will happen, so embrace and explore it in a sensitive and meaningful way.

If you find the oppressive and brutal treatment of homosexuals in the setting distressing, it won't hurt the game if you simply remove the state's interest entirely and treat the emerging relationships as normal and routine.

For more information on homosexuality before and during the Great Patriotic War, see "Queers in the Soviet Union" on page 126.



I was glad to be in a female regiment. It was easier for me because, well, men are men and women are women; I was more comfortable.”

Mariya Akilina





When I first came to the Regiment, I was not pleased. I wasn't used to working with girls, for I had always worked with men. The girls seemed noisy, and some of them were very naughty.

CAPTAIN KLAVDIYA ILUSHINA, CHIEF ENGINEER

THE CONVERSATION

At its heart, a game of *Night Witches* is a conversation. Questions will be asked and answered. The rules are there to support this interplay, and to prompt new questions after each satisfying, troubling, or surprising answer. You'll create scenes that have questions wrapped around them, and more often than not you'll answer those questions with Moves.

SCENES

Playing *Night Witches* follows many of the comfortable traditions of literature and film. As a group you will frame scenes that highlight exciting or intriguing moments, and you'll hand-wave the boring stuff between them. As you move from interesting moment to interesting moment, new opportunities and perils will naturally emerge. Since our brains are positively wired to tell stories, the whole thing is very natural and, at its best, effortless.

Framing scenes will hinge on questions. The most basic and essential question is the one the GM should constantly be asking—"What do you do?" It's both acceptable and encouraged for everyone at the table to ask each other lots of questions, though—if you're curious about something, chances are good someone else is as well and it will make a good scene. Do you wonder why Anya never writes letters home, or what's going to happen when Galya takes off in the plane Sveta didn't have time to repair? Let's find out.

The actual content of scenes—the meat of the game—is roleplaying. You get to embody your character and say what she does and how she feels about it. There are many ways to do this and you and your friends probably have your own habits. If not, just treat it as a conversation, as if you were in a movie, right down to describing camera angles and events happening off-screen, if you want.

MOVES

Eventually you'll have your character do something that triggers a Move. Moves are exceptions to the conversation—trigger points that invoke specific rules. When a Move kicks in, do what it says. Sometimes you'll roll the dice and sometimes you won't—just do what the Move tells you and things will get interesting, fast. It's totally acceptable to angle for a particular Move, and it's totally acceptable to name the Move, saying "That's it, I'm Acting Up here!"

The four standard types of Moves are Day, Night, Special, and Character.

Everyone has access to all the Day Moves: Eyeball, Act Up, Reach Out, Scrounge, and Repair. And the Night Moves: Vedomaya, Wayfind, and Attack Run. You can Tempt Fate day or night.

Some Moves—particularly the Special Moves—are triggered by unique circumstances on the ground or in the air, often as consequences of other Moves. An Attack Run may well attract Enemy Fire, for example.

Character Moves, found on Nature playbooks, often bend or break the rules in interesting ways, sometimes rewarding you with an Advance or other benefit. You start with none of these and can later choose them as Advances.

There's an entire chapter on making Moves, beginning on page 35.

ROLLING THE DICE

When a Move asks you to roll, you'll roll two six-sided dice and add their results together, for a number between two and twelve. Then you add any relevant bonus—for example, if you are Eyeballing the Regimental Politruk and have Skill +1, you'll add one to your final roll. If you also have Regard for her, you will add two—one for your Skill and one for your Regard. If your character earns "+1 forward," that means she adds one to her next relevant roll. It is a bonus that is used only once. It may be conditional, situational, or time-limited.

If your character earns a "hold," that's a bonus you can use now or in the future, when it makes sense. Holds don't stack, so you can't apply three at once to enjoy a +3. Use them judiciously, one at a time.

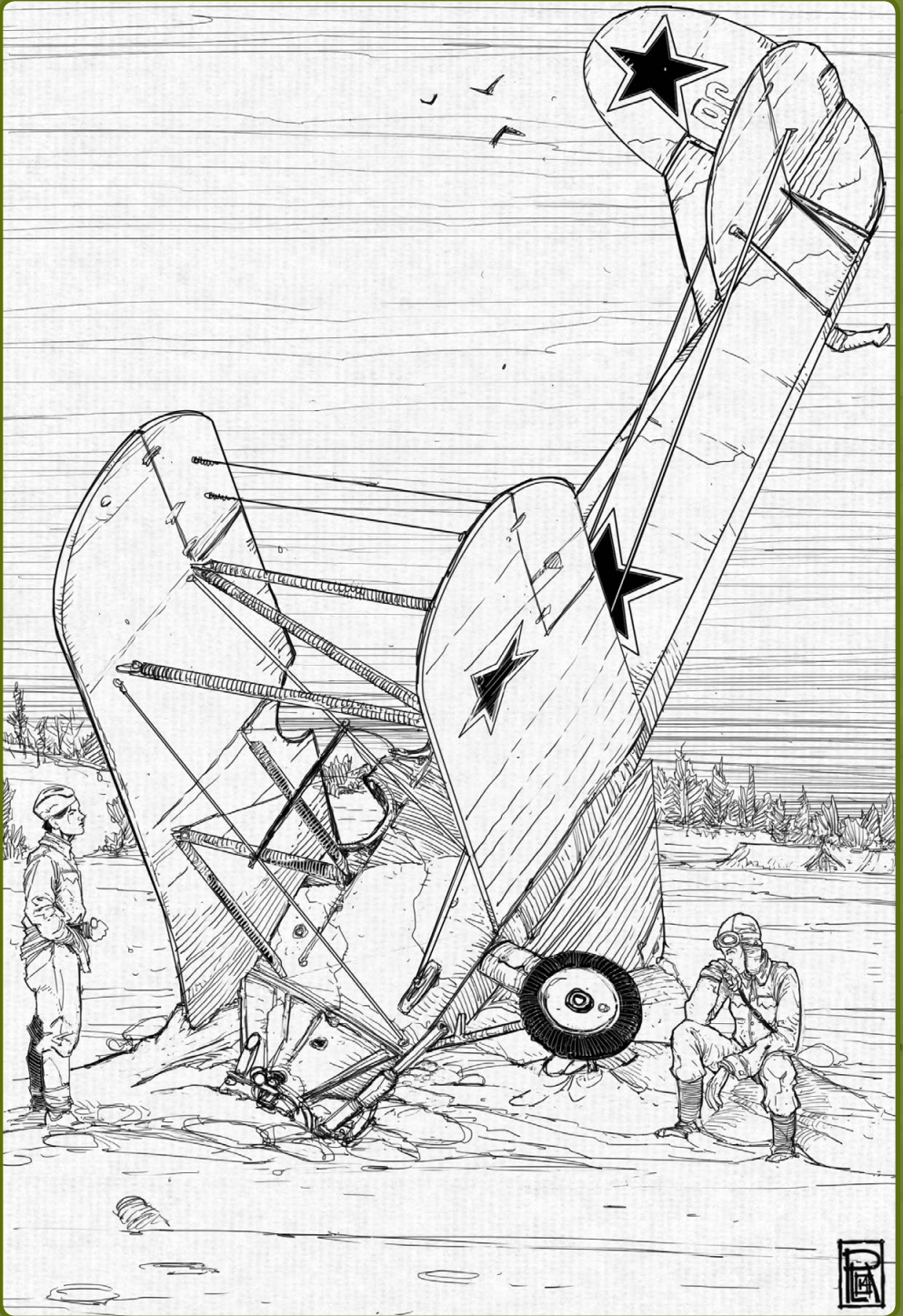
If you end up with a ten or more on the dice, you are going to get what you want safely.

If you end up with a six or less, you are not going to get what you want and it is going to go badly for you. The GM will make sure you don't like the outcome, whatever it is—you've handed them a golden opportunity to make things go wrong.

The really interesting result is the middle ground, between seven and nine. Here you succeed—you are going to get what you want—but there will be a price. And that price will be high.

“There is a superhuman psychic overstrain when you are blinded by the searchlights and deafened by the explosions of antiaircraft shells and fire all around you. Your concentration over the target is so intense that it results in a complete loss of your whereabouts - a disorientation. You cannot tell the sky from the ground. Many crews crashed that way.”

Yevgeniya Zhigulenko, HSU



We must uphold the glorious tradition of the Russian woman-warrior...Everything has been given to us. The right to defend the Motherland, and a terrible weapon with which to do it—airplanes.

MAJOR MARINA ROSKOVA

NATURAL-BORN SOVIET AIRWOMEN

The pieces that define your character point toward both past and future. She will have a Nature—that ineffable quality that shaped her personality and made her want to take to the air in the first place. She'll have a social Role within her Section, just like the heroes in war movies do. She'll have a rigidly defined duty within the Red Army Air Force, and an accompanying Rank. As a member of a tight-knit sisterhood, she'll also have Regard for her friends, her plane—and possibly her enemies.

Each player character will also have a job to perform—as either pilot or navigator—whenever they climb into a plane. Pilots sit in the front seat and drive while navigators sit in the rear and wayfind. While some airwomen are better suited for one task or the other, commanders will assign these duties as they see fit each night during the mission briefing.

Beyond these big-picture factors, your Soviet airwoman has some game-specific traits as well. She has her health—at least for now. She has a supply of Marks that indicate her exposure to combat and trauma. And she shares a set of Moves—by Day and by Night—with everyone else's player characters.

NATURES

The Natures are Hawk, Owl, Pigeon, Raven, and Sparrow.

Each Nature has a character playbook that includes a different selection of Moves, Marks, and options. Every player should choose one at the start of play.

It is fine to have more than one player with a given Nature, but getting every type into the game is probably more fun.

Once chosen, you'll keep the same Nature throughout the game. Once a Hawk, always a Hawk.

Each Nature has its own traits and instincts. All birds love to fly.



Some girls thought it unpatriotic to look attractive. I argued that we should. I said, 'Imagine that I have a forced landing at a male fighter airdrome. Soldiers are rushing to my aircraft because they know that the crew is female. I, absolutely dashing, slide out of the cockpit and take off my helmet, and my golden, curly hair streams down my shoulders. Everyone is awed by my dazzling beauty. They all desperately fall in love with me.'"

Yevgeniya Zhigulenko, HSU

HAWK

Hawks are decisive and tough, simultaneously showy and precise in their actions. They are also obsessive hunters who strike without warning.

OWL

Quiet and observant, Owls are among the most contemplative of birds. Unlike Hawks, they are happy to watch and wait. Owls are solitary predators who feast on the bones of the weak.

PIGEON

Pigeons are gregarious and not afraid to get their feathers dirty—resourceful and down to earth. They are also vaguely ridiculous and most comfortable in a crowd.

RAVEN

Ravens are intelligent and curious, acquisitive, and confident. Unlike Sparrows, they aren't afraid to make a scene. They are also carrion birds with a stubborn disregard for propriety.

SPARROW

Graceful, unobtrusive, and discreet, Sparrows tend to be everywhere or nowhere. They are also nervous, timid, and prone to flying away at the first sign of trouble.

ROLES

Roles are social obligations that your airwomen naturally fall into as part of a group. The combination of Nature and Role gives your character a clear identity and purpose in the story.

In contrast to your Nature, which never changes, your Role may shift over the course of the game. If you wish, you can change your Role when you change Duty Stations.

ADVENTURER

Adventurers live to fly. If they aren't behind the yoke and throttle of an airplane they are thinking about how to get behind the yoke and throttle of an airplane. Play an Adventurer if you were born to fly and aren't afraid of anything.

As an Adventurer, you are adept at the Wheels Down Move and Advance between Duty Stations if, at some point, you walked away from an utterly wrecked aircraft.

DREAMER

In addition to nightly clouds over German targets, Dreamers have their heads in clouds of their own making. Sometimes those dreams come in handy, though. Sometimes they come true. Play a Dreamer if things other than the here and now distract you, and you don't care if this gets you in trouble.

As a Dreamer, you'll fare better under NKVD questioning. You're flexible. Their reality can be your reality if that's what they want.

LEADER

Leaders are born to lead and assume command naturally, whether they have been assigned to or not. Leaders often end up in charge of Squadrons or Sections or serve the Regiment as general officers. Being selected to lead others is a serious honor Leaders covet. For more on being commanding, see "Rank, and the Burden of Command," page 18.

As a Leader, you inspire others during Attack Runs and Advance between Duty Stations if, at some point, someone under your direct command died.

MISANTHROPE

Misanthropes are a refreshing tonic for the hidebound madness of the Red Army Air Force. Cynical, iconoclastic, and against the grain, they always know a better way, although they may not care enough to try it. Play a Misanthrope if you know it all and don't care if your hands get dirty.

As a Misanthrope, you are an excellent Scrounger and Advance between Duty Stations if, at some point, you bucked against the patriarchy and got in trouble for it.

PROTECTOR

Protectors have a fierce loyalty to their sisters-in-arms and are driven to apply their skill and courage in the service of something bigger than themselves. For them the war is personal. Play a Protector if you'd rather take a bullet yourself than see a comrade hurt.

As a Protector, you are handy with aircraft Repair and Advance between Duty Stations if, at some point, you saved someone's life.

ZEALOT

Zealots understand that their real mission is to help develop political consciousness across the Regiment while diligently rooting out intrigues by reactionaries and wreckers, knowing that the unity of all the forces of democracy is the most reliable weapon in the struggle against reaction, and in the struggle for freedom and peace throughout the world. Play a Zealot if you are content with being hated and feared in order to do the right thing.

As a Zealot you are skilled at raising morale through snitching and Advance between Duty Stations if, at some point, you interest the NKVD in a member of the Regiment.

RANK, AND THE BURDEN OF COMMAND

The rigid hierarchy of the Red Army Air Force will be a universal constant across years of war. While rank comes with undeniable power and privilege, for all but the lowliest it also carries with it a deep and often troubling responsibility.

USING RANK IN PLAY

- Player characters will start as either Sergeants or Junior Lieutenants. They will gain promotions through Advancement (see page 26).
- Superior officers of any gender are referred to universally as “sir.”
- Precedence is determined by date of enlistment or commission—a Lieutenant who was commissioned in 1941 outranks a Lieutenant who was commissioned in 1942.
- Because this game is primarily about officers, the enlisted ranks have been streamlined a little. There are also Efreitor, Senior Sergeant, Warrant Officer, and Senior Warrant Officer ranks.
- Above Major within the Fourth Air Army the ranks continue as follows: Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, and General Major.
- Rank within the NKVD follow the same pattern except with “...of State Security” appended.

PRIVATE

The lowest rank in the Red Army Air Force is Private. The vast majority of mechanics and support personnel in the Regiment are Privates.

SERGEANT

A Sergeant is a non-commissioned officer (NCO), and as such bears great responsibility within the Regiment. Most Sergeants are career soldiers. Qualified airwomen lacking adequate education or military training may be enlisted as Sergeants. A flying Sergeant, as navigator or pilot, will be part of a three-plane Section.

Newly created characters may begin play as Sergeants.

JUNIOR LIEUTENANT

The lowest commissioned rank is that of a brand-new officer, a Junior Lieutenant. Most airwomen will begin their service at this rank. A flying Junior Lieutenant, as navigator or pilot, will be part of a three-plane Section.

Newly created characters may begin play as Junior Lieutenants.

LIEUTENANT

A Lieutenant is an officer who has been promoted after demonstrating general competence and the potential to lead. A Lieutenant, ideally one who has been decorated, may be chosen to serve as the Section Leader for a three-plane Section.

Section Leaders choose their lead navigator from among the members of their Section. They are responsible for allocating crews to planes, and they are answerable for the conduct of the five women under their command. Each Squadron has four Sections.

SENIOR LIEUTENANT

A Senior Lieutenant is an officer who has been promoted after demonstrating skill and initiative, as well as the ability to command a large formation. A decorated Senior Lieutenant might be chosen to be a Squadron Commander.

A Squadron Commander may choose anyone from among their Squadron to serve as Deputy Commander and Chief Navigator, although Lieutenants are much preferred. Squadron Commanders are responsible for ensuring the proper maintenance and arming of the aircraft in their Squadron, and they are answerable for the conduct of the women under their command. The Regiment has three Squadrons.

CAPTAIN

A Captain is the highest company-grade officer in the Regiment, and there are only a handful of them. Captains command Squadrons or occupy staff positions.

The Regiment has a logistics and training officer, a Regimental Politruk and her deputy, a Chief of Staff, and a Commander. Staff officers are formally forbidden from flying missions but often manage to find ways around this prohibition. A staff officer must be decorated, and must be at least a Senior Lieutenant, with the rank of Captain much preferred. They are responsible for their particular area of expertise, and the readiness of the unit is their chief concern. The Chief of Staff is responsible for nightly operational matters.

MAJOR

A Major commands a Regiment. The Regimental Commander is always the only Major in the unit. The first player character to attain the rank of Major replaces Yevdokiya Bershanskaya in that position. If another airwoman attains that rank, one of them will be reassigned to a different command. The Regimental Commander is, of course, completely responsible for every facet of the Regiment. The roughly 200 women who work, fly, and fight in her unit do so at her pleasure.

REGARD

Regard represents the deep well of feeling that can develop between two soldiers. Regard can be positive or negative, but it is always powerful. Mechanically, you have a +1 ongoing for any move directed at a person you have Regard for. For purposes of assigning and using Regard, a special airplane can count as a person.

A fresh recruit has no connections to anyone or any thing and no Regard. Over time, by choosing to add Regard when advancement is triggered, airwomen will gain Regard for their closest comrades, bitterest enemies, and the fragile machines that carry them to battle.

A Regard “slot” consists of a name and a tone. The name is the person or airplane it is directed toward. The tone is the flavor the relationship takes, a nonmechanical guide to roleplaying. The suggested tones are Love, Trust, Admire, Respect, Hate, Resent, Pity, and Fear. Others are encouraged—perhaps you adore, or idolize, or intimidate, or lust after, or worry about someone. Maybe you treasure or distrust your plane.

There is a hard limit to the amount of Regard you can have at one time—four slots for most, three for Sparrows, five for Pigeons.

THE REGARD BONUS

Regard is always +1 and doesn’t stack—if you have Regard for the pilot, the navigator, and the plane they are in, you still enjoy only +1 ongoing, not +3.

CHANGING REGARD

Once you have established Regard, the tone can change over time. A person you hate may become a person you love, or after the loss of your beloved plane, “Thunder from Stalin,” you may come to appreciate your new plane. You are free to change a slot’s tone at any time, and you can change who a slot’s target is between sessions or as a result of the Reach Out Move.

SEVERED TIES

There is a downside to having deep bonds, however. If a person you have Regard for dies or an aircraft is destroyed, regardless of positive or negative tone, take 1-harm immediately.

MARKS

Every airwoman is marked by her experiences. It is a bitter constant of life during wartime—a sort of slowly building doom that inevitably overtakes the best among the Regiment. Anyone who has been in combat can sense the marks war and death leave behind on another—it lingers like a bad smell.

Your character can be Marked as the result of Moves—sometimes as a choice, sometimes as a fact of life. Each Mark adds to a grim tally, and terrible things begin to happen when milestones are reached. The final milestone, of course, is the character's own unavoidable destruction.

Marks differ by character Nature. Each has some effect or repercussion, and not all of them are bad. Whenever your character is Marked, permanently check one and find a way to weave it into the fiction.

Sometimes an NPC will be Marked. This is an irrevocable death sentence. The current GM will decide when the marked NPC perishes—maybe instantly, maybe after a long while.

WORKING WITH MARKS

The effect of a Mark can happen instantly, but it is fine to wait for an appropriate moment to introduce it. Flashbacks are also appropriate at any time and can be particularly poignant when used to ramp up the tension in the middle of a harrowing mission.

In the event of a looming tragedy, it's entirely appropriate to use a letter home to establish the death of someone your character knows, or a loved one. Make it meaningful. You can also let the GM introduce the tragedy.

As GM, you should pay close attention to the choices players make, looking for ways to bring these choices to the foreground meaningfully. Many are useful flags related to what a player is interested in.

STORIES

A story is just that—a recounting of one of the pivotal events you experienced during the Great Patriotic War, or some formative and highly relevant event from your pre-war past. Stories can be roleplayed as flashbacks—perhaps a moment of candor or sentimentality in the barracks, or told from the point of view of old women in the 1980s.

When you elect to choose a story as a Mark, immediately tell the story. You have the floor. Set the scene and share an important memory.

What happened? Do you remember it accurately? Do you remember it truthfully? Your task is to recount the event that earned you the Mark, but you can recount it in any way that suits you. Perhaps it is a self-serving account. Perhaps it is deluded, or blurred with age. Don't worry about continuity!

WAYS TO GET MARKED

- **ACT UP** and choose it as an option.
- **TEMPT FATE** and fail.
- By choice, when **REACHING OUT**. (You might do this to deliberately open a Regard slot.)
- **MAKE AN ATTACK RUN**, endure Enemy Fire, find yourself Behind Enemy Lines, or in an Informal Interview, and choose it as an option.
- As the object of another character's Move. (The Raven's Voron Move, for example.)

HARM

Aircrews get hurt and occasionally killed. In the game you'll track this as Harm. Although cuts and bruises are most obvious, Harm doesn't need to be physical.

There are three levels of Harm. Untreated Harm stacks—if you already have one and then earn two, you now have three.

One Harm means you are stressed. Stress may go away with time and rest, or when you use the Reach Out move. GMs should be liberal in applying stress based on circumstances, and just as liberal in removing it. Trying to do too much during the day instead of sleeping should cause 1-harm, for example. Getting someone to cover for you so you can catch a quick pre-mission nap should remove it.

Two Harm means you are lightly injured. Perhaps you were sprayed in the eyes with motor oil, or smacked your head on the dash, or got frostbite. Maybe you saw a vision of your own death. Someone already stressed (1-harm) who ignores it and becomes further stressed (2-harm) will be exhausted and prone to dangerous mistakes. Light injury goes away completely when you are cared for and get some rest—no flying for a night will do the trick. Depending on the nature of the Harm, even a day of uninterrupted, luxurious sleep might be therapeutic.

Three Harm means you are seriously hurt. Catching a chunk of shrapnel from an AA battery, being grazed by an Me-109's 20mm cannon, or being burned by flaming canvas would all qualify. So would losing your fiancé or parents, or a nervous collapse from ongoing stress. 3-harm requires medical care and you will be grounded while you recover—it's a good time to assume GM duties while the former GM's character takes the place of yours on combat missions. If multiple characters have serious injuries at the same time, play will naturally gravitate toward the airbase. A hospitalized character stays out of action for as long as the fiction indicates—perhaps the remainder of the current Duty Station.

NPCs can be Harmed, and the fictional effects are identical.

More than three Harm is lethal.

All Harm is removed when you change Duty Stations, as time has passed.

WAYS TO HEAL HARM

- For **1-HARM**, get a good day's sleep or Reach Out and choose it as an option.
- For **2-HARM**, skip a mission and rest.
- For **3-HARM**, spend some time in the hospital.
- Change Duty Stations.

DEATH

Death is close at hand when you play *Night Witches*, and it will be a little unusual for a character to survive six Duty Stations in active campaign play. The odds are stacked against you.

Four Harm means you are dead. Since Harm stacks, it is possible for a serious injury to kill a stressed, exhausted pilot who, if fresh, would have survived.

Being Marked can also be lethal—one of the options is always death. You can choose this if it is the best-worst choice in the moment, but in the end it will be chosen for you. Eventually “embrace death” will be all that is left, and when you finally check it your character will soon be dead.

Finally, of course, you can die as the fiction demands. If a crash isn't survivable, you won't survive. If you are executed, that's that.

If your character dies, consider assuming the GM role for a while. When it feels right, you can choose an existing NPC airwoman to flesh out, or introduce a green pilot fresh from training as you prefer (for rapid advancement methods, see “One-Shots” on page 73).

ADVANCES

Advancement represents experience and growth. When you take an Advance, you change, usually for the better.

Several missions at each Duty Station will trigger Advances for anyone who participates in them. When you change Duty Stations, if you meet the condition associated with your Role, you will also Advance.

Some Moves can trigger Advances when you meet their conditions. One choice among the Marks is an Advance.

When you Advance, you can choose from five options.

HARSH LESSONS

You may choose a new Move. You have five that are specific to your Nature, and the option to take one from another Nature, as well. This Advance can be taken four or five times, depending on your Nature.

DEEPENING TIES

You can open a Regard slot and fill it in. Once you have opened a Regard slot, you can change its tone at will and the comrade or aircraft it points at between sessions or by Reaching Out. This advance can be taken three, four, or five times, depending on your Nature.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Through diligent training and relentless commitment to self-improvement, you may raise Guts, Luck, or Skill by one, up to +3.

HONOR AND PRIDE

You may earn a medal. Medals, which are awarded in ascending sequence of honor and rarity (from left to right, ending with the coveted Hero of the Soviet Union), are high honors. Medals themselves are a quasi-stat used by several moves where bluster,

prestige, and personal reputation matter more than Guts, Luck, or Skill. There will be a small ceremony before your next mission briefing or at another appropriate moment. Raise your +medals stat by one. You can choose this Advance up to four times. For more on medals, see page 29.

ADDED RESPONSIBILITY

You may be promoted. Your character goes up in Rank (see “Rank, and the Burden of Command” on page 18 for some of the implications). Only competent and deserving airwomen are promoted, of course. The relevant Ranks are, from lowest to highest: Sergeant, Junior Lieutenant, Lieutenant, Senior Lieutenant, Captain, and Major. You can choose this Advance three or four times, depending on your Nature.

No one is ever demoted. If you commit an offense worthy of demotion you’ll be remanded to the NKVD, who will either return you to duty or “demote” you all the way to a corrective labor battalion—or worse.

MOVING WEST

You can change Duty Stations. When you choose this, the entire Regiment moves west with the front lines to a new airfield as you skip forward in time.

In addition, you become the GM and everyone else takes an Advance.

Choose this option if you want to GM for a while or feel that the current Duty Station has run its course.

If you are based in Buchholz and choose this Advance, celebrate the end of the war, victory, and survival. This Advance can be taken once.

See the Special Move Operational Planning on page 48 for details about the other effects of changing Duty Stations.

WHEN THE ADVANCES STOP

If you run out of Advance options before you run out of war, you have two options:

1. Your character has become too valuable to risk on nightly raids. She is pulled from the 588th to a safer, more political job with the Fourth Air Army and retired from play. Make up a new character.
2. Every time you earn an Advance, instead lower a stat by one, erase a move, or close a Regard slot as your character starts to burn out.

WAYS TO EARN AN ADVANCE

- **TRIGGER A MOVE** that includes an Advance.
- **CHOOSE A MARK** that includes an Advance.
- **GO ON A MISSION** that triggers an Advance.
- **CHANGE DUTY STATIONS** after fulfilling your Role's condition, or when someone else chooses the Moving West Advance.



Yesterday General Vershinin told us we were the most beautiful young women. Don't think that your snub-nosed daughter has changed. No, I remain exactly as I was, but now beauty lies not in lipstick or a manicure, not in clothes or a hairdo, but in what we actually do. And he is right: our desire to smash the Germans as quickly and practically as possible makes us beautiful.”

Yevgeniya Rudneva

Writing to her parents

MEDALS

These medals are beautiful, no? You dream of a chest full of them, do you not? Wouldn't your family be proud? Maybe some day.

You may choose to have your character awarded medals as Advances throughout the game. Earning a medal is a significant choice and your character's recent behavior should give the current GM ample evidence to cite of her bravery, dedication, and skill. Anyone who earns a medal without truly deserving it—if your GM can't cite her heroic actions unreservedly—will be an object of ridicule and contempt.

When she earns a medal it has two effects.

First, the GM must incorporate an award ceremony recapitulating your character's heroism into the next mission briefing (or another appropriate time). Be sure to stand at attention while the citation is read!

The list of medals is different on each character sheet. Circle your new medal on your sheet, starting with the left-most one and ending, if you are ferociously brave, astonishingly talented, and mind-bendingly lucky, with the coveted Hero of the Soviet Union award.

Second, your character's +medals score rises by one. Various Moves require you to roll +medals, and only medals earned as Advances count toward these rolls.

Some Duty Stations award a campaign medal or honor ribbon upon their completion—the entire unit gets the award, and these medals don't count toward +medals rolls. But they are, literally, badges of honor and important milestones in the military careers of these airwomen. Bragging rights are just the beginning.

MEDAL CITATIONS

When someone earns a medal, the GM should read the citation below and add the examples of heroism and selfless determination demonstrated by the current recipient during the next briefing scene, as the Regiment's Commander.

MEDAL OF BATTLE MERIT

The Medal of Battle Merit is awarded for successful combat action resulting in a military success, courageous defense of the state borders, or successful military and political training and preparation.

MEDAL OF VALOR

The Medal of Valor is awarded to soldiers of the Soviet Army, Navy, border and internal troops, and other citizens of the USSR, as well as to persons who are not citizens of the USSR, for personal courage and bravery displayed in battles against the enemies of the socialist motherland, while protecting the state border of the USSR, during the performance of military duties in circumstances involving a risk to life.

ORDER OF GLORY

The Order of Glory, third class, is awarded to Privates and Sergeants of the Red Army, and to aviation Lieutenants, who display glorious feats of bravery, courage, and fearlessness in the battle for the Soviet Motherland.

ORDER OF THE PATRIOTIC WAR

The Order of the Patriotic War is awarded for specific heroic deeds that strike a blow to the enemy. For the 588th, the most likely reasons are contributing to the destruction of enemy materiel that supports a successful breakthrough or repairing an aircraft under fire after landing in a hostile territory.

ORDER OF SUVOROV

The Order of Suvorov, third class is bestowed upon Soviet officers who display exceptional courage, self-denial, and valor during combat. The Order is awarded to Regimental Commanders, their Chiefs of Staff, and battalion and company Commanders for outstanding leadership leading to a combat victory.

ORDER OF THE RED STAR

The Order of the Red Star was awarded to soldiers of the Soviet Army and Navy for personal courage and bravery in battle; for the excellent organization and leadership in combat that contributed to the success of our troops for successful operations of military units and formations which resulted in the enemy suffering considerable casualties or damage; or for courage and valor displayed during the performance of military duties, or, in circumstances involving a risk to life.

ORDER OF THE RED BANNER

The Order of the Red Banner is bestowed upon Soviet military personnel who display exceptional courage, self-denial, and valor during combat. It can only be awarded for the most extreme combat-related heroism.

At the end of the war, the entire Regiment will be collectively awarded the Order of the Red Banner. When you earn this individually, you may choose any staff role in the Regiment other than Commander. Choose a character to be transferred into your old job when you receive the Order of the Red Banner.

HERO OF THE SOVIET UNION

The HSU is the highest honorary title that a Soviet citizen can receive for accomplishments in “promoting peace, promoting socialism, protecting the Motherland, or a heroic act to help others.” Perhaps fittingly for the most celebrated award in the USSR, it is also the most visually simple—a small gold star with red ribbon, unadorned.

By the end of the war, 23 airwomen of the 588th will earn the HSU. This Advance is only available to heroic Regimental aviators who have already been awarded the other three medals on their character sheet.

MISSION POOL

The Mission Pool is a shared resource generated by the air Section's behavior on the ground. It represents esprit de corps, quality equipment and workmanship, diligent preparation, and fighting spirit. A well-stocked Mission Pool might be a Section brimming with confidence and élan, or one with perfectly tuned planes and shining racks of FAB-50 bombs with special messages to the Wehrmacht written on them. A Section going on a mission with no pool might be disorganized, fearful, ill-equipped, or poorly prepared. This will be reflected in their outcomes, as sure as the sun rises.

Mission Pool is a communal resource represented by tokens. Each token is worth +1 forward during the following night's mission. Anyone can take a point or more from the Mission Pool to help with any roll, as long as planes are in the air.

You can spend as many points from the Mission Pool at once as you need. If you spend more than that you are wasting Mission Pool, which only an enemy of the people might want to do, duped by the siren song of the forces of reaction into becoming a loathsome wrecker and spy. But by all means, go ahead and grab four points to turn that utter failure into a total success.

You can spend before or after a roll.

Unspent Mission Pool tokens are lost at dawn.

WAYS TO EARN MISSION POOL

- **SCROUNGE** well.
- **ACT UP** and choose to add to the Mission Pool.
- **REACH OUT** and choose to add to the Mission Pool.
- If you have the Zealot Role, **SHAME SOMEONE** during the Debrief.
- If you are a Raven and have the **PERMANENT FILE** Move, submit an official report and choose to add to the Mission Pool.

“ Other pilots in the hospital came to see me because they had heard that a young girl pilot had crashed at the front and had been brought to the hospital as a sack of bones ... The surgeon wanted me discharged from the army, and I wanted to return to flying. He wouldn't allow that and said that I must learn to walk on crutches. While I was in the hospital a letter came to the regiment informing me that my two children, ages two and five, had been killed in a bombing.”

Mariya Akilina



*We prepared the aircraft for combat missions, and at times they flew ten or more missions in a night
...we never had enough sleep; not for the whole war did we have sufficient sleep.*

KLAVDIYA ILUSHINA

MOVES

COMMON MOVES are divided between day and night, and generally Day Moves are not available at night and vice versa. Feel free to bend this rule where it makes sense, but do so reluctantly. Tempt Fate, always available, should be the ready default in these circumstances.

Some Common Moves can only be used by characters in a specific position, such as the “ranking officer” or “pilot.” This is indicated in parenthesis after the Move name.

CHARACTER MOVES are available at any time.

SPECIAL MOVES are triggered by specific fictional circumstances.



Every day held anxiety and concern, for we lost one third of the Regiment in a very short period, and among them were my closest friends. Each night was a kind of torture.”

Klavdiya Ilushina

DAY MOVES

If you have Regard for the target of a Move, always add +1. Regard doesn't stack.

EYEBALL

When you size up a person or situation roll +skill. On 10+, hold 2; on 7-9, hold 1. Spend a hold, now or later, to ask a question. Take +1 forward when you act on the answers; give +1 forward to another and share in the outcome if you prefer. Ask:

- How can I help her?
- What does he want?
- What am I overlooking?
- How can I get...

On a miss, the GM might offer a straight-up lie, honest mistake, or tragic misunderstanding.

Eyeballing has two uses—the transitive nature of the bonus means that it's a reliable way to aid a friend, and the broader questions can help you both understand and manage difficult situations. If you need something, Eyeball before trying to get it.

ACT UP

When you try to get your way...

...by acting like a hooligan, roll +luck.

...by acting like a lady, roll +guts.

...by acting like a natural-born Soviet airwoman, roll +medals.

On 10+, choose two. On 7-9, choose one:

- Make someone do what you want. (If the person you are imposing on is a PC, she can do it or not, but if she doesn't you are both Marked.)
- Ensure that there are no consequences for Acting Up.
- Add one to the Mission Pool.

On a miss, there will be trouble.

Acting Up means stepping out of your prescribed role as a demure, obedient soldier to get what you want. Hooligans—forces of counterrevolutionary reaction no woman should emulate—are aggressive, tough, and possibly cruel. Ladies—who have no place in a war zone—are caring, empathetic, and perhaps a little sexy. Natural-born Soviet airwomen are proud, patriotic, and take no shit from anyone.

REACH OUT

When you make a personal connection and reveal a significant truth, roll the dice. On 10+, choose two. On 7-9, choose one:

- Remove one Harm each from yourself and your friend.
- Change the target and/or tone of a currently filled Regard slot.
- Add one to the Mission Pool.

On a miss, your efforts are ineffective, misunderstood, or understood all too clearly.

Reaching Out, as a form of intimacy, is risky but rewarding. That risk can be ameliorated by Eyeballing your potential connection or by focusing on people you already have Regard for. It's fine to Reach Out by letter to distant friends and family. Your mail will be read.

SCROUNGE

Whenever some specific thing is desperately needed, roll straight if going through channels, or roll +luck if you aren't so good with paperwork. On a 10+, you get what you need and add one to the Mission Pool. On a 7-9, you get what you need but choose two (Misanthropes choose one):

- You attract unwanted attention.
- You get poor quality stuff.
- You incur a debt.

On a miss, it can't be acquired for love or money. Well, for money, anyway. The GM might choose two options from the 7-9 list or worse. 1-harm from lack of sleep is likely.

Scrounging is frowned upon even when it isn't illegal. Sometimes there's no choice—you need a part, you need fuel, you need someone to sit in the navigator's seat for tonight's mission.

REPAIR

If a plane has been torn up or broken down and you help the mechanics fix her, roll +skill.

On any hit, you patch it together and it is no longer damaged. On 7-9, you patch it together, but choose two (Protectors choose one):

- She'll fly eventually, but not tonight.
- You don't complete the job in the officially approved manner.
- The plane acquires a personality if it doesn't have one already.

On a miss, you are sending it into combat still damaged. Maybe that's obvious and maybe it isn't. Regardless, 1-harm from lack of sleep is likely.

The Regiment's mechanic-armorers work all day to keep the undamaged planes in flyable condition, and anyone who returns with a damaged one will both earn their ire and be volunteered to assist in its repair.

TEMPT FATE

When you Tempt Fate, roll +guts. On a 10+, you do it. On a 7-9, you do it, but not without cost—the GM can offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain, or an ugly choice.

On a miss, you take Harm as established and are Marked in addition to failing. Fate is a suka.

Tempting Fate is the default move for any hairball situation well above and beyond the normal dangers of life near the front lines. “Liberating” the propeller blades from the 218th’s liaison Po-2 isn’t Tempting Fate (that’s Scrounging!), but putting them back later probably is.

BRIEFING (RANKING OFFICER)

When the sun begins to set, consult with the GM and inform your aircrews about the coming night’s objective. Choose and check off a mission from the Duty Station sheet and present it to the assembled Regiment.

Assign one player character as a navigator to Wayfind and one as a pilot to lead the Attack Run. The remaining player characters are *Vedomye*, or “wing women.” Assign them planes other than their own to protect using the *Vedomaya* move. A pilot or navigator can be a *Vedomaya*.

Don’t forget to announce any medals and promotions during the briefing.

NIGHT MOVES

Night Moves will invariably occur during missions. Flights during the day don't require Wayfinding and targets offering no resistance don't require an Attack Run.

A routine night bombing mission requires one successful Wayfinding roll and one successful Attack Run. Many missions are not routine.

A mission will include all six of a Section's aircrew, including a few NPCs. It's up to the Section Leader to assign each player character airwoman, including herself, a job (pilot or navigator) and a responsibility (locate the target, lead the attack, support another aircraft), as per the Briefing Move above.

Moves are only available to player characters. If an NPC is put in a situation that would ordinarily trigger a Move, no dice are rolled. The GM will determine what happens. It's always a good opportunity for a hard Move.

If you have Regard for the target of a Move, always add +1. Regard doesn't stack.

VEDOMAYA

When you fly as a *vedomaya* ("wing woman") and cover your assigned fellow plane during a mission, hold one. When that plane's crew suffers a consequence, spend your hold to cover them and take it on yourself instead.

Anyone—pilot or navigator—who hasn't been assigned a primary mission function (Wayfinding and making the Attack Run) can be assigned a plane to watch over as *Vedomye*. Triggering the Vedomaya Move is always optional. If you want to help another aircraft after using Vedomaya, you are probably Tempting Fate.

WAYFIND (NAVIGATOR)

When you lead a flight to a target by daylight, or to your airbase at any time, you find it.

When you lead a flight to a target at night, roll +skill. On a 10+, you find it and line up a textbook approach. On a 7-9, you find it and choose one consequence:

- Your plane suffers a minor mechanical failure (plane is damaged).
- They are waiting for you (triggers Enemy Fire).
- You're stressed or banged around (split 2-harm between you and your crewmate however you want).

On a miss, either scrub the mission and return to the airbase in shame, or strike the target late and alone, forcing you to make your own Attack Run. Planes relying on your navigation can choose which miss condition they would prefer.

ATTACK RUN (PILOT)

When you lead an attack on a target, roll +guts. On a 10+, your payload connects! Choose one. On a 7-9, it's a hit and you choose two consequences:

- The damage to the target is not significant and it is your fault.
- You fly through a storm of flak (triggers Enemy Fire).
- A plane in your Section is damaged, GM's choice.
- You and your fellow airwoman are Marked.

On a miss, either abort the attack completely, which will surely trigger an Informal Interview back at base, or desperately press on, Tempting Fate. Planes relying on your leadership can choose which miss condition they would prefer.

After an Attack Run by a Leader, other pilots that decide to make an additional Attack Run would enjoy +1 forward.

ENEMY FIRE (NAVIGATOR)

When your Po-2 is hit by bullets or flak, roll +luck. On a 10+, the old girl's in one piece and you are fine. On a 7-9, she holds together and you choose two consequences:

- You and your fellow airwoman are Marked.
- Casualties on board. (Split 5 Harm between you however you like; also triggers Wheels Down later.)
- Your plane is shredded (plane is damaged; also triggers Wheels Down later).
- Another plane in your section goes down (GM will decide which).

On a miss, the GM might choose three from the 7-9 list or maybe something more horrific.

WHEELS DOWN (PILOT)

When you land a plane under less than ideal circumstances, roll +skill. "Less than ideal" includes putting it down anywhere but a prepared airfield, or with battle damage, or with injured or dead crew. On a 10+, you and your Po-2 are on the ground and in one piece. Change an existing Regard slot to refer to your plane if you want.

On 7-9, you break the plane; and choose two consequences (Adventurers choose one):

- It's unflyable (plane is damaged; if already damaged, it is a fiery wreck).
- Casualties on board. (Split 3 Harm between you however you like.)
- Your lack of skill, courage, or care with the people's machinery is noted.
- Your landing puts you in immediate danger.

On a miss, the GM will start with a fiery wreck and build from there.

TEMPT FATE

When you Tempt Fate, roll +guts. On a 10+, you do it. On a 7-9, you do it but not without cost—the GM can offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain, or an ugly choice.

On a miss you take harm as established and are Marked in addition to failing. Fate is a suka.

Tempting Fate is the default Move for any hairball situation well above and beyond the normal dangers of life near the front lines. Flying a mission—even a difficult mission—won't Tempt Fate, but deliberately drawing fire so that your Section Leader's damaged plane can land is.

DEBRIEF (ALL)

When you Debrief after a mission, tell your Chief of Staff or Squadron Commander what went right and what went wrong. If the mission was unusually stressful the GM may add 1-harm. If you wish, change the tone of any existing Regard. If you are a Zealot, publicly shame a comrade and add one to the next night's Mission Pool if you wish. If it was the Duty Station's last mission, begin Operational Planning.

In an emergency, anyone can fly and anyone can navigate, both from either seat, but making a Move outside your assigned position requires a change in the fiction first. Be prepared to explain your actions and be ready for possible consequences back at the base.

CHARACTER MOVES

Each Nature has five Moves associated with it, and each of these can be taken as an advancement option. A sixth choice allows you to take a Move from another Nature if you like.

SPARROW

DARK BARGAIN: You can elect to be Marked in order to remove all Harm from yourself or another.

GHOSTS: Choose a dead comrade and hold three. When you ask the spirit of your friend for help, spend your holds one for one to succeed as if you had rolled a 10+. Every time you do this you are also Harmed or Marked by the experience, your choice.

TRANSCENDENT LOVE: Choose your one and only lover. Your bond is intense and unshakable. The first time you take the Mark “Embrace Death and face your final destiny,” immediately erase it.

MURKY PAST: You guard your history carefully. Choose two things you are hiding: valuable training, prominent family, political connections, a strange secret, portable wealth. Define them whenever you want. Reveal either of these aspects of your past to save the day, make an impression, or ruin someone.

FATAL AMBITION: Once per Duty Station, advance when you do something explicitly against orders that causes you to Tempt Fate.



I can excel as a Soviet soldier ... and with a weapon in my hands, take my place in the ranks of the glorious defenders of the Motherland. May the bullet unleashed by my hand cut down the Hitlerite dog of war; may the executioners from his army be unable to carry out their murderous deeds. I was reared by the Komsomol to be hard as nails ... I beg you, don't rebuff my plea.”

Lyudmila Garlinskaya

HAWK

SUKA: You enjoy +1 ongoing when acting like a hooligan. When you act like a lady, you are Marked.

PEOPLE'S HERO: Name the high-ranking official who has taken a personal interest in your career.

11.4 METERS TIP-TO-TIP: When you want to land in some new place, you can ask “Is it remotely possible to land there?” and the GM will tell you. If the answer is yes, you don’t need to roll the Wheels Down move to land there.

AS SEEN IN PRAVDA: Use +medals instead of +guts when you Tempt Fate.

RAPTOR: Advance the first time you have sex with each of: a Senior Lieutenant, a Captain, a Major, a Lieutenant Colonel, or a Colonel.

OWL

GREATER GOOD: Rewrite an unused Mark to read “Abandon a comrade and Advance.”

PRODIGAL DAUGHTER: Advance whenever you return to the Regiment after being assumed captured or dead.

INTENSE NAVIGATION: To find a target at night, you don’t need to Wayfind if you instead take a Mark or 1-harm, your choice.

PULL RANK: Take +1 forward when you Act Up if you outrank the target.

POLITICAL THOUGHT: When you Eyeball you may also ask “Is there evidence of violation of Articles 58 and 133?”

FOR REFERENCE: Article 58 reads “A counter-revolutionary action is any action aimed at overthrowing, undermining or weakening of the power of workers’ and peasants’ Soviets ...and government of the USSR, or at the undermining or weakening of the external security of the USSR and main economic, political, and national achievements of the proletarian revolution.”

Article 133 reads “To defend the Motherland is the sacred duty of every citizen of the U.S.S.R. Treason to the Motherland—violation of the oath of allegiance, desertion to the enemy, impairing the military power of the state, espionage—is punishable with all the severity of the law as the most heinous of crimes.”

PIGEON

SHIT TALKING: Call out another player character you despise at a Debriefing and roll +regard. On a 10+ hold three; on 7-9 hold one. Spend your holds, one for one, to give your enemy -1 forward. For more on holds, see “Rolling the Dice” on page 11.

FORBIDDEN LOVE: When you take a lover, keep it secret. If discovered, face the consequences together or abandon your lover and Advance.

ANDROGYNOUS: You can Act Up by acting like a man—not a hooligan—using +guts. On a miss, you are Marked.

BEDSIDE MANNER: When you treat someone who has been badly hurt, roll +luck. On a hit, it isn’t as bad as it seemed. On a 7-9, finding this out takes a lot of time, energy, or resources—the GM will choose.

ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT: When you are Vedomaya, choose the consequences for the aircrew you are watching over.

RAVEN

TO HELL WITH DEATH: When you would normally be Marked you may choose another player character who is Marked instead.

FORTUNE’S FOOL: Choose a single Move. Replace the rolled stat with +luck when you trigger it.

VORON: When you steal a treasured possession from someone, they are Marked. If the “treasured possession” is their lover or their future, Advance.

SACRIFICE: When you are sent to the hospital to recover from combat injuries, you may choose your assignment, Squadron, Section, and aircraft when you return.

PERMANENT FILE: When you submit an official report to your superiors, roll +skill. On a 10+, choose 2. On 7-9, choose 1:

- Mark someone.
- Change accepted truth of a situation.
- Add one to the Mission Pool.



SPECIAL MOVES

OPERATIONAL PLANNING

When all missions have been completed, the Regiment's time at the current airbase is over. Fast-forward your story and change Duty Stations. This is a good time to consider changing GMs as well.

This move has the following additional effects:

- Everyone heals and all planes are resupplied and repaired.
- Anyone who fulfilled their Role condition advances.
- Anyone can change their Role if they wish.

Orient everyone to the new Duty Station before continuing.

INFORMAL INTERVIEW

When you are questioned by the NKVD, roll +luck if you lie and +guts if you tell the truth (Dreamers can roll using whatever stat they prefer). On a 10+, they thank you for your time. On a 7-9, also choose one:

- You incriminate a family member or a comrade you have positive Regard for (you choose).
- You agree to frame the target of their current investigation (GM chooses).
- You and the comrade of your choice are Marked.

On a miss, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs takes an interest in you.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

When you find yourself on foot behind enemy lines, you are Marked. The GM will present you with your immediate circumstances. You have a pistol, some high-energy milk sweets, and a map and compass. Everyone evading capture rolls for themselves.

If you have landed in an active combat zone, roll +guts.

If you find yourself in lonely terrain far from the front lines, roll +skill.

If you've put down in or near a village or farm, roll +luck.

On 10+, you'll return to the Regiment unharmed and ready for duty. Who aided you? On 7-9, choose two:

- Return after some time in hiding. Where did you hide?
- Return unfit for duty. How were you hurt? (Take Harm as established.)
- Return under a cloud of suspicion. What arouses the Politruk's suspicion? (Expect an Informal Interview.)

On a miss, you don't evade capture.



I promise to rise to the defense of my Motherland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as a fighting man [sic] of the Worker's and Peasant's Red Army, I promise to defend it bravely, skillfully, with dignity and honor, sparing neither my blood nor my life itself for the achievement of total victory over our enemies.”

Red Army Oath

COMING HOME

When you return to the 588th...

- ...**AFTER A MISSION**, give thanks for your survival and Debrief.
- ...**AFTER A LENGTHY ABSENCE DUE TO INJURY**, all Harm is removed and you are pronounced fit for duty. Effects of your war injuries may linger.
- ...**AFTER A LENGTHY ABSENCE DUE TO ARREST**, retain Harm as established. Time in NKVD interrogation facilities and prisons is not healthy.
- ...**AFTER A LENGTHY ABSENCE DUE TO SOME DISASTER** like a crash behind enemy lines, retain harm as established. An injured, exhausted airwoman who drags herself home may be headed straight for the hospital.

Regardless of the nature of the absence, ask some questions. Where was she? What did she see and do that contrasts sharply with life in the Regiment? How has she changed?

SEVERE INJURY

When you are badly wounded, describe the nature and extent of your injuries and go straight to the hospital or assume temporary duty as a staff officer. Serious injury requires medical care and you will be grounded while you recover. Consider assuming GM duties while the former GM's character takes the place of yours on combat missions.

When you have recovered, choose one:

- Accept a medical discharge and retire from active service honorably.
- Return to duty. The Regimental Politruk will vet you for loyalty and commitment and the Chief of Staff will assign you as needed.





The antiaircraft guns stopped, and a German fighter plane came and shot down four of our aircraft as each one came over the target. Our planes were burning like candles.

SERAFIMA AMOSOVA-TARANENKO

THE GAME MASTER

ABOUT THE GM

In *Night Witches*, the Game Master (GM) role is fluid, and, depending on what your group is comfortable with, everyone can have the opportunity to take a turn running the game. Decide however you like who will be GM first. Since you are reading this, it will probably be you!

The GM is in charge of breathing life into the world around the characters. It is a muddy, ugly world consumed by genocidal warfare, full of people who know that every day stands a reasonable chance of being their last. They want the things all people want—love, acceptance, spare parts, clean underwear, the last morsel of jam in the shared tin. Maybe revenge, or pity, or a medal, or a stay of execution.

Everyone needs to have a character ready to play. The initial GM's character can fade into the Regimental background or arrive for duty late—later on, the circumstances of the new GM's characters will be obvious from the emerging fiction.

Everyone should also review the GM's Agendas, Principles, Moves, and Threats (see page 56), which set the tone for play and provide lots of potential story hooks.

WHAT THE GM DOES

The GM's job is to rotate between interpersonal drama at the airbase by day and the white-knuckle terror of missions at night. It's the GM's responsibility to introduce broader threats and ground the game in muddy, cold, infuriating reality. Where the nights are filled with immediate danger, the days are where we learn who these women are, what they are fighting for, and the lengths to which they will go to stay in that fight.

The GM never rolls dice.

While the GM has a lot of responsibility, you aren't there to tell everyone else a story, or make sure people are having fun, or arbitrate real-life disputes. Everybody at the table is responsible for these things.

If you aren't used to being GM, pay attention to how others handle the job and know that the game's tools make it really easy. If you're ever stumped about what to frame a scene about, encourage someone to Reach Out in a letter or to another character, then act on whatever new information is revealed.



There were 200 women in the Regiment. We were the only Regiment in the whole of the Red Army without any men serving in it. Our aircraft flew 1,100 nights of combat. ”

Irina Rakobolskaya

BEING EVERYBODY ELSE

Being the game's initial GM gives you the opportunity to establish and flesh out a few iconic characters within the Regiment. Make the people you portray, from local villager to NKVD Colonel, really straightforward. There's a war on, so some people will not have time for any bullshit. Others will use the war as an excuse for all kinds of bullshit. Give everyone an obvious motivation—this one wants a promotion, that one wants a scapegoat. This one wants some Shvetsov engine gaskets, that one wants love and reassurance. When they can't get what they want, they'll turn to the player characters, of course.

The very best thing you can do is to attach these people to two different player characters in a messy, asymmetric relationship—a triangle consisting of two player characters and an interesting, demanding NPC. Maybe they want something different—really uncomplicated—from each. Keep them focused on the player characters, keep them stirring the pot in different relationships, and they'll write their own stories for you.

EMBRACING FAILURE

This game gives you a lot of power to push in directions you like. You can certainly succeed a lot if that makes you feel good. Your character's success, however, may come at the expense of your friends' fun, because challenge and danger and hardship are the building blocks of compelling stories.

Embrace failure and unpredictability. Relish complications. Listen to what your friends are asking for and give it to them—and then some. Be gracious and throw some curve balls. If they want love interests, give them juicy and complicated triangles. If they want to kill Germans, show them the full measure of war's horror. If they just want to survive, give them something to survive for.

This advice applies when you are GM and when you aren't.

THE FOUR LISTS

As GM, you are the keeper of four lists that absolutely define *Night Witches*. They are the core of the game, its thematic center. They are your Agenda, Principles, Moves, and Threats.

Your **AGENDA** is a punchy list of goals. Every move you make should be in the service of one or more Agenda items. These are the game at its most elemental—it is about these women, in the middle of this war, and their experiences.

Your **PRINCIPLES** are techniques for hammering your Agenda.

Your **MOVES** are special. Unlike player Moves, they don't have any mechanical constraints. Shit just happens when you have permission to dish it out. They can be hard—as hard as death—but they don't have to be. Let the situation and the dice dictate, keeping in mind that only the players ever roll them.

Your **THREATS** represent the entire world of blood, chaos, heartbreak, and paperwork. Each Threat has moves of its own; listen to your friends and choose a couple of Threats to bring forward to define your tenure as GM.

Use these resources in combination, tailored to the situation. Be honest and true to your friends and the rules, and follow the Principles. You can afford to be generous and transparent.

AGENDA

- Bring the war to life.
- Put them in the middle of the grind.
- Seek out their stories.
- Play to find out what happens.

BRING THE WAR TO LIFE.

The Duty Station handouts and these rules are stuffed with little details. Embrace them and throw them in whenever it will illuminate, focus, or invoke empathy.

PUT THEM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE GRIND.

These women flew 1,100 nights of combat. The pace is relentless! The endless cycle of day and night should be omnipresent. There's too much to do and not enough time or hands.

SEEK OUT THEIR STORIES.

Make the game about the women your players create.

PLAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS.

Don't assume the role of GM with specific ideas about the direction the game will go. Be interested in your friend's characters and the stories you have sought out.

PRINCIPLES

- Let everything flow from the fiction.
- Address the characters, not the players.
- Point the action at the characters and their Moves.
- Give each plane's tail number and Duty Station a personality.
- Give each NPC a name, a past—and no mercy.
- Sometimes just give it to them.

LET EVERYTHING FLOW FROM THE FICTION.

Once you've started, the game will run itself. Ask how the characters react and see what happens next. The necessity of external inputs will diminish over time.

ADDRESS THE CHARACTERS, NOT THE PLAYERS.

"Anya, where are you going to land?" not "Greg, where is Anya going to land." This may seem like a small thing, but it makes a big difference!

POINT THE ACTION AT THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR MOVES.

This is the ground-level way to seek out their stories.

GIVE EACH PLANE'S TAIL NUMBER AND DUTY STATION A PERSONALITY.

This is really just zeroing in on your agenda to bring the war to life.

GIVE EACH NPC A NAME, A PAST—AND NO MERCY.

Don't fall in love with your NPCs. Make them interesting, but always remember that war doesn't discriminate.

SOMETIMES JUST GIVE IT TO THEM.

It's perfectly acceptable to occasionally say "OK, the mission goes smoothly. You've returned and debriefed—now what do you do?"



MOVES

You have Moves to make, but you should never name them. Just let them happen as part of the conversation. For example, don't just say "Offer an opportunity and name the price." Have a grimy corpsman from an infantry unit passing through ask for "medicinal" alcohol in exchange for a twenty-kilo bag of sugar he's illegally acquired somewhere. What could you do with that much precious sugar? And where could you get enough alcohol to interest the corpsman in a trade? One easy source would be to bleed methanol from the torpedoes just delivered to the 218th Regiment to support the Black Sea Fleet...

SOFT MOVES

A soft Move is a chance for you as GM to ask more questions. Your questions should usually be loaded ones. Think about your NPCs and what they want—soft Moves are a wonderful chance for them to act.

Make a soft Move when a hard Move doesn't apply—in other words if they haven't missed on a roll or given you a golden opportunity, don't make a hard Move.

Make a soft Move that telegraphs a coming hard Move if they do nothing. When they wait for you to tell them a story, make sure they don't like your story.

Stressing them—that is, inflicting one Harm based on stressful conditions—is an easy soft Move that is rarely inappropriate. If they work too hard during the day, when they should be sleeping, stress them.

HARD MOVES

Hard Moves are when you, as the GM, demonstrate the simultaneously ineffable and grinding cruelty of war. Players and fate will hand you beautiful golden opportunities.

Make a hard Move when someone makes a roll and ends up with a six or less.

Make a hard Move when they ignore a shitty situation you have been telegraphing with soft Moves.

Ease up on the hard Moves if things are going well—that is, when the player characters are engaged with one another and causing lots of trouble, your Agenda is well in hand, and your Principles are creeping into the fiction without your concerted effort.

SNOWBALLS IN HELL

Since inconclusive, success-with-a-cost results are common, Moves tend to get mashed and pile up, one on top of the other, each triggered by the last. This is great! Remember that it should be rare for something that happens in the fiction to result in fewer options.

Failure should always be as interesting as success—as GM, you have a lot of control over that, and your delicious list of hard Moves will keep things jumping. Always, always end with “What do you do?”

GM MOVES

- Bring their gender into it.
- Show them the darkness on the horizon.
- Bring a threat to bear.
- Inflict Harm or scarcity as established.
- Offer an opportunity and name the price.
- Put them somewhere they don't want to be.
- Doubt them and demand discipline.
- Have death collect what is due.
- After every Move ask...“What do you do?”

BRING THEIR GENDER INTO IT.

There's a powerful dramatic kernel at the heart of *Night Witches*, and it revolves around gender. Don't shy away from it.

SHOW THEM THE DARKNESS ON THE HORIZON.

Telegraph bad things that are on their way...

BRING A THREAT TO BEAR.

...and having telegraphed it, bring it on without hesitation.

INFLECT HARM OR SCARCITY AS ESTABLISHED.

Taking away or limiting the default supply at a Duty Station is a hard Move.

OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY AND NAME THE PRICE.

Make the opportunities impossibly tempting, and the prices impossibly high. Any Move that comes with a potential Advance is a good place to offer a dreadful bargain.

PUT THEM SOMEWHERE THEY DON'T WANT TO BE.

Between the German lines and home. Between the Major and the NKVD. Between a lover and a friend.

DOUBT THEM AND DEMAND DISCIPLINE.

Authorities will treat the unit as a sideshow. The 588th is a military unit, and discipline will be ubiquitous, crushing, and unfair.

HAVE DEATH COLLECT WHAT IS DUE.

Just as you have no mercy for NPCs, when death is a clear outcome for a player character don't shy away from it.

AFTER EVERY MOVE ASK...“WHAT DO YOU DO?”

What do you do? What do you do now? And now? This simple question is what drives the game.

THREATS

THE HITLERITE BANDITS

- Wait for them in the clouds [1].
- Ambush them from out of the dawn sun [2].
- Pin them with searchlights and flak.
- Sow panic and reap death.
- Hit them where it hurts [3].
- Deliver a crushing defeat elsewhere.

THE WEATHER

- Blind them and make them uncertain.
- Make them sit still for days on end.
- Delay them, waste fuel, make them go around.
- Damage their planes.
- Freeze and bake them, then bake and freeze them.
- Give them a beautiful sunny day now and then.

OUR BELOVED 588TH REGIMENT

- Confess love or pregnancy or both.
- Brew up petty rivalries, spread rumors, and gossip.
- Bury the dead—or the living.
- Celebrate a victory, award, wedding, or name day.
- Deliver very bad news from home.
- Introduce green recruits or know-it-all veterans.
- Our Gallant Flying Comrades
- Send Major Popov of the all-male 218th Night Bomber Regiment over.
- Take credit.
- Laugh at the women of the 588th.
- Make the *Night Witches* act like men—or women.
- Spotlight an ace from the mostly female 586th Fighter Regiment.
- “Borrow” resources and equipment.
- Break the rules and get away with it.

REAR-ECHELON HEROES

- Delay vital supplies or paperwork.
- Deliver the wrong things; deliver late or not at all.
- Rat them out.
- Loiter around the airbase looking for a party.
- Demand a “consideration”—or steal from them.
- Have the Central Directorate of Rear Services of the Soviet Army Air Forces, 4th Air Army Logistics and Supply Commissariat call them to account.

THE STATE

- Look for violations of Articles 58[4] and 133[5].
- Demand assistance in a nearby village.
- Introduce them to dashing, sexy partisans.
- Put pressure on their families.
- Send reporters from Komsomolskaya Pravda and Krasnaya Zvezda.
- Demand greater zeal and productivity.

NOTES

1. The German STG 77 squadron, waiting in the clouds in slow JU-87 fighter planes, were lethal Night Witch hunters.
2. The German JG 54 squadron, the “Green Heart Wing,” flying FW-190 fighters out of the dawn sun. Too fast for anything but luck. Often lucky.
3. Hit them where it hurts with German JU-88 medium bombers from the KG 51 squadron.
4. Article 58 reads “A counter-revolutionary action is any action aimed at overthrowing, undermining or weakening of the power of workers’ and peasants’ Soviets... and government of the USSR, or at the undermining or weakening of the external security of the USSR and main economic, political and national achievements of the proletarian revolution.”
5. Article 133 reads “To defend the Motherland is the sacred duty of every citizen of the U.S.S.R. Treason to the Motherland—violation of the oath of allegiance, desertion to the enemy, impairing the military power of the state, espionage—is punishable with all the severity of the law as the most heinous of crimes.”





*To fly a combat mission is not a trip under the moon.
Every attack, every bombing is a dance with death.*

SERAFIMA AMOSOVA-TARANENKO

THE SETUP

GETTING STARTED

Gather your friends in a comfortable space.

You'll also need some supplies—dice (six-sided, two per person), pencils, playbooks, and handouts, as well as a few tokens for the Mission Pool; coins work just fine. You can find the handouts at <http://www.bulypulpitgames.com/games/night-witches>.

THE PITCH

Before you play, read the historical context and review it at the table. You can skip this if everyone is familiar with it, but if not, it is useful to share a high level summary, like so:

“We’re playing Soviet women in an all-female Night Bomber Regiment during World War Two. We’ll be pilots and navigators. We’ll be airwomen.

Our mission is to harass the German army, which has invaded our country. The war is brutal and horrific. We fly obsolete biplanes and drop bombs or, when we don’t have bombs, railroad ties, on the Germans. Things are desperate. It is incredibly dangerous. We fly in darkness, sometimes a dozen missions each night.

The Soviet army wishes we didn’t exist and nobody expects us to succeed. We are going to succeed anyway.”

If anybody has questions you can refer to the history section (see page 123), but it is probably better to just get started and answer questions as they arise.

THE STRUCTURE OF PLAY

The structure and flow of play in *Night Witches* is easy to outline. Kasper Brohus Allerslav broke down general *Apocalypse World* style play into a succinct series of four steps, which has been adapted for *Night Witches* below:

STEP ONE: THE SETUP

- a. Gather your friends and materials together and then pitch the game.
- b. Choose a GM (let's assume it is you) and decide how long you'll play.
- c. Make characters as a group. (See page 74.)
- d. Ask some questions, fill in additional context (the airbase, the planes), and present an opening situation. (See page 78.)
- e. Is everybody eager to play? Go to Step 2.

STEP TWO: THE CONVERSATION

- a. Ask a player's character, or a group of characters "What do you do?" (see page 9.)
- b. Listen as they tell you what their characters do.
- c. Did the players give you a golden opportunity? Go to Step 4.
- d. Do their actions trigger a Move? Go to Step 3.
- e. Repeat this step if no Move or opportunity emerges.

STEP THREE: MAKING A MOVE

- a. Carry out the Move's instructions. (See page 10)
- b. If the player rolls a miss, that's a golden opportunity for the GM. Go to Step 4.
- c. Did the Move's effects trigger another Move? Go to A and repeat this step.
- d. Otherwise, go to Step 4.

STEP FOUR: MAKING TROUBLE

- a. Review the Agenda and Principles. (See page 57.)
- b. Did the players give you a golden opportunity? Make a hard Move (See page 61) and go to Step 2.
- c. Otherwise, make a soft Move (see page 60) and go to Step 2.

That's it. That's the whole game, procedurally. If you do that over and over again you'll have some hair-raising, tragic, triumphant, dramatic times.

CHOOSE A GM

To play *Night Witches*, you'll need someone in the role of the Game Master. Take a moment to decide who the first GM will be for your game. Since you are reading these rules, we'll assume that's you for now.

For more information on what being a GM means, see the Game Master chapter (page 53).

CHANGING GMS IN PLAY

Although there is only one GM at a time, the role is fluid and will change hands. In campaign play, everyone will get a chance to GM.

Consider changing GMs when:

- Any player chooses the “Moving West” Advance.
- Any character is hospitalized, arrested, or institutionalized.
- The current GM needs a break.

Switching GMs makes the game better and adds texture and perspective. Your group can decide how best to handle this responsibility. If you need a rule of thumb, swap the GM every Duty Station.

When you are GM, your character is safe from harm. Why isn't she flying? Has she been injured or called away? When she returns to the Regiment, decide who will GM next. If there's no obvious reason for the new GM's character to take a break, the Red Army works in mysterious ways and has many, many rear echelon staff positions that need to be filled.

PLANNING AHEAD

One fun variation is to assign Duty Stations to GMs in advance, when you start a campaign. This gives everyone a chance to think about ways to breathe life into “their” Duty Station, and even do a little research into that region of the world if they want.

Using this method, you can't pre-plan too much (choosing Threats isn't going to make sense until you see what's going on between characters when the Regiment arrives, for example), but a little advance notice might give you a chance to make the Duty Station you GM really memorable.

ESTABLISH PLAY TIME

You can play *Night Witches* for one session or over a series of sessions that follow the characters' journey through the entire war. Take a moment to talk to your friends about that now.

While the game truly shines across multiple sessions as airwomen grow and bond with one another, it also works well as a one-shot. Realistically, it will often be played in that mode.

CAMPAIGN PLAY

If your group is on board for a number of sessions, you'll make characters normally and start play in training at Duty Station 1 "Engels Aerodrome" (page 103).

ONE-SHOTS

If you want to play a satisfying single-evening session, consider sticking with a single GM and skipping training to start the game in the middle of the action.

To do this, have the players begin making fresh character per the normal rules. While they are making characters, review Duty Station 3 ("Pashkovskaya" page 109) as your starting point. Look at your Agenda, Principles, Moves and especially Threats (page 56). Choose two or three that you can frame the session around, and sketch out a few NPCs, focusing on what they want from the player characters.

When the players have their characters ready, explain that they have been through accelerated training and spent six months flying every night over the front lines at "Trud Gornyya" (see page 106).

QUICK ADVANCEMENT

Have each player quickly advance their characters by crossing off seven Marks (page 22) and choosing six Advances (page 26) to show how they've changed in these few short months. Ask questions about these choices and look for ways to tie the answers into the fiction.

KEEP FLYING

Another possibility is that you'll play a one-shot scenario and your players will decide they want to keep playing to see what happens. That's perfectly fine—just move on to the next Duty Station as appropriate and keep following the fiction.

MAKE PLAYER CHARACTERS

Your character is your alter ego in the setting of *Night Witches*. Everyone, including the GM, will make one.

You will have some statistics that highlight her strengths and weaknesses, a few identifying features, and something unique and special that sets her apart.

Choosing these things is a group activity, so work together to create a group of characters that can contrast one another in interesting ways.

Your character will be a Soviet airwoman—maybe heroic, maybe deeply flawed, maybe monstrous, maybe all three—but she will be a woman from the Soviet Union who flies.

This is an iron-clad rule. You can't play an American, you can't play someone who can't fly, you can't play a man—unless, of course, everybody thinks that man is a woman.

There is still room for variety among the characters. The Soviet Union was a big place full of diversity, so go ahead and play a taciturn Georgian, or a proud Azeri, or a reluctant Estonian, or a despised Volga German, or a far-from-home Yakut if you want.

NATURES

Begin crafting your character by choosing a Nature.

Your character's Nature represents a bird she identifies with or is inspired by in some way.

Choose the Nature that suits your mood and enthusiasm. When in doubt about how your character should behave or make a decision, use your bird for inspiration.

NAME

Some nice appropriate names are provided, but feel free to choose your own. The nicknames (or lack thereof) are the most important part—anyone close to her will call your character Galya, even if her name is Galina Yushina-Petrova.

LOOK AND BACKGROUND

Your look and background should reflect the sort of person your character is. Make thoughtful choices from the options afforded by your Nature and paint a picture for yourself and your friends.

A NOTE ON SEX AND GENDER

There's a spot for Sex for each character under look, and in all but one instance it is already filled in with "female." The Sparrow, already an iconoclast, has the option to bend or break this rule. The entire Regiment is composed of women. If you aren't a woman you are passing as a woman in very close quarters, and that's pretty interesting. As far as gender, well, anything goes.

RANK

Choose your Rank.

Within the Red Army Air Force, discipline and hierarchy reign supreme. Each character has a Rank. Your character will start as a Sergeant or Junior Lieutenant, your choice. Sergeants begin with slightly better stats and Junior Lieutenants begin as officers who can push Sergeants around. For more about ranks, see "Rank, and the Burden of Command," page 18.

STATS

Choose your Stats.

Characters have four measures of general effectiveness—stats—in *Night Witches*. They are pretty self-explanatory.

GUTS is a measure of personal courage, toughness, and determination. Pilots rely on Guts a lot, but so do women who want to act like ladies despite the hyper-masculine nature of front-line military service.

LUCK is a measure of the immeasurable—some women are born with it and others make their own. Everybody needs a little Luck. Some women need a whole lot.

SKILL is a measure of raw talent, academic training, and assiduous attention to detail. Navigators will turn to Skill often, but so will airwomen with their personal antennae tuned to the subtle power plays behind the scenes in the Regiment.

MEDALS are, well, medals. You earn them through valor and always start out with +0. See page 29 for more about Medals.

If you are a Sergeant, add a total of one to **GUTS**, **LUCK** and **SKILL** in any order. For example, +1, +0, +0 or +2, +0, -1.

If you are a Junior Lieutenant, add a total of zero to **GUTS**, **LUCK** and **SKILL** in any order. For example, +1, +0, -1 or +0, +0, +0. Also possible is +2, -1, -1, but it's not recommended!

Only the **MEDALS** stat can ever exceed +3, and that's a special case—being awarded the *Hero of the Soviet Union* medal makes you a God among women and well deserving of a rule-breaking +4. Other than that one instance, +3 is the maximum.

ROLES

Choose your initial Role within the Section, or ask your Section-mates to tell you what your initial Role is.

Roles are archetypes that tend to shake out in any combat unit. Your character's Role is flexible and can change in campaign play.

The roles are Protector, Dreamer, Adventurer, Misanthrope, Zealot, and Leader.

QUESTIONS

Now you have a Soviet airwoman with a Nature, a name, background and look, a Rank, set of stats, and Role. It's time to flesh her out a little.

SHARE

Share your character with the group. Introduce her by name. Tell your friends what she looks like and what her place in the Regiment is. Does she dream of being a pilot or navigator?

ASK QUESTIONS

Ask the airwomen on your right and left a question from the list below, or inspired by it. Choose questions based on the image that has been presented so far, or things you know your friend would love to answer, or things you are curious about. These questions will kick start relationships and interpersonal drama, providing juicy hooks for everyone at the table to explore.

CONCERNING WAR

- What did you lie about on your Regimental intake form?
- When you were last disciplined by your Squadron Commander what was the reason?
- What did the Germans take from you?
- What job—pilot or navigator—would you prefer? Why?

CONCERNING GENDER AND SEXUALITY

- When has your sexuality gotten you in trouble?
- When has your sexuality gotten you out of trouble?
- In what ways do you dress or look like a woman?
- In what ways do you dress or look like a man?

CONCERNING SENTIMENT

- Whose picture is taped to your plane's dash?
- Who in the Regiment evokes the strongest feelings from you, and why?
- When we search your footlocker, what surprising thing do we find?
- Whose funeral did you miss by volunteering for flight training?

CONCERNING SEXISM

- What did you do when your first flight instructor failed you because you were a woman?
- What happened the last time a crowd of brother airmen wolf-whistled in your direction?
- What would you be doing if they didn't let you fly?
- When did you get a favor because of your gender, and how did you pay it back?

CONCERNING POLITICS

- What did the Soviet state take from you?
- Why does the NKVD already have a file on you, and how did you get around that black mark to join the Regiment?
- What does the Marxist-Leninist struggle against the forces of reaction mean to you personally?
- Were your parents actually guilty?

CONCERNING CONNECTIONS

- Who do you routinely see from your brother unit, the well-equipped, all-male 218th Night Bomber Regiment, and where, and why?
- Who do you know in your sister unit, the photogenic media darlings of the mostly female 586th Fighter Regiment, and how do you feel about her?
- Who do you know in the 4th Air Army Logistics and Supply Commissariat, and what favor do you owe them?
- Who do you know west of the Dniepr in occupied territory, silent since June of '41?

OTHER STUFF

There are a few other things on the character sheet that don't require any attention before play unless your game will be a one-shot (page 73).

CHARACTER MOVES

Moves are interesting exceptions or triggers that inform play. Being fresh as a daisy and as green as spring, you start with no Character Moves. You do start with all the Day and Night Moves, however. For details about Moves, see page 35.

MEDALS

As mentioned, you don't start with any medals and, as a result, your initial Medals score is +0. Perhaps you burn with the desire to change this sad fact! Strike courageous blows against the fascist monsters and, in time, you will.

REGARD

Regard represents your stock of deep emotional commitment. You start out with none, because you don't know anyone and haven't grown attached to your plane.

For more on Regard, see page 21.

MARKS

Marks indicate close contact with the horrors of war. Each Mark is a brush with death, a profound revelation, a whisper of the inevitable. Every character has a dozen, and while not all Marks are grim, the final one is iron-clad doom.

You don't start with any Marks, but feel free to review the possibilities. You'll have to choose one soon enough.

For more on Marks, see page 22.

HARM

0 HARM means you are fit for duty, healthy and calm.

1 HARM means you are stressed, fatigued, and battle-weary. Expect to operate with 1-harm often!

2 HARM means you are injured but still able to perform your duties.

3 HARM means you are either injured (2-harm) and unconscious, or badly injured and require hospitalization, as circumstances demand.

4 HARM means you are dead.

Start with 0 Harm. See page 24 for more about Harm.

ADVANCES

Advances are moments of growth and opportunity made manifest. An Advance might be newfound skill and confidence, a strange twist of fate or personality, a promotion or honor, or some other fictional benefit. You start with no Advances.

For more on Advances, see page 26.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

FILLING THE RANKS

Surround your airwomen with colorful characters. Give each NPC a name and bring the war to life by connecting them to the player characters.

Every section will have a few mechanic-armorerers attached—how do they feel about the flyers? Are they desperate to get assigned combat duty? Are they jealous? Are they bitter? Do they love the planes and hate the damage they are subjected to?

The 588th also has a small and harried support staff—a supply Sergeant and her minions, a doctor supervising a medical tent, and a few clerks and specialists—some of whom work for the NKVD.

Beyond the Regiment are brother and sister units with needs and opportunities of their own, local civilians, partisans, military brass, friends and family back home, and a whole world at war.

ANATOMY OF A COMBAT SECTION

The Combat Section is the smallest operational unit in the Red Army Air Force. It consists of six airwomen and is supported by a ground crew. There are four Sections in a Squadron.

All of your characters start in the same Section. The current GM's character may be a late arrival or tasked with administrative duties and won't be flying combat missions.

One of the women in the Section, typically the most senior, is Section Leader. The Section Leader is responsible for assigning aircraft and personnel within the Section, and serves at the pleasure of the Squadron Commander.

If a woman in her unit gets in trouble, so does the Section Leader. It is her responsibility to decide who will fly as pilots and who will fly as navigators. While anyone can fill either position, some will clearly be better than others for these duties.

Pilots sit in the front seat and drive, something that takes considerable courage when operating from crude runways or being shot at.

Navigators sit in the back seat and wayfind. In the dark. From second-hand maps, often by starlight. Often while being shot at.

It is up to the Section Leader to divide up crews, and her word is law. It's good practice to pair inexperienced airwomen with veterans.

It may take a while for the players to really see how to game missions. Being in command and choosing who flies with who is pretty important.

THE REGIMENTAL TABLE OF ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

In May of 1942 there are a total of 40 ground crew, 80 aircrew, and 200 total personnel in the Regiment. Unlike every other regiment in the Red Army, each one of them is a woman.

REGIMENTAL STAFF, 588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT, FOURTH AIR ARMY, RED ARMY AIR FORCE

Regimental Commander (Major)

Chief of Staff and Deputy Regimental Commander (Captain)

Regimental Politruk (Senior Lieutenant of State Security or higher)

Deputy Politruk and Morale Officer (Junior Lieutenant of State Security or higher)

Logistics and Training Officer (Lieutenant or higher)

...plus enlisted support personnel—commissary, logistic, medical, administrative, technical.

1 SQUADRON, 588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT

AIR SECTION 1A, 3 aircraft plus one three-seat limousine, Squadron Commander (Captain), Squadron Chief Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 1B, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Deputy Squadron Commander (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 1C, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Section Leader (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 1D, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Section Leader (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

...plus enlisted mechanic-armorers.

2 SQUADRON, 588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT

AIR SECTION 2A, 3 aircraft plus one two-patient ambulance, Squadron Commander (Captain) and Squadron Chief Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 2B, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Deputy Squadron Commander (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 2C, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Section Leader (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 2D, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Section Leader (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

...plus enlisted mechanic-armorers.

3 SQUADRON, 588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT

AIR SECTION 3A, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Squadron Commander (Captain) and Squadron Chief Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 3B, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Deputy Squadron Commander (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 3C, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Section Leader (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

AIR SECTION 3D, 3 aircraft plus one reserve, Section Leader (Lieutenant+), Section Lead Navigator and 4 airwomen

...plus enlisted mechanic-armorers.

TRAINING SQUADRON, 588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT

ONE TRAINING SECTION (T), 4 aircraft, Logistics and Training staff officer and up to 8 trainees

As the war continues, this structure will change. Reserve aircraft will become a thing of the past, for one thing. In actual history the training squadron became a full fourth combat squadron in 1944.





PLANES

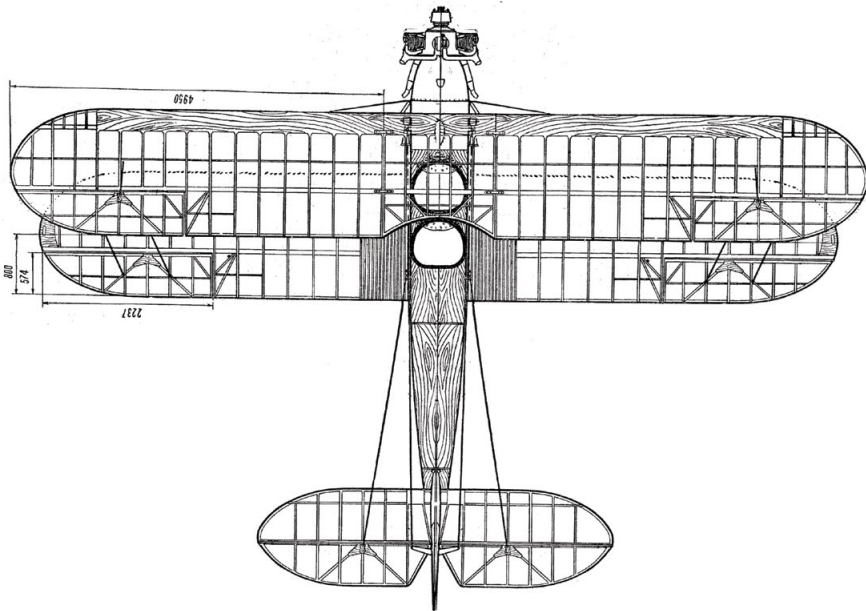
AIRPLANE DAMAGE AND REPAIR

Individual airplanes may, as the result of Moves, become damaged. The nature of the damage should be established in the fiction.

A damaged plane can land, but it can't be used for another mission until it is patched up via the Repair Move or other means.

Some Duty Stations offer a bonus or penalty to Scrounge and Repair Moves, based on the supply situation at that point in the war.

A plane that, in the course of a mission, is damaged twice immediately crash-lands or disintegrates in mid-air. Depending on the situation this may call for a Wheels Down Move, but the “fiery wreck” option seems certain.



AIRPLANE PERSONALITIES

Individual planes can acquire personalities. A personality is an adjective—a simple description of a quirk, flaw, or noteworthy feature of that aircraft.

While personality has no direct mechanical effect, it adds color, offers interesting plot hooks, and gives everyone a reason to add Regard for their favorites.

Once an aircraft has a personality, assigned as the result of a Move, it is fixed forever.

Here are some suggestions:

Badass (or deluxe)

Maternal (or girlish)

Aggressive (or confident)

Fast (or efficient)

Lucky (or strange)

Reliable (or uncomplaining)

High-spirited (or playful)

Proud (or independent)

Stubborn (or cantankerous)

Loud (or demanding)

Unreliable (or unpredictable)

Clumsy (or Pride of Socialist Agriculture)

Quirky (or amusing)

Beloved (or despised)

Forgiving (or dignified)

Masculine (or feminine)

Glamorous (or sexy)

Blessed (or cursed)

Responsive (or stable)

Tough (or hardworking)

Slow (or lazy)

Delicate (or jury-rigged)

Spiteful (or devious)

Sensitive (or neurotic)



*Don't believe those who say they had no fear in the war.
I did fear the war, and death—I feared each combat mission.*

NINA RASPOPOVA

STARTING PLAY

LIFE AND DEATH WITH THE 588TH

A session of *Night Witches* always starts at dawn, and life for the Regiment follows a day-and-night pattern. By day, plans are made, aircraft are readied, and the ceaseless grind of keeping the entire Regiment running is attended to.

By night, air wings are dispatched to targets across the front line, often only minutes away. The planes return, are rearmed, and sent out again. And again. And again. For game purposes, these endless sorties are combined into one overarching mission each night.

Your airplane holds two people. Barring special circumstances, it has no machine gun. You fly too low for parachutes to be anything but extra weight. You have neither radios nor radar.

Officers are issued Tokarev pistols. If you crash behind enemy lines, save the last bullet for yourself.

24 HOURS WITH THE 588TH

Days are for rest and preparation. During the day, airwomen will:

1. EAT TWO GOOD MEALS.

WHAT'S COOKING?

Meals, hot when possible, are served just after the Debrief and just before the Briefing in a communal canteen tent. The morning meal is “supper.”

Meals are a good time for Sections to revisit the previous night's mission and settle any unofficial business between them.

Many aircrews also tuck away morsels of food to eat during the night as lunch. Some make a bad habit of devouring the milk candy in their survival kits.

2. DO CHORES.

HOW DOES ONE GET SQUARED AWAY LIKE A NATURAL-BORN SOVIET AIRWOMAN?

Personal needs—laundry, a cold shower, sewing to repair uniforms—usually occur after Debriefing and the morning meal.

Communal needs like cleaning the barracks and maintaining the airfield and facilities occur at this time, as well.

Mechanically minded airwomen squeeze chores and grooming in after coordinating airplane refit and repair for the day shift. This is why mechanically minded airwomen are often dirty and exhausted.

3. HIT THE HAY.

WHAT ARE THE SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS?

Sleep occurs at mid-day, behind covered windows. Every woman has her own cot. A footlocker contains everything she owns.

Extra-curricular interests (like stealing parts from another Regiment, pitching in to repair work, conducting a clandestine affair, or assembling a dossier on some Capitalist wrecker) typically cut into sleep time.

WHAT'S GOING ON WHILE THESE FLYING LAGGARDS GET THEIR PRECIOUS REST?

Many of them aren't getting much sleep, because there's a lot to do. While day shift mechanics and armorers do the grunt work, it often takes highly motivated individuals willing to demonstrate their Socialist zeal and entrepreneurial spirit to solve the Regiment's supply problems through quasi-legal means.

Any plane that returns damaged must be repaired. The day shift mechanic-armorers, who don't fly, have just a few hours to return each aircraft to operational condition. Any plane sidelined is a black mark against its crew, their mechanics, and the Regiment as a whole. Inefficiency, incompetence, and carelessness with the people's equipment are all likely to attract the attention of the NKVD [Repair].

The Regiment is in constant need of supplies, and somebody needs to acquire them during the day. Materials to repair damaged aircraft are just the beginning—fuel, oil, grease, and solvents are in short supply. Sometimes even food is in short supply. Engine parts, uniforms and boots, soap, even hand tools are sometimes hard to find, and all these things are vitally necessary [Scrounge].

Just as with general materiel, ordnance in the form of FAB-50 and FAB-25 fragmentation bombs is in short supply. Machine guns and their ammunition are in short supply and must be rationed. Every night planes need to drop something, but there aren't always bombs to attach to the wings. Regimental mechanic-armorers are spending every day rearming planes as aggressively and creatively as possible.

Any character who follows this daily routine can return to combat each night refreshed. Any activity that invokes Moves during the day is going to cut into time for sleep, relaxation, or scheduled tasks. The GM should inflict 1-harm on characters who are neglecting their rest during the day.

4. RELAX.

SO THERE'S TIME FOR A LITTLE FUN FOR THE AIRCREWS? LIKE WHAT?

Late afternoons are usually reserved for recreation—writing letters home, exercising, embroidering or sketching, attending lectures to raise moral and political consciousness, singing, or dancing. Sometimes there is optional or mandatory training.

For mechanically minded airwomen, this time is spent checking the work of the day shift crews. This is why mechanically minded airwomen are always grumpy.

For Section Leaders, Squadron Commanders, and Command Staff, this time is devoted to paperwork.

Squadrons assemble as dusk approaches, and the whole cycle begins again.

A mission highlights the most hair-raising moments across half a dozen or more sorties in a night. On a mission, each Section must:

5. CHOOSE A TARGET.

WHO CHOOSES THE NIGHT'S TARGET?

The player of the Squadron Commander or highest-ranking airwoman. It's their job to communicate the mission as ordered by the Regimental Chief of Staff and brief the Squadron's four Sections [Briefing]. The chosen target is marked off the Duty Station list.

For each mission, a navigator must be assigned to Wayfind and a pilot must be assigned to lead the Attack Run. All other player characters must be assigned other planes to serve as Vedomayas.

When all six targets have been marked off, it's time to change Duty Stations (see the "Operational Planning" special Move on page 48 for details).

6. DEPART AT DUSK BY THREE-PLANE SECTION. LOCATE THE TARGET [WAYFIND].

WHO CAN MAKE A WAYFIND MOVE?

Anyone in the rear seat of an airplane—that is, anyone assigned as a navigator. Multiple navigators can Wayfind individually if they like. You don't earn promotions by refusing to use your skills.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE OUR ODDS?

- Ask your Vedomaya for help.
- Use Mission Pool, before or after you roll.

WHAT IF THE SECTION HAS NO PC IN THE NAVIGATOR SEAT?

- The GM will decide what happens, probably with a hard Move.

WHAT IF WAYFIND FAILS?

- Another PC in a rear seat in the Section can try to find the target.
- If everyone fails to Wayfind, the Section can't find the target.
- The Section will likely need to return to the airbase, mission scrubbed. This looks like incompetence, because it is.

7. STRIKE THE TARGET [ATTACK RUN].

WHO CAN MAKE AN ATTACK RUN MOVE?

Anyone in the front seat of an airplane—that is, anyone assigned as a pilot. Multiple pilots can make Attack Runs individually if they like. You don't earn medals by being timid.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE OUR ODDS?

- Ask your Vedomaya for help.
- Use Mission Pool, before or after you roll.

WHAT IF WE FAIL ANYWAY?

- If you fail, the target isn't hit.
- Another PC in a front seat in the section can try to attack the target.
- The Section can return to the airbase, mission aborted. This stinks of cowardice, because it is.

8. GET HOME.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN GETTING HOME?

The outcomes of Wayfind and Attack Runs and the choices you make. Normally it is trouble-free, but Moves tend to snowball. Your crew may be injured or your aircraft may be damaged. You may be forced down behind enemy lines.

HOW DO I IMPROVE THE ODDS?

- Pray that your Vedomaya still has your back.
- Don't screw up the Attack Run and Wayfind Moves.
- Use Mission Pool, before or after you roll.

9. ASSEMBLE AT DAWN [DEBRIEF].

WHO CONDUCTS THE DEBRIEF AFTER A MISSION?

The GM, as an NPC who outranks all the PCs. Perhaps the Squadron Commander, Regimental Chief of Staff, or Politruk. For very important missions, it might be the Commander herself, or a high-ranking officer in the Fourth Air Army. The Debrief is an informal opportunity for airwomen to acknowledge one another, for good or ill.

Once the Debrief is over, the day begins—time for rest and prepare again.

THE MISSION

The mission of the 588th is one of constant and unrelenting harassment. You lack the resources and firepower to do serious damage to the German war machine, but you make up for it in persistence and the imposition of maddening uncertainty. You keep them up listening for your little motors, you keep them wondering. Every once in a while you kill a few Germans, and they know who is responsible every time—women in biplanes. For a society even more obsessed with gender roles than the Russians, it is humiliating and maddening.

A mission consists of orders to overfly a specific target, usually but not always with harassment as the objective. In *Night Witches*, missions always focus on a three-aircraft Squadron and are assumed to include many sorties—five trips between airbase and target at a minimum, and up to a dozen. In play we aggregate these and focus on the most dangerous and exciting moments.

It's all well and good to fly around all night in the dark, but if you want to find and engage the enemy, that requires skill and courage.

Combat Sections are cohesive units. They navigate and attack together. During the mission briefing, the Section Commander will delegate who will lead these tasks (see the Briefing Move on page 39).

The lead navigator will usually make the Wayfind Move. A good Wayfind roll will line up the attack for your Section; a bad one will send you home with full bomb racks or worse.

The lead pilot will usually make the Attack Run Move. Consequences for a botched Attack Run can be severe and Moves can snowball.

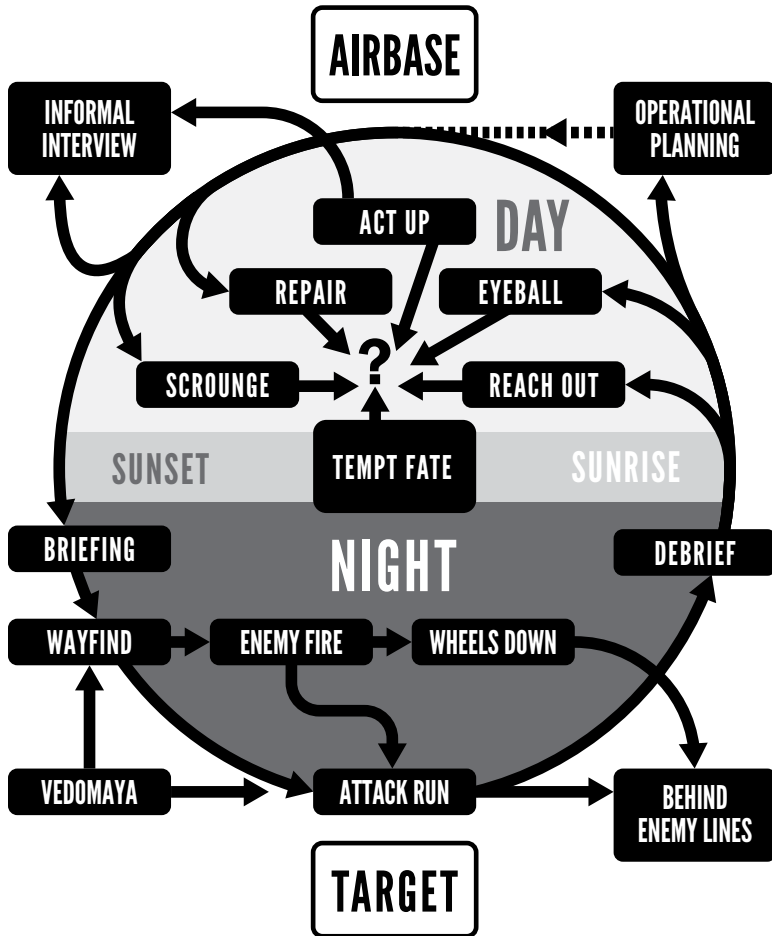
Characters who aren't in the lead will serve as Vedomayas, covering their fellow airwomen's wings.

Anyone hungry for glory will want to find and engage the target on their own rather than following the Section Commander. Particularly aggressive or audacious attacks will no doubt Tempt Fate. Any airplane with only NPCs on board is in the GM's hands.

Remember the Mission Pool is available to anyone in the air. Since any pool points not used are discarded each morning, you might as well grab a few while you can.

If your plane is hit due to a bad roll or hard Move, there's a Move for that. Simply landing may be a challenge if you've taken damage or had mechanical problems. It's possible that you'll need to land immediately, behind enemy lines, or that you'll return to your airbase with a broken, difficult-to-replace wreck. It is a dangerous business from dusk until dawn.

THE DAY & NIGHT CYCLE DIAGRAM



YOUR FIRST SESSION

Just because it's the first session, whatever, you're still playing the game. GM the game. Bring it. But especially do these:

- Describe.
- Springboard off character creation.
- Ask questions like crazy.
- Leave yourself things to wonder about.
- Look for where they're not in control. Push there.
- Nudge the players to have their characters make Moves.
- Give every character good screen time with other characters.
- Leap forward with named, human NPCs.
- Hell, have a fight.

Do all of those things. Constantly leap forward with sensory descriptions, melancholic backdrops, and probing questions. Use your scene framing to put characters together and see what their chemistry is like. Ask questions, and when there's no clear answer, make finding an answer part of what the game is about.

Use the first session to establish some names and personalities, to build an initial roster of non-player characters.

Don't try to frame the characters into an intense rollercoaster of action scenes right away. Instead, spend some time following them around. Learn their daily routine. That way, when it gets upset and turned upside down later, we'll have a frame of reference to understand why that drama is interesting. Learn what each character wants, and what they're afraid might happen to them. This way, you can tempt them and create chaos for them later on.

Vincent Baker

THE AIRBASE

The airbase is home. Each Duty Station has questions that help define the airbase, but they are just the beginning. Flesh out the location and its inhabitants and aggravations as you play.

Most airbases are crude arrangements of tents surrounding a primitive airfield. In spring and summer everything is covered in mud. Weather is terrible interspersed with brief moments of beautiful clear skies. In fall and winter, everything is covered in snow. Weather is terrible interspersed with brief moments of beautiful clear skies.

Each day should begin with a meeting to analyze the previous night's mission ("Debrief," see page 43). Crews will be both exhausted—possibly stressed—and filled with powerful emotions like elation, relief, terror, and grief.

Acquiring parts, fuel and other necessities ("Scrounge," page 38) will be a major concern. Acquiring something as trivial as boots that fit correctly can be an epic adventure. And comforts, luxuries, and items to take a soldier's mind off war, however briefly, may be rarest and most precious of all. Sexism and scarcity should be endemic.

Daytime is also a chance to build (and destroy) relationships, and much hay can be made by bouncing massive egos and battle-hardened veterans off one another. If you earn a medal, the Regiment will certainly have an award ceremony to pin it on your uniform, perhaps followed by a mandatory celebration. Overarching Threats will tend to pop up during the day, of course. Neighboring Regiments might cause trouble, supply units may have ulterior motives in delaying shipments, the weather will definitely not cooperate, and neither will Hitler's running dogs. And above all this is the watchful eye of the Regimental Politruk. As the intermediary with the NKVD, she and her subordinates (including, perhaps, a player character) will either be collaborating or running interference.

“ But life remains life, and we, as military pilots, still remained young girls. We dreamed of our grooms, marriages, children, and a future happy, peaceful life. We thought to meet our future mates at the front. But our regiment was unique, for it was purely female. There wasn't even a shabby male mechanic to rest a glance on.”

Yevgeniya Zhigulenko, HSU



*I believe that all of you will come back as heroes; epics and songs will be composed about you.
You'll be glorified by future generations!*

MAJOR MARINA ROSKOVA

DUTY STATIONS

01. ENGELS AERODROME

NAME AND LOCATION

Engels Aerodrome, Saratov Oblast, Russia

Аэродром города Энгельс

51.472678, 46.203876

“EN-gels”

February-April 1942

NIGHT INTRO

Flights out of Engels and the auxiliary field at Tambov happen nightly in cold weather, through rain and snow. The pace of instruction is relentless—three years of training are compressed into four months. Hanging over everyone’s head are qualification flights for piloting and navigation, as well as the specter of the final exam, an actual combat mission over German positions.

THEATER OVERVIEW

The region around Saratov is dominated by the mighty Volga River, which is its most prominent aid to navigation. Beyond the valley of the Volga, gently rolling hills and steppe are the primary landform, with empty fields that await spring and cultivation. The auxiliary field at Tambov is in more densely forested country with fewer landmarks. Training is taking place during the wettest season in this otherwise dry region. The furthest German advance places their forward units southwest of Voronezh, with most training flights very unlikely to encounter enemy troop concentrations or reconnaissance.

MISSIONS

SPECIAL RULES

Accelerated training means half the missions of a combat Duty Station.

Everyone must make at least one successful Wayfind and Attack Run Move while in training to qualify for combat duty.

- a. A daylight mock bombing on a target range outside Bogoslavka. You'll enjoy "aggressive" fighter-bomber escort from the all-male 217th Assault Aviation Regiment under Captain D.P. Galunov. Wayfinding rolls are optional. Potential Enemy Fire is actually friendly fire from the 217th's Tupolev SB's, or nervous Soviet anti-aircraft crews. Anyone participating Advances, and must choose Deepening Ties (and Regard).
- b. Under the tutelage of major Marina Roskova herself, a night flying exercise culminating in a live bomb attack on targets arranged on either bank of the Tsna River, simulating a bridge. Potential Enemy Fire is damage from ordnance dropped too low.
- c. Flying from the auxiliary airfield at Tambov, this is reconnaissance and bombing of actual German positions near Stary Oskol, southwest of Voronezh. This mission is carefully supervised by elements of the experienced and all-male 218th Night Bomber Regiment under D.D. Popov. Anyone participating Advances, and must choose Harsh Lessons (and a new Move).

HONORS

No decorations or medals are awarded for completing flight training.

DAY INTRO

Accelerated training under Major Marina Roskova has begun at the Engels Aerodrome, across the Volga River from Saratov. Classroom and ground-based instruction happens at Engels, with flight exercises and tactical problems conducted out of a rough field near Tambov that simulates combat conditions. The pace is brutal and the stakes are high—anyone falling behind is immediately washed out.

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW

Engels Airdrome is a major center for flight training, buzzing at all hours with fighter, bomber, and transport crews learning to handle their aircraft. Many begin earning their wings in the front seat of a Po-2. Support is ubiquitous and resources are abundant; +1 ongoing for Scrounge and Repair at the well-equipped Engels Airdrome.

QUESTIONS

Which officer trainee arrived already homesick? Which one of you has caught the eye of Major Roskova, and for what? How are you dealing with the minor sabotage of your planes by male ground crews? How is the Engels Aerodrome laid out? Where are the barracks, the flight line, the hangars, the classrooms, the supply depot, the command building, and control tower? Where is the exercise yard and the secluded spot by the Volga where you can look over at the bustling city of Saratov? Draw it.

By the way, what unusual feature makes the auxiliary field at Tambov so difficult to fly out of?

02. TRUD GORNYAKA

NAME AND LOCATION

Trud Gornyaka, Ukraine

Труд горняка

48.514479, 38.674003

“Troot Gar-NYAK-ah”

June-August 1942

NIGHT INTRO

The summer weather is good for flying and the Fascist scum have not quite learned how to counter harassment bombing. The biggest dangers come from inexperienced crews and your own primitive airfield, which is made of split logs and mud. Hay bales line the runway and are set on fire to guide damaged planes home. Circumstances are...not ideal.

THEATER OVERVIEW

The tactical area encompasses the western gateway to the Caucasus, consisting of birch forests, marshes, and fertile agricultural lands. Most of these have been abandoned, and cultivated fields make useful landmarks from the air. A major southeast-northwest rail line from Donetsk through Luhansk to Starobilsk is also a key strategic feature and navigational reference, as is the Donets River just north of Trud Gornyaka. Navigators look for structures around the Bryanka coal mines and long fire breaks in the forests. Note that a skilled pilot can put a Po-2 down in one of these fire breaks in an emergency.

MISSIONS

- A. Bombing a German First Panzer Army headquarters unit. Expect mobile anti-aircraft artillery and, possibly, advance intelligence of your arrival.
- B. Harassing German and Hungarian infantry massing at a crossing along the Mius River. Expect little resistance, unless you fly low enough to see the unit patches on their shoulders.
- C. Precision bombing of the railroad crossing at Likhaya. Denying this junction to rolling stock is an urgent request from the 40th Army, who intend to retake the area and quickly put the rail line back in service.
- D. Bombing a German marshaling yard behind the Don River crossing. Expect railcar-mounted anti-aircraft guns, searchlights, and enemy air patrols at dusk and dawn.
- E. Supporting the retreat from Rostov-on-Don by harassing German ordinance depots. To reach this target, every plane in the Section will have to first endure Enemy Fire. Anyone participating Advances.
- F. Intense bombing of German troop positions and supply depots across the Kuban area around Starobilsk and the Taganrog-Kuybyshev line. Heavy patrols by Luftwaffe's elite JG54 group should be expected through this area of operation. All consequences are increased by one during this mission. Anyone participating Advances.

HONORS

No campaign medals are awarded for defensive operations in the Don River basin.

DAY INTRO

Two months have passed. The 588th has relocated to a remote field in the middle of nowhere, within striking distance of active combat zones on three sides. The thunder of artillery is constant. The badly battered Red Army is in retreat; communication and supplies are erratic. It's time to earn first blood in the Don River basin.

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW

Everything is chaos and the supply chain is seriously fractured. New recruits can't even find the Regiment, much less parts and consumables. Occasionally aircraft need to be dispatched to distant warehouses by day to bring back food. -1 ongoing for Scrounge and Repair at Trud Gornyaka. Find it and fix it yourself. Welcome to the war.

QUESTIONS

Which officer of the 588th was in no condition to fly when the Regiment arrived in Trud Gornyaka? What is being done to keep livestock off the runway, and why isn't it working? Who gave the German FW190 pilot seemingly obsessed with your Regiment the nickname "Yellow-Tail"? What does the rye field used as an airbase at Trud Gornyaka look like? Where is the rough runway lined by hay bales? Where are the leaky plywood covered dugouts that serve as barracks? Where is the actual village, and the edge of the thick forest? What's the one place not drenched in mud? Draw it.

03. PASHKOVSKAYA

NAME AND LOCATION

Pashkovskaya, Krasnodar Kray, Russia
Пашковская
45.025867, 39.140972
“PASHKOV-skya”
March-May 1943

NIGHT INTRO

The Regiment has moved west and south, into the warm southern maritime region dominated by the Kerch Strait. Now you're occasionally flying over water for the first time. Targets are heavily defended by anti-aircraft artillery, aided by spotlights and supplemented by occasional fighter cover. The Germans are slowly learning how to defeat the Po-2 using FW-190 fighters at dusk and dawn.

THEATER OVERVIEW

The northern portion of the tactical area consists of marshes, bottomlands, and vast swathes of arable land, much of it now fallow. The southern portion consists of rough country covered in beech forests, rising into low hills and even mountainous terrain. The maritime climate is temperate and very wet. The Kuban River is the dominant waterway, stretching inland to Krasnodar and beyond.

German troops can appear anywhere in the tactical area.

Navigators, look for newly cultivated fields in the north, patterns of small lakes, unusual forest landmarks, and bald hillsides in the south as waypoints.

MISSIONS

- A. Harassment of German positions near the Keramzitovy Zavod rail junction. Expect searchlights and flatcar-mounted anti-aircraft guns.
- B. Bombing of a German supply depot near the front lines at Krasnodar. Expect enemy combat air patrols.
- C. Attacking your own airfield, hastily evacuated and now being overrun by the enemy. German troops are on the ground and preparing to land aircraft, which would be a disaster. The 7-9 consequence when Wayfinding on this mission is always Enemy Fire. Anyone participating Advances.
- D. Bombing the Krymskaya fuel dump and rail yard, near the city of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea. A low-altitude attack on this target is suicidal, so precision will be required. Burning fuel will illuminate you against the night sky as you depart.
- E. Bombing the heavily defended Village of Taman, behind the dreaded “Blue Line.” Expect anti-aircraft artillery unless you come in over the sea, itself a dangerous proposition.
- F. Conducting a daylight supply drop on the Malaya Zemlya beach-head near Novorossiysk, tenuously held by Soviet naval infantry. No Wayfinding roll is needed for this mission. To reach this target, all planes will have to first endure Enemy Fire. Anyone participating Advances.

HONORS

Upon changing Duty Stations, all members of the 588th Regiment are awarded the Campaign Medal for the Defense of the Caucasus. This medal does not increase the +medals stat and has no mechanical effect.

DAY INTRO

Six months have passed. From a hastily converted civilian airfield here in Pashkovskaya (“Pash-KOV-skya”), you are supporting the Black Sea Fleet in the battle for the Caucasus. The Germans are pushing hard, but you are pushing harder.

You’re sharing the field with the celebrated (and all-male) 218th Fighter Regiment, who has requisitioned everything of utility or value, leaving you with the scraps.

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW

Pashkovskaya is quite close to the city of Krasnodar, which is a lynch-pin in the German plans for seizing the Caucasus. The supply situation is adequate, with rail lines serving the city of Krasnodar and trucks available to the airbase personnel nearby, along with your brother Regiment. There are no special supply rules for Pashkovskaya.

QUESTIONS

What completely unreasonable demand has been made on the Regiment? When is Lieutenant General Igor Miroshnichenko, Commander of the Fourth Air Army, arriving for the inspection? What steps have been taken to keep the Regiment efficient in such close quarters with her brothers in the 218th? What does the shared military airfield at Pashkovskaya look like? Where are the overcrowded women’s barrack tents shared with the 586th and where are the spacious huts of the 218th? Where are the motor repair hardstands, the armorer’s bunker, and the command tent? What object just beyond the perimeter is a stark reminder of war’s cost? Draw it.

04. PERESYP'

NAME AND LOCATION

Peresyp', Krasnodar Kray, Russia

Пересыпь

45.347503, 37.135214

“Pyer-ye-SEEP”

October-December 1943

NIGHT INTRO

Driving the Fascist beasts off the Taman Peninsula requires a new kind of flying—often above the Sea of Azov and Black Sea, over water at night. Without landmarks this requires dead reckoning with the careful coordination of airspeed, heading, and time. Extremely technical flying in foul weather, combined with stiffening German resistance, makes for very stressful nights in the cockpit.

THEATER OVERVIEW

The tactical area covers the Taman Peninsula, Kerch Strait, and eastern Crimea. This is a region of complex topology, with mountains, foothills, and rocky lowlands all straddled by open water to the north and south. Navigators, memorize the features of the coastline—if you can find the Chushka Spit you can follow it to solid ground and home. Sea approaches will demand skilled technical flying, and you can expect strong resistance from land and air and even sea at fascist-controlled ports like Feodosiya. There is no location completely safe from Hitlerite attacks within the operational zone.

MISSIONS

- A. The western terminus of the German cable tram moving equipment across the Strait. The tramline extends several kilometers from the Crimean side northeast of Kerch to the Chushka Spit.
- B. KG51's Luftwaffe fuel depot at the Feodosiya airfield. This is deep in German-occupied territory. This mission requires a pincer approach, one of which is over water—two Wayfinding rolls by different navigators are needed to successfully locate the target. Anyone participating Advances.
- C. German trenches, close to friendly infantry near the village of Urma straddling the Kuban River. Expect ineffectual ground fire.
- D. Rail marshaling yard behind the Kerch salient at Alushta. Expect fierce anti-aircraft fire and searchlights.
- E. Anti-aircraft defenses atop Mt. Mitridat above Kerch, dangerous and technically difficult to reach. The guns themselves have been modified to fire at negative elevation, toward the beaches below. The Lead plane automatically takes Enemy Fire. This mission requires two Attack Runs for successful completion. Anyone participating Advances.
- F. Daylight search for three missing barges full of naval infantry lost on the Black Sea. This mission requires Wayfinding. An Attack Run to drop supplies and messages is optional; Enemy Fire on a failure represents the harsh maritime environment.

HONORS

Upon changing Duty Stations, all members of the 588th Regiment are awarded the 46th Taman Guards banner. This honor does not increase the +medals stat and has no mechanical effect.

DAY INTRO

Four months have passed. The battle of the Caucasus is slowly changing momentum in the Soviet Union's favor, but the butcher's bill has been high and no end is in sight. You're operating out of a picturesque coastal village with magnificent views of the serene Sea of Azov. The villagers resent your presence and your takeover of their community.

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW

Peresyp' is close enough to truck-served supply lines feeding the Red Army that the Regiment is adequately provisioned despite winter weather. The local villages scattered along the coast of the Sea of Azov can provide what the Red Army Air Force does not—for a price, of course. There are no special supply rules for Peresyp'.

QUESTIONS

Which officer of the 588th is quietly afraid to fly over water? What secret luxury item are the local villagers rumored to possess, and who would gladly pass up a promotion to get her hands on just a little? Why has the NKVD set up shop in the abandoned church? How is the runway—the packed-dirt main street of the village of Peresyp'—oriented? Where is the converted school used as barracks, briefing room and staff headquarters? How about the well-guarded supply tent, the barn-turned-hangar, and the lonely hill overlooking the sea? Draw it.

05. ZAMBRÓW

NAME AND LOCATION

Zambrów, Poland

Замбрув

52.982775, 22.208793

“ZAM-broof”

October-December 1944

NIGHT INTRO

The operational pace begins to slow as the length and complexity of individual sorties increases. Here in Poland, flights of several hundred kilometers are suddenly routine. The Regiment can't hope to keep pace with the rapidly advancing front lines. We'll retrain for higher altitude flying and develop strategies for avoiding the new threat of night-hunting JU-87s.

THEATER OVERVIEW

The operational area consists of the northern half of Poland. Along the Baltic it stretches from Szczecin to the massive natural harbor around Gdańsk to East Prussia. Below the coast lie the central lowlands, from Warsaw to Poznań, from the Oder River in the west to the Vistula and beyond to the east. It is by far the largest zone of tactical operations the 588th has yet been asked to handle. Navigators, longer missions will force you to rely on dead reckoning. The Nerew/Bug River, where it splits from the Vistula, is a good reference point. It flows east, and its southeast bend is 15 kilometers due south of Zambrów.

MISSIONS

- A.** Making a surprise attack on the heavily defended German headquarters, IX Corps, Third Panzer Army, Army Group Center, at Poznań. Any plane damaged on this mission will not be able to return to the airbase. Anyone participating Advances.
- B.** Bombing an ammunition depot outside Grudziasz, in support of the First Belorussian Front. Depleting German supplies is vital and the Front is counting on you to deliver.
- C.** Bombing the port of Gdańsk. German night-equipped JU-87 squadrons are specifically hunting Po-2s in the area and the greatest caution is urged. To reach this target, all planes will have to first endure Enemy Fire. Anyone participating Advances.
- D.** Conducting the emergency medical evacuation of Colonel Franciszek Józwiak, chief of staff of Armia Ludowa, Poland's Communist resistance, from behind enemy lines. Leave the back seat free! This mission is at the limits of the Po-2's range—two Wayfinding rolls by the same navigator are needed to successfully locate the target.
- E.** Harassing the German garrison at Chełmno. These troops are disorganized and no resistance is expected.
- F.** Bombing the train station at Nasielsk, in support of the attack on Warsaw. Anticipate German fighter cover and possibly anti-aircraft artillery.

HONORS

Upon changing Duty Stations, all members of the 588th Regiment are awarded the Campaign Medal for the Liberation of Warsaw. This medal does not increase the +medals stat and has no mechanical effect.

DAY INTRO

A year has passed since Peresyp'. The airfield at Zambrów is being used by other units, leaving the 588th with a wheat field next door. The weather is cold and icy, and so is the attitude of the men flying flashier planes from improved runways. The competition to be the first to attack German soil in East Prussia is on everyone's lips.

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW

Supplies are catching up with the racing Red Army, and a tidal wave of materiel is rolling across Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Poland. The Regiment can dip an eager hand into the flood and provision itself well. American lend-lease goods are showing up in quantity. Opportunities for graft abound. +1 ongoing for Scrounge and Repair at Zambrów.

QUESTIONS

Which officer of the 588th came to Poland loaded with luxury goods? According to rumors, what lies just beyond the perimeter in the birch forest? Where is the actual airbase next door? Why has a lock been installed on the Regimental chart case? How has a wheat field outside Zambrów been turned into an airfield? Where is the runway, and who cuts endless timber by day to harden it? Where are the barracks and command tents? What surprising source of shelter does Zambrów offer the Regiment's planes? Where is the only place to get out of the endless freezing rain? Draw it.

06. CHWASZCZYNO/BUCHHOLZ

NAME AND LOCATION

Chwaszczyno, Poland and Buchholz, Germany
54.473370, 18.477588 and 52.507134, 14.150829
“Khvash-CHIN-oh” and “BOOK-halts”
March-May 1945/Buchholz

NIGHT INTRO

Flying out of the grass field at Chwaszczyno feels like a return to the bad old days of 1942 and Trud Gorniyaka. The Hitlerites are running like frightened dogs now and the long-distance sorties continue.

Buchholz is in the heart of hell—“To Berlin!” has been your rallying cry but now you are there, flying intensely dangerous missions against suicidally brave opponents.

THEATER OVERVIEW

The Oder River, which bisects western Poland and the stinking hole known as Germany that we are sweeping the Hitlerite rats back into, forms a natural boundary and a good navigational reference point. The Baltic coast at the top of our tactical area can be followed east to the Hel Peninsula, Gdansk Bay, and eventually Chwaszczyno. The country below is utterly ruined. Certainly Berlin, eternally burning, is a prominent landmark from all points east. The villages of Eastern Germany are essentially flattened, but look for noteworthy church spires or the shells of factories.

MISSIONS

CHWASZCZYNO MISSIONS

- a.** Dropping Propaganda leaflets on German troops massing to retreat across the front, from the Oder to the Baltic beaches west of Koszalin. No one can use the Vedomaya Move on this mission. Each plane flies alone and must Wayfind alone. No Attack Run is needed.
- b.** Harassing a resupply staging area for Army Group Vistula. Expect little resistance.
- c.** The besieged but heavily defended “fortress city” of Königsberg. Only volunteers will fly this mission. To reach this target, all planes will have to first endure Enemy Fire. Anyone participating Advances.

BUCHHOLZ MISSIONS

- d.** Repeated bombing of a Third Panzer Army fuel dump and supply depot at Pankow, minutes away. Expect heavy anti-aircraft fire. All of Berlin is ablaze and your planes can easily be seen in the fire-lit skies—the 7-9 consequence when Wayfinding on this mission is always Enemy Fire. Anyone participating Advances.
- e.** Long-distance harassment of the German Ninth Army, trapped in the Halbe pocket south of Berlin. No one can use the Vedomaya Move on this mission, and damaged planes cannot return to Buchholz.
- f.** Headquarters of Verteidigungsbereich Swinemünde, a knot of Nazi dead-enders who will fight to the last.

HONORS

Upon completing the final mission or changing Duty Stations, the war ends. All members of the 588th Regiment are awarded the Campaign Medal for the Capture of Berlin and the Campaign Medal of Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

DAY INTRO

Three months have passed. The war nears its bloody conclusion. Death spasms of the Third Reich and the fall of Berlin.

NOTE: This Duty Station is divided in two. Complete the first three missions at Chwaszczyno, then relocate to Buchholz for the final three. Moving to Buchholz doesn't count as changing Duty Stations, but it is a powerful signal that the tempo is increasing and the war is close to ending.

LOGISTICS OVERVIEW

Chwaszczyno is a return to the Regiment's roots—a forgotten muddy field. Supplies are difficult to obtain and slow in coming. -1 ongoing for Scrounge and Repair at Chwaszczyno.

Buchholz, in contrast, is at the tip of the logistical spear and awash in parts and consumables—some of it captured from the Luftwaffe. +1 ongoing for Scrounge and Repair at Buchholz.

QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS ABOUT CHWASZCZYNO

Which officer of the 588th arrived in Chwaszczyno under a cloud of suspicion? What makes this vast muddy field different from all the previous vast muddy fields? Where is the mess tent, the barracks and headquarters tents, the ammunition dump? What building has been requisitioned and turned into a maintenance shop? Draw it.

QUESTIONS ABOUT BUCHHOLZ

According to rumors, what fate awaits female aviators after the war? How did the Luftwaffe lay out an airfield? Where are the barracks, the dining hall, the machinist's workshop, the hangars? Where are the supplies kept? What reminders of the Third Reich cannot be erased here? What comfortable structure has the NKVD commandeered for its own use? Draw it.





Counter-revolutionary sabotage...aimed at the weakening of the power of the government and of the functioning of the state apparatus is subject to...the highest measure of social protection: execution by shooting... ARTICLE 58-14 OF THE RUSSIAN SFSR PENAL CODE, 1937

HISTORY & CONTEXT

This section is filled with colorful background information about the Soviet Union before and during the Great Patriotic War. It isn't comprehensive and it isn't even necessary to enjoy the game.

WOMEN IN THE SOVIET UNION

While the Soviet constitution granted women “equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life,” reality was far different. Sexism was deeply ingrained and ubiquitous. The women’s Regiments only formed after horrendous losses made a lack of aircrews a strategic emergency, and even then it took unprecedented pressure by famous female aviators to elevate them from reserves to front-line combat formations. The Red Army Air Force didn’t want them and existing air Regiments wanted them to fail. The only people who genuinely loved the 588th—eventually—were the infantry whose lives they occasionally saved, who saw the work they did up close, where it mattered.

The Soviet Union enforced a rigid gender binary, both socially and legally. After 1934 deviation was literally illegal.

1941

OCTOBER-DECEMBER

The call goes out for female aviators to form three new Regiments. Two will be well-funded and equipped with the latest Soviet aircraft. The third will be the 588th.

1942

JANUARY

Volunteers begin to arrive in Saratov, to be greeted by Marina Roskova.

FEBRUARY-APRIL

The 588th forms up on February 5 and training begins at Engels Aerodrome. Three years of training are compressed into four months of 13-hour days. On April first, the Regiment suffers its first losses—an aircrew becomes disoriented in bad weather and crashes. [DUTY STATION 1]

MAY

The Regiment arrives at the front on the 27th, temporarily based south of the Donets coal fields at Morozovskaya. They are accompanied by an enthusiastic Major Roskova.

JUNE

Four months of defensive fighting begin. The 588th GvBAP is declared operational and enters combat for the first time on the ninth, taking part in the battle of Stavropol. One crew fails to return from their first combat mission, shot down over a railroad junction.

JULY

The Regiment attacks troop concentrations along the Mius and Don Rivers. German positions along the Taganrog-Kuybyshev line receive special attention. The Regiment's airbase is frequently overrun, forcing incommunicado returning pilots to improvise. The Soviet army is in complete disarray. [DUTY STATION 2]

AUGUST

German forces remain on the offensive, taking most of the Kuban district. Krasnodar, Maykop, and Mozdok fall to the Wehrmacht. The First Panzer Army pushes east toward the oilfields of Baku and Grozny. The Regiment retreats to Konstantinovka, in the Donbass region.

Everything that the women of the 588th did defied society's expectations of how a sane young woman should behave. Men not only doubted their ability and resented them, but had been taught that they were defying everything that made them good Communists. In the thirties and forties, it was widely understood that a woman's obligation to have children was an essential component of political consciousness. In 1944 the Mother Heroine and Order of Maternal Glory medals were introduced to honor mothers of seven or more children. Across the war, there was precisely one birth in the 588th, and that was considered a disgrace.

For women who fought, the perils were obvious. To be too masculine was to court derision, suspicion, and possibly even institutionalization for "lesbianism." To be too feminine was to demonstrate inherent unworthiness in the profession of arms, a hyper-masculine arena with no tolerance for the "weakness" of traditional feminine values and approaches.

MARINA ROSKOVA, HERO OF THE SOVIET UNION

The story of Russian women in aviation could be said to begin with Marina Roskova, an aspiring opera singer who more or less stumbled into her life's work as an aviator. Roskova was a pilot and navigator on several high-profile record-breaking flights in prewar Russia and a celebrity in a society mad about aviation. Across the Soviet Union, young women

joined flying clubs, eager to follow in Roskova's footsteps. Despite a predictably sexist reception, many not only proved themselves capable but also became excellent pilots and even instructors.

Along with two female crewmates, she was made a Hero of the Soviet Union in 1938 when they smashed a distance record aboard the experimental aircraft *Rodina*. This adventure vaulted her into the upper echelon of Soviet society. Roskova made friends with Josef Stalin and tirelessly advocated for women's participation in the nation's developing air power. Her advocacy was tolerated with patronizing good humor, even as bloody madness wracked the nation.

THE GREAT PURGE

Throughout the thirties, the totalitarian Soviet Union had been gripped by a paroxysm of paranoid madness and calculated violence known as the Great Purge. At its peak, one thousand people a day were being shot as reactionaries, wreckers, and enemies of the state. Most of them were completely innocent.

Every citizen was touched by the insanity, many personally. Everyone knew someone who was stripped of their party membership and job, imprisoned, executed, or disappeared. Outspoken intellectuals, the religiously devout, anyone out of step with Stalin's brand of Communism were under intense—and often lethal—scrutiny. The military was not spared—three of five Marshals of the Soviet

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

Novorossiysk falls. The Soviet line at the Terek River holds briefly, before German forces break through south of Mozdok. Stiff resistance and a counter-attack halts the German advance toward the oilfields. The Regiment relocates to Assinovskaya, near Grozny, for four months. Mountainous flying conditions are very dangerous. Ardon Station, in the foothills of the Caucasus, is a frequent target. Serious casualties are evacuated to the hospital at Ordzhonikidze.

NOVEMBER

Staff officers are awarded a watch by the Central Committee of the Comsomol in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Red Army.

DECEMBER

Harassment operations continue in the Caucasus. Targets include enemy headquarters and stores. The first replacements arrive.

1943

JANUARY

On the fourth, Major Marina Roskova, HSU, is killed in an accident. Blinded by a snowstorm, her Pe-2 suffers a controlled flight into terrain. Later in the month the Mozdok region is recaptured by the Red Army. The Caucasus counteroffensive begins.

FEBRUARY

Brutal fighting continues along the Mozdok and Terek Rivers in the Caucasus. Stranded by impassable roads and without fuel or supplies, volunteers are ordered to fly daytime missions to Kropotkin, 200km away. Once fuel arrives, night attacks resume, although the Regiment subsists on boiled corn. The Regiment hammers Petrovskoye and Krasnyy Oktyabr on the 24th.

MARCH

The Regiment moves south and west to take the fight across the dreaded “Blue Line” on the Taman peninsula, gateway to the occupied Crimea. The Blue Line runs from Novorossiysk to the Sea of Azov. Bad weather, enemy fighters and strong anti-aircraft batteries augment the German positions. Soviet marine infantry assault and mop up Germans on the Chushka Spit. The Regiment attacks Kievskaya and Trudovaya. They are based at Ivanovskaya, near Krasnodar.

Union were purged, and the officer corps was trimmed down through bureaucratic terror at every level.

QUEERS IN THE SOVIET UNION

The thirties were a time of repression for homosexuals in the Soviet Union—while homosexuality had been decriminalized after the 1918 revolution, Stalin made male homosexuality a crime again in 1934, and the state treated female homosexuality as a mental illness. For lesbians in particular, meeting potential partners was very difficult, and military service was often the first opportunity for these women to find others and explore their sexuality.

It wasn't without risk, though. A male Red Army soldier outed as gay could expect, at best, a five-year prison sentence for violation of article 121.1 of the criminal code. His gay female compatriot could expect a three-month stay in a psychiatric hospital. Publicly outing a character is, in the context of *Night Witches*, a dangerous and cruel betrayal.

A soldier suspected of “lesbianism” might get a warning from her Squadron Commander first, followed by an NKVD interview if the warning is ignored. Some might be allowed to serve while informing on other women in the Regiment—being put on a “pink sheet” as a potential informant by the NKVD. Others might be sent to a

hospital for a regimen of harsh drugs and ideological therapy before being sent back into combat. All sorts of tragic and awful situations can emerge naturally from a simple, innocent relationship.

FASCIST INVASION

When Germany invaded on June 22, 1941, it faced a gutted, demoralized, inexperienced Soviet force. Several million German troops launched a massive attack that Stalin had stubbornly refused to prepare for. Hitler made plans for a parade through Moscow in August.

At first things went very well for the invaders—Soviet forward air bases, along with their planes on the ground, were demolished, assuring the Germans air superiority. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops were enveloped by German armor and mopped up by Wehrmacht infantry. Across a battlefield that stretched from Estonia to the Black Sea, the Red Army was in full retreat—battered, confused, and demoralized. But there was no parade in Moscow in August. In fact, as the summer came to an ominous end, the Germans had taken Kiev but their opponents, fighting on home ground, were starting to regroup. They ceded territory west of the Dnieper and began to dig in for a protracted, bloody war—something Russians know a thing or two about.

APRIL

The month begins with ferocious attacks on occupied Novorossiysk. On the 23rd, the Regiment supports heroic and doomed Soviet naval infantry at Malaya Zemlya, dropping supplies in daylight to beleaguered troops of the Black Sea Fleet. The Regiment temporarily relocates to Pashkovskaya, where they enjoy a genuine airfield with hangars. [DUTY STATION 3]

MAY

The summer campaign against German positions around Novorossiysk escalates. The “Kuban Bridgehead”—the German retreat position on the Taman peninsula—holds despite determined Soviet assaults. A massive evacuation by sea and from the airfield at Slavyanskaya allows a quarter million German troops to slip away.

JUNE

Based near recaptured Novorossiysk, the Regiment flies nightly sorties against the Blue Line, suffering terrible losses. The nearest evacuation hospital is in Krasnodar, with long-term cases headed to Sochi.

JULY

The worst month of the war for the Regiment. Five crews are killed in operations against the Blue Line, and four are ambushed over the Kuban delta by German night fighters on July 31. In recaptured cities, collusion trials begin. The first trial, in Krasnodar, results in the death sentence for eight citizens. They are hanged before a crowd of 30,000.

AUGUST

Continued operations against the Blue Line. Support of naval infantry landings at Eltigen.

SEPTEMBER

The Taman peninsula is finally recaptured and Soviet sights turn to the Crimea. Continued Regimental support for amphibious landings.

OCTOBER

The Regiment moves forward to the fishing village of Peresyp', 20km from the Kerch Strait. They will stay here for six months. Due to their heroic efforts driving the Germans off the Taman peninsula, the Regiment is renamed the 46th Taman Guards Regiment.
[DUTY STATION 4]

OTHER ENEMIES

The exigencies of war “rehabilitated” many of the officers who survived the purges, but they served their country under deep suspicion.

Every unit had a despised Politruk, euphemistically known as the Deputy Commander for Political Affairs, who was the officer in charge of political education and a watchdog alert for dissent and treason. The organization responsible for carrying out any investigation and arrest (and, sometimes, trial and punishment) was the Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the dreaded NKVD, who operated throughout the war, vetting soldiers, Commanders, and entire units with great and often lethal enthusiasm.

Despite this, most citizens maintained a strained faith in socialism, leavened with both a heavy dash of fatalism and more than a little cynical gallows humor. Through it all, the Soviet Union fought on.

WOMEN STEP FORWARD

When the Third Reich invaded, many qualified female aviators immediately volunteered. These women were turned down or delayed by a military that was reluctant to put women into combat roles, despite the explicit equality written into the Soviet constitution. Marina Roskova

had already urged the creation of all-female aviation units, and the Red Army had quietly laughed at her ideas until Stalin himself told them, at Roskova's insistence and in the face of critical manpower shortages, to make it happen. With the creation of the 586th, 587th, and 588th Regiments, female aviators had the green light and joined up en masse. All three units were explicitly created with the intention of being all female, all the way down, and while this was never completely the case, it's fair to call them predominantly female Regiments. The units formed up and began intense training at the Engels Aerodrome, not far from the shaky front lines, in late 1941. The plan at the time was to create three reserve Regiments, but the desperate shortage of male pilots rendered this moot. Once trained, they were thrown into battle.

THE THREE REGIMENTS

In April of 1942 the 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment, flying Yak-1 fighters, was the first to see combat. Darlings of the Soviet media, glamorous and courageous, the 586th was home to two aces, including the Pravda-crowned "White Lily of Stalingrad," Lidya Lityvak. Lityvak was shot down in 1943 after roughly 12 kills and her fate is uncertain to this day.

The 587th, later the The 125th Guards Bomber Aviation Regiment, was

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

The first of November sees the liberation of the city of Kerch after a hard-fought cross-strait battle. The Regiment is asked to suppress enemy firing positions atop Mt. Mitridat above Kerch harbor, a dangerous and technically difficult series of targets that prove instrumental in the Soviet victory.

1944

JANUARY-MARCH

The Crimean offensive begins in earnest. The Regiment conducts harassment operations over the Crimea.

FEBRUARY-MARCH

Vicious fighting in the Crimea. Targets include Wehrmacht ammunition dumps and airfields.

APRIL

The Regiment switches from direct flights over the Taman peninsula to longer, more circuitous flights over the Black Sea, to reach targets in the Crimea. The new route is longer and results in fewer sorties per night. The risk of ditching in the Black Sea replaces the risk of anti-aircraft fire.

MARCH

The Regiment hits targets around Prokopyeva on the ninth. Targets include the same anti-aircraft guns and searchlights that seek to destroy them.

APRIL

Nightly strikes impede retreating German and Romanian troops in Balaklava and Feodosiya.

MAY

On the fourth, the Regiment focuses on enemy positions on Cape Kherones on the approach to Sebastopol, a heavily defended choke point. This will be the last action in Ukraine. On the fifteenth, the Regiment receives orders to transfer to the Belorussian front. In anticipation of longer sorties across central Europe, parachutes are issued for the first time when they reach Smolensk.

JUNE

The Regiment adjusts to Belorussia, with its featureless forests and flat terrain, and harasses enemy defensive positions along the Pronya River in the Mogilev sector.

commanded by Roskova herself. They flew the latest and best Soviet medium bomber, the Pe-2, reflecting Stalin's direct support for their Regimental Commander. Roskova was killed in an accident in 1943.

The 588th was the ugly step-child, almost an after-thought. Their mission was a difficult one—night harassment, meant to impact morale and readiness among the German front line troops. It would involve low-level flying in darkness and precision attacks with minimal ordinance. And to increase the difficulty, it would all be done using planes that were twenty years out of date.

THE PO-2

The plane's Russian nickname was Kukuruznik, "corn-cutter," thanks to its use in agriculture.

The Polikarpov Po-2 first flew in 1928. A simple, rugged two-seat biplane sporting an anemic one hundred horsepower engine, the Po-2 was easy to handle and generally reliable. The Po-2s, made of wood and cloth, were nearly invisible to radar. They were so slow that they operated below the stall speed of modern fighters, making them difficult to hunt. They were both easy to repair and cheap to replace. It could carry 120 kilos of bombs under its wings—more if the crew were light. Compared to the sleek Yak-1 fighters and state of the art Petlyakov-2 medium bombers, the Po-2s were a joke—but the Germans weren't laughing. Instead they were staying up all

night, listening for the click-clack of those noisy engines, waiting for the bombs to fall.

Through painful trial and error, the 588th learned how to fly their missions and return alive. The standard technique became almost rote: a formation of three planes that would approach a target. Two would distract the searchlights and flak batteries while the third cut off her noisy Shvetsov M-11 engine, glided silently over the target, and dropped her payload. Then the roles would switch until all three had dropped their bombs.

It was a harrowing job, and an aircrew in the 588th, operating from forward bases only a few kilometers from the front lines, did it five or more times every night. Their patriotism and dedication should have been unquestioned—but it wasn't.

DUTY STATIONS

Due to the nature of their duties and the limitations of their aircraft, the 588th followed the front as the Red Army pushed west. In doing so they saw much of eastern Europe before the end of the war, from the Don River basin to the German frontier.

Accelerated training under Major Marina Roskova began at Engels Aerodrome in November 1941. The selection process began and, gradually, the three Regiments formed up. For the women of the 588th, exercises in navigation, by day and night, by sight and instrument, ate up countless hours. Ground

JULY

The Regiment moves forward with the front, to the vicinity of Minsk. At one point crews from the 566th cover the Regimental aviation maintenance battalion hunting scattered Germans in the nearby forest, using the Po-2's rear machine gun.

AUGUST

Starting on the 25th, Zambrów, Poland is first a target and then a base of operations for the Regiment. There is massive competition to be the first aircrew to attack German soil in East Prussia.

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

The Regiment follows the front across Poland from Zambrów, operating over long distances from the airbase there. [DUTY STATION 5] Much retraining and skill-building is accomplished as the pace of missions diminishes.

DECEMBER

The Regiment participates in the Soviet attack on Warsaw, bombing the train station at Nasielsk on the 13th.

1945

JANUARY

On the 29th a call for volunteers goes out—Soviet troops are encircled in East Prussia and low on ammunition. The entire Regiment volunteers for daylight airdrops near the town of Kresin amidst blizzard conditions.

FEBRUARY

The Regiment follows the Second Belorussian Front as it gains momentum and the Wehrmacht collapses.

MARCH

The Regiment relocates to Chwaszczyno in the Gdańsk-Gdynia area on the Baltic coast; Gdańsk is captured by the Red Army on the thirtieth. Targets include rail hubs and lines of communication. The Regiment is based at Buchholz, northwest of Berlin.
[DUTY STATION 6]

APRIL

The Regiment participates in the battle of Königsberg, bombing evacuee docks in Pillau and troop concentrations in the city. Later in the month they move west, attacking positions in Stettin, Neubrandenburg, and Berlin itself.

attack training followed—with and without escort in all conditions.

Deployment in the summer of 1942 saw the Regiment based in a series of muddy, undeveloped airstrips outside primitive villages like Trud Gornyaka in the Caucasus. Compared to the local amenities, the slightly-bigger-village of Bryanka was a Paris of the Ukraine. Here in the Don River basin the 588th would first have a chance to hurt the Germans. The Third Reich, still ascendant, still with air superiority, rolled eastward with a will.

For the Red Army the disasters kept coming—a failed 1942 winter counter-offensive, plus defeats at Kharkov and the Crimea earlier that year, cost them an unfathomable 1.4 million men and seven complete armies. By the spring of 1943 the Regiment was based in Pashkovskaya, near the volatile city of Krasnodar, east of Rostov on Don. The Red Army was starting to push back—hard—across the Taman peninsula, and the entire Crimea was up for grabs. In a desperate change of role, the 588th dropped supplies during the massive amphibious assault on Kerch, at Malaya Zemlya. Based in Peresyp', a fishing village near the Kerch Strait, the 588th fought in the bitterly contested Crimean campaign. In September 1943 they harassed German units already near the breaking point—and in the end, they broke them. This was the hardest, most violent combat the Regiment had seen to date. Hitler's hubris was firmly checked, and the tide began its agonizing turn westward.

The next summer the Regiment was in Zambrów, Poland, flying long-distance missions and barely able to keep up with the galloping First Belorussian Front. The German Army was in disarray, in full retreat in places, and Soviet strength was growing every day. For many the end of the war was in sight, just over the horizon, and one word was on everyone's lips—"Berlin."

March of 1945 saw the Regiment in Chwaszczyno, Poland, and scarcely a month later they were in Germany. Buchholz, in April 1945, was the last Duty Station of the 588th. The Seelow Heights had fallen and there was nothing standing between the Red Army and Berlin but hastily armed boys, old men, and the tattered remains of Army Group Vistula. Hitler, out of madness or spite, swore to destroy his capitol before capitulating, and in that he succeeded. By early May it was all over.

MAY

For the 588th, the last operational sorties of the war occur on the seventh, against the port of Swinemünde in Pomerania.

JUNE

The Regiment prepares to be demobilized.

AUGUST

Ten crews participate in the Moscow victory parade on Air Fleet Day.

NOVEMBER

The unit is disbanded.



Suddenly we saw the mechanics run up to our aircraft and do something. What they were doing was deactivating the bombs. The Germans had surrendered; the war was over. I burst out crying. Everybody cried that day. LT. POLINA GELMAN, HSU

REPLAY

LOUIS, ANNA, JACK, and **GRACE** sit down to continue their *Night Witches* campaign. It's the fourth session and the Regiment has been through a lot. The death of Jack's first character was the apex of the previous session and he's returning with a replacement fresh from training.

LOUIS: So what are you thinking, Jack?

JACK: Can you guys recap your characters? It's been a while. I feel like my old character fit in really well, and I want to play somebody quite different, but I also want her to mesh with the existing characters.

ANNA: Poor Raisa, we'll miss her! Sure, I'm Lt. Zoya Kovalyova, grease monkey and mad lover!

GRACE: Zoya's deeply in love with my navigator—and her boss — Captain Tamara Malkova. She's commander of 3 Squadron now and really regrets having a love affair with Zoya.

ANNA: C'mon, it's true love! Zoya got punished for being a lesbian and spent some time away from the front after Pashkovskaya, if you recall. She's back and even more obsessed.

LOUIS: And I'm Lieutenant Marina Lusitsiva, Section Leader of the unfortunately-named C-section, 3 Squadron. She's an NKVD snitch, remember? And a great pilot. And Tamara is boss of all of us.

GRACE: You're damned right she is.

JACK: Thanks, that's helpful. OK, is it all right if I play another pilot? Will that be stepping on your toes, Louis?

LOUIS: Not at all. It'll probably be helpful on missions, actually.

JACK: And for nature, Raisa was a Hawk so what aren't you guys?

ANNA: If you want a unique one all that's left is Raven.

JACK: That sounds really cool, actually.

JACK grabs a Raven playbook and chooses options for his new character

I want a unique name. How about Valentina Surnachevskaya?

LOUIS: Valya!

GRACE: Awesome.

JACK: She's a pilot, a flight officer—Junior Lieutenant—and she's not a good pilot yet but she's lucky. So -1 skill but +1 luck. Wears a regulation uniform, she's got a tough body, and she's handsome, photogenic but not conventionally pretty let's say. From Vologda. A little masculine. Very serious. She's got a fiancé in an aviation regiment named Boris Mednikov. Maybe this kept her out of combat for a year and she's got something to prove.

ANNA: I like her!

LOUIS: What's her Role in the group?

JACK: What are you all?

LOUIS: Still a Zealot.

ANNA: And Zoya's a Dreamer.

GRACE: And Tamara is naturally a Leader.

JACK: I kinda see her as a potential Leader too, but we can change Roles, right?

GRACE: Yep, when we change Duty Stations.

JACK: Then for now she's an Adventurer.

LOUIS: I see a plane crash in her future.

GRACE: And that's it, she's done! Let's play.

JACK: I don't have any Marks or anything?

GRACE: No, but you will soon enough, rookie.

LOUIS: If you were picking up an established NPC with some experience we could use the one-shot rule for advancement. As it is you show up without any Regard, or Marks, or Moves, or... anything. Is that OK?

JACK: Yeah, it's good, I like being new and innocent. Unlike you hags, I'll probably survive the war.

GRACE: Let's play! Who is GM?

LOUIS: Not you; you were GM all last session. Not Jack, he needs to introduce Valya. Anna?

ANNA: Not feelin' it.

LOUIS: Me, then. That's cool. OK, Marina's been called away for some NKVD-related administrative task, which fits perfectly. Where are we?

GRACE: Duty Station five. Zambrów, Poland. Dang, after all that time in Ukraine and southern Russia we are on the move now.

Everyone reviews the Duty Station handout

JACK: A year has passed!

LOUIS: Jack, what are the questions?

JACK: Oh, right. "Which officer of the 588th came to Poland loaded with luxury goods?"

ANNA: It's Zoya for sure. She's got presents. For Tamara. Everybody OK with that?

JACK: "According to rumors, what lies just beyond the perimeter in the birch forest?"

GRACE: The Poles have a still set up, I think. Potato vodka, rumor has it.

LOUIS: Yes!

JACK: "Why has a lock been installed on the Regimental chart case?"

LOUIS: Security crackdown! The Regimental Politruk is on a rampage now that Marina's eased up on her informing.

JACK: OK, map time. Anna?

ANNA: I'd love to.

JACK: "How has a wheat field outside Zambrów been turned into an airbase? Where is the runway, and who cuts endless timber by day to harden it? Where are the barracks and command tents? What surprising source of shelter does Zambrów offer the Regiment's planes? Where is the only place to get out of the endless pissing rain? Draw it."

ANNA draws a map, pointing out the features. Everyone chips in with additions and suggestions.

LOUIS: Cool, you guys think about the situation and what you'd like to do. Give me another sec.

[LOUIS reviews his GM Agenda, Principles, Moves and Threats. He decides to pick a pair of Threats to emphasize. Since he already mentioned a security crackdown, he chooses "The State." Since the Regiment recently lost the beloved pilot Raisa and there's a raging one-sided love affair underway, he chooses "Our Beloved Regiment."]

You guys ready? Does anybody need anything before we start?

[JACK leaps up and grabs some extra snacks.]

JACK: Ready!

LOUIS: October, 1944. A steady cold drizzle keeps everything damp and muddy. There's just been a memorial service for a new Sergeant-pilot who lasted a single mission. Nobody knew her.

ANNA: I think all our thoughts are on Raisa, who we knew and loved, instead of the new girl.

GRACE: Tamara is standing in the rain smoking a cigarette, lost in her own thoughts.

LOUIS: Jack, where is Valya?

JACK: I think she just arrived. She's been dropped off at the edge of the muddy runway and she's hauling an enormous canvas bag full of all her brand-new equipment. She struggles over to Tamara, drops her bag in the mud, and salutes.

GRACE: Tamara looks her up and down and reluctantly returns the salute.

JACK: Junior Lieutenant Valentina Surnachevskaya reporting for duty, Captain.

GRACE: Welcome to the 588th, Junior Lieutenant. You've been assigned to 3 Squadron. Our tent is over there. Drop your things there and dry off.

JACK: Yes, sir.

LOUIS: Tamara, Captain Lobodeva finds you standing out in the weather. She's the Regimental Chief of Staff, the #2, your immediate superior.

GRACE: I give her a token salute and take a long drag on my cigarette.

LOUIS [AS LOBODEVA]: Captain.

GRACE: Captain.

LOUIS: You've met our replacement.

GRACE: She seems young.

LOUIS: She is young. She's 18.

[LOUIS checks in with JACK; this hadn't been established but JACK nods enthusiastically.]

I want you to put her with an experienced navigator in A-section with you. Pair her with Lieutenant Kobalyova.

JACK: Hold up, out of game, who is that?

ANNA: That's me.

GRACE: I'd prefer to put her with my lead navigator.

LOUIS: I'd prefer a hot bath and chocolates. Put her with Zoya, that's an order.

[GRACE breaks character]

GRACE: OK, that seems like a bad idea. She's a pilot, but not a good one, and Zoya is more mechanic than navigator...

ANNA: ...and not a good one.

GRACE: I'm not OK with that.

LOUIS: What do you do?

GRACE: *[Back in character]* With all due respect, Captain, I know how to run my own squadron.

LOUIS: Oh, do you?

GRACE: Yes, I do. And I brush the order of Suvorov and Order of Glory medals pinned to my chest. I'm going to Act Up.

LOUIS: OK, gotcha. By acting like a natural-born Soviet airwoman, I see.

GRACE: You're damned right. I have three medals, so that's +3.

[GRACE rolls two six-sided dice and gets a seven, which, with her medals bonus, results in a ten.]

OK, ten, awesome, I choose three. I get what I want here. Do I add one to the Mission Pool or ensure there are no consequences?

JACK: Mission Pool.

ANNA: You could also choose Mission Pool twice and suffer for it!

GRACE: Yeah, I'm not doing that. I'll choose "no consequences" and one for the Mission Pool.

LOUIS: So one for the Mission Pool, but you get what you want without any trouble?

GRACE: Yes.

[ANNA and JACK groan.]

LOUIS: Captain Lobodeva shrugs. As you wish, Squadron Commander. I'm sure you know best. And she walks away.

ANNA: Did I see all of this?

LOUIS: Do you keep a constant eye on Tamara's comings and goings?

ANNA: Well, duh.

LOUIS: Then of course you saw all that.

ANNA: I'm very nonchalantly moving over to Tamara.

GRACE: Tamara would ordinarily avoid you, but she's out in the open and it's too late. She's just finishing her cigarette and start to move toward the Squadron barracks tent, and there you are.

ANNA [AS ZOYA]: Tamara.

GRACE: Hello, Zoya.

ANNA: I've got something for you.

GRACE: Listen, Zoya, I'm Squadron Commander now. Whatever happened between us...

ANNA: ...she opens her hands and there's an American chocolate bar. A Hershey's bar.

GRACE: Tamara just stops talking in mid-sentence. It's like she's looking at a tiny magical unicorn. Mesmerizing.

ANNA: For you, my love. She holds it out.

GRACE: Tamara reaches for it.

ANNA: And Zoya pulls it away. I know you don't love me.

GRACE: Zoya...

ANNA: It's all right. I can't bend fate. I've made my peace. [ANNA breaks character for an aside] Zoya has not made her peace! [Back into character as everyone laughs] Tamara, all I ask is that you let me fly with you. Let me sit behind you.

GRACE: Zoya...

ANNA: ...and she hands you the chocolate bar. I'm not Acting Up here, do whatever you want, I think I'm Reaching Out.

GRACE: Makes sense. This is an intimate moment in its own way.

ANNA: What do I roll here?

LOUIS: You just roll straight on Reach Out unless you have Regard for the other person, which I am guessing you do, so +1.

[ANNA rolls the dice and gets a ten, for a total of eleven.]

ANNA: Huh, OK, choose two. What should I choose?

JACK: Mission Pool.

GRACE: I say go with one point for the Mission Pool and change Regard. Whatever you choose, my Regard for Zoya is shifting from “regret” to “fear.” I’m actually terrified that you are going to ruin my career.

ANNA: Harsh. Are you going to let me fly with you?

GRACE: I think I won’t! You are absolutely bonkers.

[The scene ends and LOUIS sets up a new one. The players go about the Regiment’s daytime business, dealing with the lack of some crucial parts—and some judicious scrounging of an abandoned Polish car dealership in Zambrów—and weathering the Politruk’s discreet inquiries. Eventually the sun begins to set.]

LOUIS: It’s almost time to fly. Captain Malkova, you should assemble your Squadron.

[GRACE, as Squadron Commander, scans over the list of targets for the Zambrów Duty Station and chooses one. She stands up to deliver the briefing, which is a pretty obvious way of triggering the Briefing Move.]

GRACE: Listen up, ladies. First let me welcome Junior Lieutenant Valentina Surnachevskaya to the Regiment as a replacement pilot.

[JACK nods.]

GRACE: Tonight we're hitting an ammunition depot outside Grudziasz, in support of the First Belorussian Front. It's a heavily defended but crucial target. I want you to stay at a relatively high altitude, since we will be detonating bombs and ammunition if we score direct hits.

ANNA: Who will fly with whom, Commander?

GRACE: I want our lead navigator, Lieutenant Gordievskaya, in plane 079 with Lieutenant Kovalyova. And in the lead plane, 122, will be myself and our new Junior Lieutenant.

ANNA: Zoya can't help but flash a look of complete fury at this betrayal.

GRACE: 027 will be Malinovskaya and Garasimova as usual. Dismissed.

LOUIS: Not so fast. Captain Malkova. As the briefing comes to its conclusion, a Colonel from the Fourth Air Army arrives. He's tall and a little drunk, kind of a creep.

GRACE: I snap a crisp salute.

ANNA: Zoya is sort of hunched down, watching, knowing what's coming, a little jealous.

LOUIS: Captain Malkova, in honor of your accomplishments in promoting peace, promoting socialism, and protecting the motherland, as evidenced by your heroic actions over the Crimea, I have the honor..." and this Colonel is none too steady "...of presenting you with the medal conferring upon you the title of Hero of the Soviet Union."

GRACE: I can smell this guy's breath. He's probably staring at my tits.

LOUIS: Well, he's trying to pin on the medal, on the wrong side of your uniform, and the whole thing is a little unseemly. Are you just putting up with it?

GRACE: I guess I am. For the good of the Regiment, right?

LOUIS: Sure, if you say so. He pins on the HSU and returns your salute and stumbles back to his car.

JACK: That did not feel very heroic.

GRACE: Medals +4 is all I care about. Let's go bomb some Germans.

LOUIS: OK, so Anna, you will be flying with a non-player character navigator.

ANNA: That's great.

LOUIS: And 027 has an NPC crew. Tamara, I believe you have some regard for the lead plane, don't you?

GRACE: I have an irrational love for 122, yes. That creaky old crate.

LOUIS: Cool. The Regimental Commander, Major Bershanskaya, is out on the flight line waving you off. You're in Poland now. The war is going well. Night falls as first 1 squadron, then 2 squadron, and finally you guys take to the air. As a reminder the Mission Pool stands at two. Use them wisely!

GRACE: A-section is a tight formation, guiding B, C, and D sections. I'm personally going to Wayfind to the target. I'm a frickin' hero now.

ANNA: Hey, we forgot about Vedomaya.

GRACE: Crap, I was supposed to assign coverage. Uh, I'm lead navigator, obviously, and the Attack Run...

JACK: Valya!

GRACE: Yeah, right, hot stuff. Kovalyova's going to take it. Watch and learn.

ANNA: Oh, she'll attack all right. She's mad as hell, but not at the Germans.

GRACE: Perfect. So, Vedomaya. Jack, I want Valya looking out for the crew of 079 when they lead the attack. I'll cover them as well. Anna, I want Zoya watching us in 122.

JACK: Roger that. Wish we had someone to Vedomaya for 027.

LOUIS: Just an NPC behind Anna's pilot, no joy.

GRACE: So, Wayfinding. Here we go.

[GRACE rolls two dice and adds Tamara's skill. She gets a total of seven.]

JACK: Ouch. Even if you used all the Mission Pool...

GRACE: ...I got this. We're on time and in formation. The plane, thanks to Zoya, flies perfectly. The weather is good—but the pilot is brand-new. Our approach isn't very stealthy and we get pinned by searchlights right away.

ANNA: Oh, no. And nobody's covering you.

GRACE: It's a bad scene. We're getting shot up.

ANNA: Who rolls?

LOUIS: Two PCs in the plane, so rear seat rolls Enemy Fire. That's you, Grace.

[GRACE rolls the dice again, this time adding Luck. She gets an abysmal total of five.]

GRACE: I'm using both points in the Mission Pool right now.

JACK: Do it!

GRACE: That brings it up to a seven. I choose two. Huh. She'll make it home and we aren't torn up.

JACK: So we're both Marked!

GRACE: Yes. I'm taking "Put duty before health or love," and I think that's resolved immediately. I could call off the attack and spare all the other planes in 3 squadron this terror, but I don't. I let us all get shot at.

LOUIS: Hell, yes. Choose right now and describe the scene in the air, Jack.

JACK: My very first Mark! Awesome. Can I take "Witness the death of a comrade"?

LOUIS: Of course you can. I'll figure out how to incorporate that.

ANNA: I think you have a pretty good opportunity.

LOUIS: I think so, too, but let's hold off a second. You still need to make an Attack Run.

ANNA: Wow. That sucks.

LOUIS: Yes it does. Your lead plane tipped off the German anti-aircraft defenses.

JACK: Sprays of glowing tracer ammunition light up the sky. Searchlights are waving around, trying to pin you like moths. The whole situation is screwed, and the Captain is not aborting the mission. We have to fly through it.

LOUIS: Does anybody else want to Wayfind? Totally optional but it looks good on your service record if you're grubbing for medals.

ANNA: Hell no. You are so evil, Louis, for even suggesting it.

GRACE: Anna, you're up.

ANNA: Wow, Valya should be making the Attack Run roll. She's the actual pilot up in here. You've got a mechanic leading this! That's messed up. You probably want her to die, don't you.

[GRACE thinks about it]

GRACE: OK, change of plans. Captain Malkova pops a flare to signal that her plane is making the Attack Run. She taps Valya on the shoulder—go, go!

JACK: Valya nods, a little uncertain.

ANNA: You guys have one Vedomaya covering you, and it is a royally pissed-off Zoya. I just feel like I need to keep saying that until, you know, somebody listens.

LOUIS: Nobody is listening, are they?

GRACE: Right, Valya adds her Guts. Do it, Valya!

JACK: Yes sir! Valya's dirty secret is that she has no Guts. +o.

ANNA: Really?

JACK: Really! I was counting on that Mission Pool.

GRACE: Tamara is talking you through the Attack Run, calming you down, reminding you to watch altitude and airspeed. Just don't screw this up.

ANNA: Wish somebody was Vedomaya-ing 122.

LOUIS: Yeah, switching duties mid-mission is weird. But it makes sense 122 could cover 079. Anna, I assume you want to help out if you can?

ANNA: I don't know, do I?

GRACE: Don't do it for Tamara, do it for the new chick.

[ANNA laughs and agrees.]

LOUIS: Cool, how are you covering them?

ANNA: Zoya's been through this before. She's flying close to 079, close enough to see Valya and Tamara, but with her eyes on the ground looking for searchlights and anti-aircraft pockets to avoid.

LOUIS: Cool, when the time comes you may be able to take some of the consequences of the Attack Run yourself.

ANNA: Zoya's looking forward to being a little martyr for her Captain.

JACK: Yikes. OK, Valya remembers they are bombing a munitions dump and flies high, straight, and level.

[JACK rolls the dice and adds... nothing, because his Guts is +0. He gets a seven.]

JACK: Yes! We got this.

GRACE: Barely. It's still a massive disaster.

LOUIS: Not that massive—Jack, you hit the target. Describe that for us.

JACK: A searchlight is about to find us but 122 races ahead and distracts it. We're free and clear, and our bombs connect. There's an explosion that buffets our plane and shakes us around in the seats. It's a hell of a first mission success for Valya.

LOUIS: Which consequences do you choose?

JACK: This is so cruel! I get two. I don't think we're Marked by this experience...

GRACE: ...we already have been. Two Marks in one mission would be brutal.

JACK: ...and we avoid additional flak—we don't trigger Enemy Fire. So that leaves "The damage to the target is not significant and it is your fault" and "A plane is damaged, GM's choice".

ANNA: Oh, no!

JACK: Valya thinks she's a hero, but the damage she did is trivial and everyone can see that.

ANNA: Wait a minute—I want to take that consequence on myself. Vedomaya, bitches.

LOUIS: How does that work in the fiction?

ANNA: I think I'm so eager to cover the lead plane that I get in the way and mess up her Attack Run—the bombs are off target because I'm flitting about blocking her field of vision. It's my fault.

LOUIS: Sounds good, and we'll hear more about that later on. Meanwhile, 027 brings up the rear and flies calmly into the teeth of hell.

GRACE: Oh, no, no, no.

ANNA: Oh, shit! I should have taken the "a plane is damaged" consequence.

[LOUIS reviews his Agenda and Principles. "Give each NPC a name, a past—and no mercy" leaps out.]

LOUIS: Searchlights get a fix and they glow like the sun. Every gun fires on them and the plane is annihilated. Valya, you see the navigator, Junior Lieutenant Garasimova, who had a cot next to yours, who shared her tea yesterday afternoon an hour after you joined the Regiment, leap from the burning airplane, herself on fire, without a parachute.

JACK: That's awful.

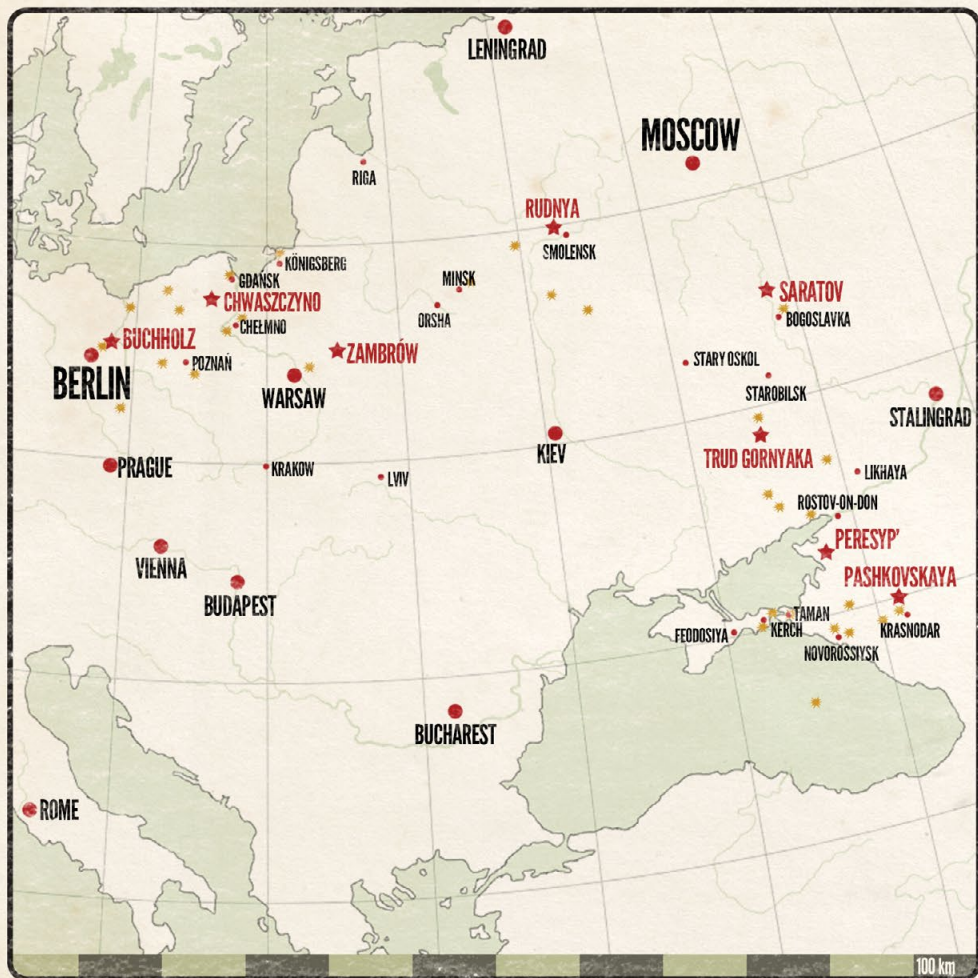
LOUIS: Hey, you made the choices, not me.

JACK: It's still awful. I didn't think "a plane is damaged" would lead to that.

LOUIS: Are you OK with it?

JACK: Yes, but... damn.

LOUIS: And that's the mission. You fly back to the airbase at Zambrów without further incident. The Major is waiting to debrief you.



588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT, 1942–1945

• City ★ Duty Station ☆ Target

APPENDICES

TEACHING THE GAME

GLOSSARY

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PLANE STATS

TEACHING THE GAME

As the GM, it's likely that you'll be responsible for teaching the game to others. Teaching something like this can be difficult! What order should you teach things in, and how much information should you give them all at once? The key considerations to have in mind when teaching are:

- Teach the mechanics in a concentric way.
- Teach the context as you teach the mechanics.
- Use examples and demonstrations.
- Teach as you go.
- Teach what they need in order to make informed decisions.

TEACH THE MECHANICS IN A CONCENTRIC WAY. It's easy to get caught up in the details, or how everything fits together. After all, you're knowledgeable about the game, so that's the level at which you're processing this information. But new players are at a different level, and that kind of information can be overwhelming to them. Start with the most basic piece of information, and state it as simply as possible. Then introduce the next piece of information, one that builds on what you've said already and expands their knowledge. Start simple and expand out. This is called concentric teaching. With Moves, the simplest thing you can say is, "You can just say what your character does. Sometimes, what they're doing counts as one of these Moves, and then we'll have to roll dice and follow some rules." Start with that, and then expand out concentrically from there.

TEACH THE CONTEXT AS YOU TEACH THE MECHANICS. There's a reason why *Night Witches* has all of these rules. It's because they all do something to help create interesting stories with interesting characters. It's important that as you teach players about the mechanics, you mention what these mechanics do for the story. When you explain the Mission Pool, don't just talk about how you earn and spend it. Talk about what it means to work together in combat, and what the Mission Pool can represent.

USE EXAMPLES AND DEMONSTRATIONS. People need examples in order to confirm and solidify what you're teaching them. Use short examples throughout any explanation that you give. When you explain how to roll dice for moves, pass two dice to someone. Say, "Let's say you've got Skill +2, and you're rolling to find a target in the dark. Go ahead and roll. Great. Add those two dice together, and add in your Skill +2. What's the total?" This will help make what you're saying concrete, and will clarify any misinterpretations.

TEACH AS YOU GO. If you spend the first hour of a game explaining the entirety of the rules, you'll lose buy-in from any players who aren't excited about the intricacies of game design. So avoid doing that. Instead, teach as you go. Trust that it's okay to teach your players some of the details now and the rest later. Many people have a limit to how much knowledge they can absorb in a single period. They need to be able to put their knowledge into action before they're ready to learn more.

TEACH WHAT THEY NEED IN ORDER TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS. While giving players too much information can overwhelm them, giving them too little information will lose their trust and confidence. Give players the information they need in order to make informed decisions. Make sure they understand the choices that they are making. If someone makes a bad choice early on, like picking a character Move that they later realize they'll never use, be generous and allow them to go back and change their decision.

Avery Medaldno

GLOSSARY

588TH NIGHT BOMBER REGIMENT: One of three female aviation Regiments established early in the Great Patriotic War. The 588th operated from close to the front with a primary mission of harassment, and flew over 23,000 sorties during the war. Known as the *Night Witches*.

ADVANCE: Growth through experience. When you earn an advance you become more competent, more skilled, or more respected.

AGENDA: GM guideline. The thematic core of the game.

AIRBASE: Wherever the Regiment flies from. Conditions might vary from a well-maintained airport to a grass or snow-covered field.

DUTY STATION: An aviation regiment's area of operation, tied to a specific front.

LUFTWAFFE: The German air force.

MARK: An indelible and traumatic experience of war. Marks are narrative hit points that only go down.

MISSION POOL: A collective representation of unit cohesion and esprit de corps.

MOVE: The intersection of fiction and mechanics.

NACHTHEXEN: See 588th Night Bomber Regiment.

NIGHT WITCHES: See 588th Night Bomber Regiment.

NKVD: Народный комиссариат внутренних дел, the People's Commissariat for internal Affairs—the law enforcement arm of the Communist party that includes the secret police. Regimental Politruks are NKVD officers rather than part of the military chain of command.

PO-2: See Polikarpov Po-2.

POLIKARPOV PO-2: A two-seat biplane designed for agricultural and training use, first flown in 1927. The Polikarpov Po-2 is a utilitarian biplane that served as the primary aircraft of the *Night Witches*. Slow and vulnerable, but rugged and utilitarian.

POLITRUK: A Regimental political officer, reporting to the NKVD instead of the Red Army.

PRINCIPLE: GM guideline. The procedural core of the game.

REACTION, FORCES OF: Those groups and individuals who espouse socialism but are in reality working toward the goals of capitalism or fascism. The reactionary is an enemy of the people, a class enemy, a disease to be rooted out and purged.

REGARD: Strong feelings toward another, or toward a particular aircraft, positive or negative.

REGIMENT, AVIATION: 36 combat aircraft, their crews, and support staff totalling 200 people. Commanded by a Major, an aviation regiment is divided into three squadrons. This represents “paper strength”—in reality, due to losses and supply problems, actual combat strength may be substantially lower. The 588th Night Bomber Regiment is the focus of this game.

SECTION: Three combat aircraft and their crews. Commanded by a Section Leader, usually a Lieutenant. There are four Sections in a Squadron.

SQUADRON: Twelve combat aircraft and their crews, divided into four Sections. Commanded by a Squadron Commander, usually a Senior Lieutenant.

SUKA: сука, the Russian word for “bitch.”

THREAT: An explicit danger that a GM can foreshadow and introduce.

VEDOMAYA: The feminine form of ведомый, literally “wingwoman.”

VORON: Ворон, the Russian word for “raven.”

WRECKER: A saboteur. A wrecker might be a careless worker, a reactionary enemy of the people, or a foreign spy.

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And here's a fun film that's easy to track down for streaming on the Internet:

In Flight Are the Night Witches (В небе Ночные Ведьмы). Screenplay by Vladimir Valutskiy and Yevgeniya Zhigulenko. Dir. Yevgeniya Zhigulenko. Gorky Film Studios, 1982.

And a documentary, also readily available:

Night Witches. Dir. Gunilla Bresky. Röda Lappar, 2008.

PLANE STATS

POLIKARPOV PO-2

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

LENGTH:	8.17 m
WINGSPAN:	11.40 m
HEIGHT:	3.10 m
WING AREA:	33.2 m ²
EMPTY WEIGHT:	770 kg
LOADED WEIGHT:	1,030 kg
USEFUL LOAD:	260 kg
MAX. TAKEOFF WEIGHT:	1,350 kg

POWERPLANT

POWERPLANT:	1 × Shvetsov M-11D 5-cylinder air cooled radial engine
POWER OUTPUT:	82 kW at 1,650 rpm for takeoff, 75 kW cruise
SPECIFIC POWER:	9.5 kW/L
COMPRESSION RATIO:	5.0:1
POWER-TO-WEIGHT RATIO:	0.50 kW/kg
BORE:	125mm
STROKE:	140mm
DISPLACEMENT:	8.6 L
ENGINE DRY WEIGHT:	165 kg

FUEL CAPACITY:	200 L (weight 142 kg)
FUEL CONSUMPTION:	23-25 kg/h (5.9 hours flight time)
MOTOR LIFE:	400 h

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEED:	152 km/h
CRUISE SPEED:	110 km/h
RANGE:	630 km
SERVICE CEILING:	3,000 m
RATE OF CLIMB:	2.78 m/s
WING LOADING:	41 kg/m ²
POWER/MASS:	60 W/kg

ARMAMENT

GUNS:	One 7.62 mm ShKAS machine gun
BOMBS:	Six 50 kg bombs

BITS

ELECTRICAL

Magneto coil, magneto drive gear on crank shaft, distributor and distributor block, collector spool, interrupter, primary and secondary circuit, condenser, spark plug

STRUCTURAL

Flying wires, Interplane struts (spruce/ash), Upper wing, Lower wing, fuselage, empennage, tailplane, Vertical stabilizer / rudder, Horizontal stabilizers / elevators, Landing gear, box truss, longerons, stringers, frames/ribs, spar

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LETTERS FROM HOME

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REGIMENTAL POLITRUKS

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Teos Abadia, Robert Abrazado, Mike Addison, Chrystal Andros, Ano, Anterobot, Ara, Arc Dream Publishing, Peter Aronson, Misha B, D B, Tracy Barnett, John Bartley K7AAY, Paul Beakley, Madeline Bernard, Dave Bickerstaff, Jason Owen Black, Cameron Blackwood, Ed Blair, Andi Blija, S. Hutson Blount, Noah Bogart, Claus Bornich, Sean Bouchard, Bruno Boulandet, Arthur William Breon III, Steph Brochu, Christopher Bryan, Robert Burson, Andrew Butcher, Jac & Baz Cadwgan, Gerald Cameron, Damian Caruana, Matt Cashman, Dan Cetorelli, Danielle Church, Antonio Coelho, Charles Coleman, Carl “everbigger” Collins, Graeme Comyn, Rafael Cordero, Rowan Crawford, Bill Creasey, Yoshi Creelman, Chris Czerniak, Mikael Dahl, DeWitt Davis, Yohann Delalande, Jodi “The Costumed Jewel” Delaney, Steven desJardins, Juliusz Doboszewski, Stuart Dollar, Xavier Doolittle, Clinton Dreisbach, Andriev Drovosek, Dave Dubin, Cyril Modred Dugarcein, Nick Eden, Ron Edwards, Julia B. Ellingboe, Scott Elliott, Kurt Ellison, Will Emigh, Richard Emms, Katherine Fackrell, Toby Fagence, Corrie Fahl, Daniel Fidelman, Keegan Fink, Kristin Firth, Walter Floth, Gabriel Frank, Dana Fried, Jamie Fristrom, Jennifer Fuss, Martin Gallo, Geek Chic, William Gerke, Ian Glascock, Thiago Goncalves, Cat Goodfellow, Axel Gotteland, Derek Gour, Kerri-Leigh Grady, Stephen Graham, D. Graham, Phredd Groves, Jack Gulick, Ville Halonen, Laura Hamilton, K. Handy, Phil Hanley, Pat Harrigan, Nathan “_nthdegree” Harrison, Seth Hartley, Eric Hartman, Matthew Haulman, Matthew Hayes, Ross Hendry, Katherine Hill, Stephen Holowczyk, Aithi Hong, David Humphreys, Pete Hurley, Paul Imboden, Inveighed, Ariel Jaffee, Ed Johns, Karl the Good, Judd Karlman, Isaac “Supercool” Kelley, John Kelly, John Kennedy, Andrew Kenrick, Matthew Klein, Jonathan Korman, Brian P. Kurtz, Eric John Kuzniar, Michael Kwan, Kit La Touche, Jason Larke, Jérôme Larré, Gareth Lazelle, Phil Lewis, Siqi Li, Tobias Lidman, Matthew Lind, Lars-Inge Lindbom, Basil Lisk, Jay Loomis, Christina Lorang, Jason Lutes, Esther MacCallum-Stewart, B. Manderino, David Mandeville, Brian Markham, Arkhip Matusov, Alex Mayo, Ralph Mazza, Mandy McCrone, Avery Mcdaldno, Megan McDonald, Anna McDuff, Kurt McMahan, Johnstone Metzger, Jerry

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