

MYTHIC RUSSIA

HEROISM AND ADVENTURE IN THE LAND OF THE FIREBIRD



A COMPLETE ROLEPLAYING GAME FOR PLAY IN A MYTHICAL OR HISTORICAL MEDIEVAL WORLD, USING THE HEROQUEST GAME ENGINE



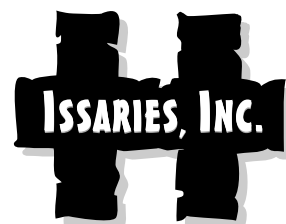
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HEROISM AND ADVENTURE IN
THE LAND OF THE FIREBIRD



FIREBIRD PRODUCTIONS

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MYTHIC RUSSIA

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I. WELCOME TO MYTHIC RUSSIA!

“Nothing is impossible in Russia.”

“Once upon a time, not long ago but not recently, in a land not far away, but not near...” So begin many of the oldest folktales of Russia. A land of icy winters and fiery passions, where the warrior who was trying to split you in half with his axe an hour ago may be swearing eternal friendship in an hour’s time (a jug or two of vodka might help).

A land just now throwing off Mongol rule and yet still not a country in its own right, in which princes scheme and bicker as they seek to make themselves tsar.

A land torn between the new teachings of Christianity and the old, pagan ways of the wilds and the household spirit.

A land where saints walk the day and mighty spirits of the forest walk the night, where the fish you catch may offer you three wishes for its life and the twinkle of light in the night might be the Firebird himself, leading lost children back home, or a stray moonbeam shining off the iron teeth of Baba Yaga, the man-eating witch.

A land of deep, dark woods, in which humanity has still made few inroads, huddled in towns and around campfires in clearings and along rivers.

A land of legend and folktale, history and myth, of triumph and tragedy.

A land ready for adventure.



Alyosha Popovich is one of the bogatyr, the great heroes of Russian tradition. He is a cheerful and adventurous Christian warrior, deadly with spear and sword and always ready for action. Just don’t, some unkind souls will say, trust him with your back or your wife...

LAND OF THE FIREBIRD

It is the 1380s, and Russia is in the midst of a painful, violent and dangerous birth. After all, ‘Russia’ as a country does not really exist, it is more a geographic region defined by a broadly common language and culture. The Rus’ themselves are products of the arrival of Viking traders, raiders and conquerors 500 years ago. Some carved themselves their own princedoms, married members of the scattered local Slavic tribes and over the years rulers and ruled combined to form a common people sharing characteristics of both cultures.

The Tatar Yoke

Some 150 years ago, the **Mongols** (or Tatars) swept across the principalities of the Rus’ – an irresistible,

WHAT IS HEROQUEST?

Mythic Russia is the first separate game licensed by Issaries, Inc. to use the superb and infinitely-scaleable *HeroQuest* game engine, originally developed by Robin Laws for play in Greg Stafford’s richly-detailed fantasy world of Glorantha and then expanded into a generic game engine as *HeroQuest 2*. The games are entirely compatible, although in some cases there are optional rules in **Mythic Russia** to reflect distinctive aspects of the setting or different underlying assumptions. Especially noteworthy changes from the original *HeroQuest* are highlighted under the **Other Heroes, Other Quests** rubric.



alien host convinced that the whole world was their rightful dominion. Some Rus' tried to fight, but in vain: the Mongols even laid waste to the great city of Kiev. Instead, the Rus' learnt the wisdom of surrender and cooperation. After all, the Mongols were conquerors rather than imperial administrators. They had no interest in the detail of government, happy to leave that to subject princes, so long as they acknowledged the authority of the Great Khan and paid their tribute in silver and humiliation.

The Daniilovich dynasty of a small, upstart city called Moscow proved to be the greatest beneficiaries of the 'Tatar Yoke.' They grew in power and wealth as the Mongols' most ruthless and effective vassals. But Mongol power and unity is waning and **Prince Dmitri of Moscow** has been cunning enough to see that it is time to turn against them and re-invent himself as the champion of a new, reborn Russia – under his rule. In 1380, a combined Rus' force broke the forces of Tatar Khan Mamai at **Kulikovo Field**.

After Kulikovo

Kulikovo is just the beginning. Russia is a land of feuding principalities and one victory will not break the power of the Tatars. Besides, many Russians happy to support Dmitri against the Mongols may not do so again as it becomes known that he even seeks that title no other prince has ever attained: **tsar**, 'emperor.'

So it is an era of danger and opportunity. Heroes, schemers, patriots and turncoats join the complex and often murderous internal politics of the Rus'. Entrepreneurs grow rich on trading opportunities and storytellers spread news, myth and gossip. This is also a time of social and religious turmoil. The Rus' practice *duoverie*, 'twin faiths,' blending pagan ways with Christianity, but this is being challenged by different, less inclusive Churches both to the south (the Greek Orthodox hierarchy in Constantinople) and Europe (the Roman Church).

A TALE OF THREE CITIES, AND THREE RUSSIAS

In many ways, there are three Russias. **Urban Russia** is focused around small, wood-built, walled towns and cities. Many have their own prince, ruling from a central fortress, called a *kremlin*. Some are independent, others vassals of the princes of other, larger cities. Although this is becoming less common, princes still often move from city to city, appointed by their overlords or even recruited by local elites who need a new 'chief executive'. Thus, there is a 'career progression' as able and ambitious princes move from smaller, poorer cities to the more desirable ones.

Three cities dominate Russia. **Kiev** was once greatest, but was smashed by the Mongols. While still important, it is now a melancholy place, haunted by ghosts of its glorious past. Its people are known for their honour, devotion to Christianity and pride in their heritage. The

northern city-state of **Novgorod** was founded on trade and exploration, with connections to the advanced societies of northern Europe and huge territories across northern Siberia: cosmopolitan, entrepreneurial, even democratic in its own way. But the rising power is **Moscow**, brooding home of a new dynasty determined to 'gather all the Russias' under its rule. By extending its control over more and more cities and regions, Moscow's power has grown dramatically under the Daniiloviches, and their city is now awash with new money, adventurers, plotters, spies and mercenaries.

Most people, though, live in **rural Russia**, in small villages and homesteads scattered across this vast land. Life is a struggle, and the community must work together to survive, so these are close-knit, conservative little societies.

Then there is the *pustinya*, the **wilderness**. This is the real Russia: not town, nor village; not cultivated, nor yet mapped or tracked. A land of rolling steppes to the south, deep woods in the centre and the swampy pine forests known as taiga to the north. A man can travel for weeks through the forest without meeting a fellow human. Tracks are few and Russia's broad, slow rivers are the main routes for trade and traffic. This is the dark heart of magical Russia, a place where wolves talk, where falling into a river may take you into the palace of the Water Tsar and where the shadow flitting across the face of the moon might be Baba Yaga in her flying pestle...

THE PEOPLE OF MYTHIC RUSSIA

The **RUSSIANS** themselves are at once suspicious and selfish, open and generous. Despite a hard life in difficult times, the Russian's hospitality is remarkable. At the same time, he is a wily character, always looking for some new opportunity to advance his cause or look after his community. Precisely because life is so often so short and hard, Russians are passionate and emotional.

The Russian is superstitious, and rightfully so. He lives surrounded by dark and mysterious lands and his life is at the mercy of capricious forces he cannot control, from the winter to invading foreigners. So he is sensible and covers his bets, leaving out some bread and vodka for the *domovoi*, the household spirit, praying to the Christian saints and giving offerings to the pagan gods. You can never have too much divine protection, after all!

To the west are nations which the Russians view rightly with distrust, as well as a degree of envy. Fourteenth-century **EUROPE** is dominated by the Catholic faith and more advanced and settled, with the first lights of the Renaissance beginning to shine in distant Italy. There are Europeans in Russia, but few, typically specialists and adventurers: merchants, mercenaries, artists, architects, exiles and renegades. Most threatening are the **TEUTONIC KNIGHTS**, an uncompromising crusading Catholic order based in Germany and the Baltic region. Devoted to crushing the Russian Orthodox Church –

which they regard as heretical – they are a constant threat to northern and western Russia. The only mercy from the Russians' point of view is that they are equally hostile to the pagan **LITHUANIANS**, who would otherwise pose a threat to Russia in their own right. There could certainly scarcely be a greater contrast: where the Teutonic Knights are dour and disciplined, the Lithuanians are a passionate and argumentative collection of tribes more than a nation.

The southern fringes of Russia are home to the **COSSACKS**, hardy horsemen and mercenary warrior-farmers made up of a motley collection of runaway peasants, Mongol deserters and outcasts seeking a new life and a new freedom.

Further south is the great metropolis the Russians call 'Tsar-Grad,' 'Emperor-City.' This is gleaming **CONSTANTINOPLE**, capital of the Byzantine Empire. It is in decline, sacked by Christian crusaders and under growing pressure from Islam. For all that, it is still larger, richer and more impressive than Moscow, Kiev and Novgorod put together. Its people, whom the Rus' call Greeks, are proud and learned, and this is also a melting pot and trade centre with no equal.

East of Russia stretch the tundra and taiga of Siberia, inhospitable but often starkly beautiful. In the winter, they can become so murderously cold that a man can freeze to death in an hour. However, summers can, to the south, at least, be warm at best, stickily hot at worse, the air thick with clouds of mosquitoes that can kill an unprotected man almost as quickly as the winter chill! This is home to scattered tribes of hardy primitives, spirit-worshipping hunter-gatherers, whom the Rus' label collectively as the **SIBIRYAKS**. The Rus' trade with them for furs, and Novgorod has seized many of their lands, but otherwise contact between them is minimal.

The other eastern peoples are the **MONGOLS**. Really a continent-wide confederation of nomad peoples, they were forged together by Genghis Khan 200 years ago and unleashed on a seemingly unstoppable westward mission of conquest. The Russians who resisted died, and the survivors soon learned to accommodate themselves to the 'Tatar Yoke'. It was only Genghis Khan's death that saved western Europe from conquest, but since then, Russia has been loosely dominated by the Golden Horde. It is now in decline, threatened by a new and vigorous confederation from the east, but is still the most powerful single force in the region. The Mongols are still close to their nomad roots: a tough, relentless people, master horsemen and archers.



A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

To be honest, this book presumes that you already have some idea of what roleplaying is, even if the rules are new to you. In short, roleplaying is a form of entertainment in which the players tell a collective story: you gather with a group of other players and by talking, and every now and then rolling some dice, together you create an unpredictable adventure story featuring the heroes you have created, all set in **Mythic Russia**.

This is thus a story-telling game, with emphasis on plot, personality, and consequences instead of numbers, charts, and detailed spell lists. Play focuses on the story as the centre of action, not the rules. Players only use dice to create and resolve uncertainty in moments of crisis or drama.

One person takes the role of the **narrator** who plays a wide array of narrator characters – everyone except the player heroes. The narrator also plays the world – tells what the weather is, how steep a mountain is, how



suspicious a person seems, and so on. Her job (purely for the sake of clarity, in this book 'she' refers to the narrator, 'he' to other players) is to place limits on the heroes, confronting them with entertaining challenges as they try to accomplish their goals. Some game groups have one narrator who runs all the games; others may rotate the position, allowing everyone a chance to play and to narrate.

Everyone else plays an imaginary character, one of the heroes whose actions together shape the story. Your hero is your persona in **Mythic Russia**. You determine what your hero is like, how he interacts with others, and what he or she does when confronting new dangers and mysteries.

Individual stories are referred to as adventures or scenarios. A series of adventures sharing heroes and other plot elements is called a campaign.

To play, talk and describe what your hero is doing; say what your hero says. **Mythic Russia** is a talking game, not a numbers game. Most of the time players just say what their hero does (or tries to do). In cases where failure is possible, the narrator decides how difficult the act is, she and the player each roll a die to determine relative success or failure, and the narrator describes the results with the player's help. Then the game and story go on.

The First Rule: Play the Story, Not the Rules

The focus of **Mythic Russia** is the story, not the rules. Nothing destroys the pacing and emotional intensity of a story quicker than a pause to look up rules or special cases. Let your hero and his goals direct the story, and turn to the rules only when his actions or desires conflict with someone or something else.

IS THIS HISTORY?



No; or at least not strictly speaking. While this is a game of fantasy, it is rooted in Russia's history and how the Russians themselves saw their world. However, it does not pretend to complete historical accuracy: there are the major differences such as the inclusion of magic but also minor liberties taken with reality, such as the inclusion of such characteristically Russian elements as vodka and

Cossacks, even though they were not present at the time the game is putatively set, the 1380s.

There is a great deal of background material in this book – although there could have been much more! For some people, this will be one of the reasons why they bought this book, but others may find it off-putting. The fact is that a game of **Mythic Russia** is not a course in Russian history, here are no mid-terms and no required homework. The background material is in this book to support those who want it, and different styles of play. After all – as will be discussed in the **NARRATING**

chapter – there are all sorts of gamers and also different types of game which can be run. Some may want an essentially historical game in which the role of magic is minimised or even removed, while others may enjoy a freewheeling, fairy-tale style of play, in which most adventures take place in the Otherworlds or in a Russia drawn in very broad strokes and bright colours, where every city has its onion-domed churches and every village its wise woman. Sections under the **History Lessons** title highlight particular points of interest or divergence from the reality.





2. VOICES OF MYTHIC RUSSIA

“The wise man knows his place.”

Come closer! How better to begin to learn about the world of **Mythic Russia** than from the lips of some of those who live in it: a peasant, a successful townswoman, a minor boyar (aristocrat) and an outsider?

A PEASANT'S TALE

Life is hard, boy, but it could be worse. Think of what we have. Look around you at our family's *izba*: the wooden walls are sound and the stove has a flat top, so some of us can sleep on it during those cold winter nights. I built this hut, and your father the new stove; family's important, you see. But even a good family needs all the help it can get, which is why in the 'beautiful corner' we have not just the wooden icon of St Gleb your brother bought back from Suzdal but also a statue of Perun your great-grandfather carved, a lucky straw man and the wooden bowl into which we slosh some milk, *kvass* or even vodka when we want to make an offering to the household spirit.

We know what's important, and that's why I'm on the village elder's council. Don't pull that face: it's thanks to old goats like me that we don't have a lord's man here in our own village, and that when the tax collectors come from Suzdal, we know all the tricks, from burying the spare grain in the forest to making sure it's the prettiest girls in the village who greet them with bread and salt. That's why we could afford to build our church, and the little jetty on the river. That's why there are dozens of families living here, and we have a road between the square and the jetty, paved with logs. Sure, in the thaw after the One Year Freeze, the logs sank into the mud and we had to cover them with a new layer, but the next time that'll need to be done, it'll be your sons cutting and lifting, thanks to God! You've not travelled out of this village yet, but you'll soon see there are places a lot worse. Villages which are just a handful of huts in a clearing; villages where everything rests on one mangy horse, and when that dies, they better try to steal another or else they won't live through the next bad winter; villages where the landlord lives next door.

So you just count your blessings, boy.

A TOWNSWOMAN'S TALE

Look at this! Have you ever seen the like? Silk, all the way from far, far China, beyond even the empire of the Mongols, and fit for the fairest maiden's headscarf. Something for the man? No soldier off to serve his prince would look anything less than fine in this cloak, trimmed in the choicest mink fur, hunted by Sibiriyaks and brought here only last week by traders from Novgorod. I've got it all here: rings set with glittering turquoise, linens and leathers, plain cloth tunics for your slaves and heavy coats embroidered in the old style for your grandmother...

Oh, I can see you looking at me, wondering what I'm doing as a trader. That's the beauty of living in a town. More often than not, the highborn boyars keep their women locked away and under guard, while in the villages, women's work means backbreaking labour in the day, putting up with being pawed by a drunken peasant by night. Here, though, I can be my own mistress. I started with a barrow in the market, and now I have this shop, with a room behind it all my own. I have some silver, too, and more to the point, I have respect. That's what money means, you know: a place, a voice. Why, in Novgorod they even have a woman



mayor!

A BOYAR'S TALE

They think I have it so good. Well, I suppose I do. During the winter, I stay here in Vladimir. My house is new, only three generations old, and I enjoy the banquets we hold, closing the cold outside world away behind doors and shutters, while we live in a circle of roaring fires, hot meals and loud toasts. The summers get hot, though, and the city stinks, so I tend to spend them in the country, hunting, hawking and looking over my lands, making sure the stewards, tax collectors and petty gentry don't steal more than they ought.



But everything is getting complicated. Give the Tatars their due: a murderous bunch, demons in the saddle, but in the old days, we knew just where we were. So long as a prince had made the journey to Sarai, cozened the Great Khan with some sacks of silver and promises of more and received the patent to rule in his name, then they really didn't care what you did. Show respect any time one of the bastards passed by, keep the peasants quiet and the taxes paid and you had a free hand. Now the Golden Horde is in trouble, and we all followed Dmitri of Moscow to give Mamai a beating at the battle of Kulikovo. I even went along with my *druzhina*, my armed retainers, instead of just sending them off to do the fighting. The trouble is that we all know the Golden Horde isn't really beat and will be back – and meanwhile we've now got a bastard of our own in Dmitri. The princes of Moscow were always the Mongols' closest allies amongst the Rus' and while they've now turned on

them, there's something of the Tatar about them still: ruthless, dangerous and out for power.

Why should I care? I'm not a political man, but my bloodline is important, and it's clear Dmitri is looking to bring all the principalities under his control, even make himself the first tsar, emperor, Russia's ever had. There's talk of knife-point alliances, of subtle poisons and subtler schemes. How can I persuade them that I can be easily bought and even more easily intimidated?

A FOREIGNER'S TALE

They thought I was mad to come to Russia. But there's something about this place, something that creeps into your bones like the cold on a still winter night, something that won't leave you, like a cloud of mosquitoes on a sticky summer afternoon. It's a land of contradictions. The people are blunt and crude, but they can be as sly as a Venetian courtier and ruthless as a Milanese banker. Many are plain and heavy-set, but then you'll see the haughty profile of some well-bred princess under her veils, lines as elegant as you'll see walking down the Borgo degli Albizi in Firenze. They fear we Europeans, they resent our Pope, but at the same time they desperately want to be like us. So now I build houses for boyars and gentry who want to pretend that they have Italian villas, even though they wouldn't dream of setting foot outside their ramshackle country.

But this is a time of change, of opportunity. I felt it back in Italia, in the bubbling ferment of ideas, of art, of culture they call the Renaissance. Here it is more brutal, more primal. The prince of Moscow has fought off the Mongoli, and dreams of an empire of his own. Of the other princes, some hate him, some fear him, some serve him (and some do all three). The priests claim God has sent him, while they call him a devil behind his back. The ordinary Russians just keep their heads down, because they know that when a prince talks about greatness, it will be their grain that pays for it, their blood that buys it. But for someone like me, someone with a skill to sell and a nose for an opportunity, this is all good. Greatness needs its monuments, and for those you need, well, someone like me.

3. YOUR HERO

“It is braver to live than to die.”

As a player, creating a hero is one of the most important aspects of the game. While your hero will develop and change over time, your initial creation sets the tone of your gaming alter ego. Be imaginative and also responsible: try to create a hero that will be fun to play and interesting for both you and the other players rather than just squeeze every

advantage you can out of the system. Your game alter ego is an extraordinary individual, capable of becoming one of the great movers and shakers of **Mythic Russia** — a hero, and destined for fame. Create a character ready to be a hero, one you look forward to playing, but also one who is likeable or admirable in some way to the other players.

CHARACTER CREATION

Your hero is defined by traits, which can be anything from skills and magical powers to relationships and even flaws, each of which has a numerical rating, generally from 13 upwards, indicating how significant it is to the game. The numbers go up to 20 and then restart as 1m (‘one mastery’) and then 2m, 3m and so on until 20m, after which comes 1m2 (‘one mastery two’) etc. Generally, a rating of 1m is something you are good at,

such as the core skills of your job, 1m2 shows the kind of ability that everyone in the village respects, while 1m3 is a talent famed across the land. Although there are some standard abilities a hero gains from particular *keywords* (broad groups linked to a particular culture, job or faith), there is no set list of abilities. Part of the fun is coming up with your own!





The basic way of creating a hero is the Narrative Method: write a 100- or fewer word description of your hero, including abilities, background, and goals, as discussed later.

Most heroes will start the game with three or more **Keywords**, initial descriptors which set out his background knowledge and attitudes: **Homeland** (“where do I come from?” – reflecting their native culture, such as Novgorodian Rus’ or Mongol), **Occupational** (“what do I do?” – Merchant, Warrior, Healer, etc) and **Magic** (“in what do I believe?” – such as membership of a Church or a relationship with a spirit).

CHARACTER CREATION TIPS

Cooperation

More will be said later in the book about the way that **Mythic Russia** is intended as a game of cooperative creation between players and narrators. However, at this point it is worth suggesting that before creating characters, the players and narrator ought to talk a little about the kind of games they plan to play. Sometimes this will be as straightforward as the narrator telling them ‘it’s going to be a campaign built around the efforts of a bunch of old-school Russian pagans to resist Christian encroachment into their region’ and the players creating their characters accordingly. However, it is often best for this to be a collaborative process so that everyone feels fully engaged. For example, the narrator’s chapter describes different styles of **Mythic Russia** campaign, including those based around various forms of Russian folklore, from the superheroics of the *byliny* (Russian stories about larger-than-life cultural heroes) to a more grittily historical play through to following the conventions of fairytales. Characters developed for one might well seem out of place in another and although that doesn’t make them *wrong* at least the layer ought to know if he is going to be playing such an anomaly.

Likewise, some of the most meaningful and affecting games are based not around some story into which the narrator has decided to throw the heroes but on the characters’ own conflicts and ambitions. When creating characters, players would be well advised to think in terms of creating such seeds of future play, including credible relationships (not least, between the heroes: just what do they have in common, why are they together?) and a mix of short- and long-term ambitions which will help drive play.

Sympathy

Heroes of myth and folklore often have one thing in common: even though they might be deeply flawed in one way or another, the audience is sympathetic to them. In a roleplaying game, your audience is your narrator and your fellow players. See to it that your hero is likeable or admirable in some way. If you do, you will find that your hero has a longer life span. No character is

guaranteed to live forever, but if everyone likes your hero and enjoys having him in the game the narrator will be more likely to act in his favour to keep him around when the chips are down. Likewise, other players will be more likely to risk the well being of their heroes in order to rescue yours when he gets into trouble. If your hero is a creep, they will be happy to see him meet his final reward. They might even participate in his downfall!

Indispensability

If you create as unique a hero as possible, your narrator and fellow players will likewise contrive to keep him alive. Maybe your hero has some ability or status that makes him central to the continuing story line of your series. Maybe he is just plain entertaining. Either way you have made him indispensable, which is a useful technique in roleplaying games.

On the other hand, if your hero is an uninspired, run-of-the-mill creation, or if you tend to play the same hero every time, regardless of his abilities or hero description, neither narrator nor players will care much when he bites the dust. They will expect you to create another one just like him anyway.

Ambiguous References

Depth and wonder in the world background comes from the references to things that will either get described later, or left as a hook on which the reader can hang their own imagination. When creating heroes, it is often fun and effective to use this approach.

More practically, sometimes an ambiguous but poetic phrase can get you more than a precise but prosaic one. **Mythic Russia** is a land of fantasy and wonder, so the more evocative your description, the better. This is particularly true of supernatural abilities, which are open to a number of possible interpretations. You might have only a vague idea of what a phrase means when the

Example: Dry-Eyed Raisa

Raisa Ivanovna Konev has been known as Dry-Eyed Raisa since she shed her last tear when the Mongols killed her father Ivan, prince of Suzdal. When fleeing Suzdal she did nonetheless salvage, her player decides, an ancestral heirloom, the *Crown of Night*. Her player, Carrie, doesn’t know what this is, but thinks it sounds good. Later on, when Raisa is trying to sneak past Mongol pickets at dusk, she decides that it makes her invisible at night. Sophie, the narrator, gives the classic narrator’s answer: ‘yes, but.’ Yes, it does, but she may still make her presence known through sound and smell, and magical senses may penetrate the magic (in other words, she may have to pit the crown’s rating against an observer’s *Keen Senses* or the like). In a future adventure, she is attacked by Midnight Spirits, and Carrie suggests that the crown might allow her instead to command them, and again the narrator agrees.





hero begins his career, waiting for an appropriate moment in the course of play to propose an exact meaning for your intriguing and ambiguous reference. In this sense, all ambiguous references act like the Quick Start option of character creation, allowing you to delay making a decision until it is to your advantage to do so.

DESCRIBING YOUR HERO

Whichever character generation method you use, consider the following elements:

Name: Give your hero a name, based on his or her culture.

Appearance: How would you describe your hero to the other players in your group, or to another player's hero? You might also include how others perceive your hero: he may think he is dashing or handsome, but those who know him well might disagree. Finally, do not neglect the symbolic ways character is expressed. Let the fact that Heinrich von Zeier is a devoted knight of the Teutonic Order also show in his dour expression, his simple clothes and his habit of spending every night before setting off on a journey in prayer.

Background: Is your hero from a city or a farm? Are his parents still alive, or any siblings? What childhood events shaped his life and outlook?

Goals: What is your hero's main goal in life? You might decide his lifelong dream is to find a wife, buy a farm, and settle down to a leisurely life of breeding horses. On the other hand, you may decide that you want your hero to end up at the top of his profession or die gloriously in battle. You might tend towards loftier goals, such as driving the Mongols from Russia, or bringing the Roman Church to Moscow. Emulate or even surpass the heroes of old. Also, keep in mind that your hero is not a cardboard cutout — he should change and grow during play. If your hero's goals change over time, be sure to add to or amend your hero's description.

Homeland: A hero's goals, background, and appearance are of course coloured by his homeland and its beliefs. Where is he from?

Occupation: Occupations are as numerous as cultures: what does he do? Is this just a job, or a true vocation?

Faith and Magic: Most of the time, your hero will be able to choose from several religious options based upon his homeland and occupation. He may also have unique stand-alone magical abilities, as described below.

Abilities: Abilities are the things your hero does well, generally divided between mundane abilities (anything from skills to physical attributes) and magical ones (described below). His abilities depend in part on his keywords, as well as his background. Information on using and improving abilities is covered in detail in the **CORE RULES** chapter.

Personality: Primarily behaviour and emotions, personality traits are normally used to enhance other abilities, but your narrator may ask you to roll against a

trait directly. Note that most occupations have one or more personality traits that are common among members, and that most deities expect their worshippers to exhibit specific behaviours.

Wealth: Background and occupation generally determine your hero's economic resources, but your hero might be significantly wealthier (or poorer) than one would expect for his occupation. This is not just, or even mainly, about how many silver coins you have in your pocket: it could just as easily reflect whether you have good credit with the local money-lenders or hold ancestral lands which provide you with a steady income.

Relationships: True loners are rare, and while more relationships are likely to be formed during game play, most heroes will start with several. These can be positive (friends, those he loves, communities of which he is a member and so forth) or negative (mortal enemies, bitter ex-partners, the bully he fears). Does your hero have any children or family members to support, or a special someone in his life, or perhaps an archenemy or rival? The higher the ability rating of a relationship, the stronger it is and the greater bearing it will have on your hero. See the chapter **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS** for more on this.

Magical Abilities: Some heroes will have natural magics, an expression of personal power or fortunate blessing of birth or fate, while others draw on the magics provided by gods, saints or spirits as well or instead. Each religious keyword confers a number of magical abilities on its worshippers.

Special and Magical Items: Consider giving your hero an unusual item (magical or otherwise) to help set him apart from others. Your hero might not just ride a horse, but own a specially-trained horse that does tricks or comes when called. Extra equipment, amulets, souvenirs of past expeditions, ancestral heirlooms, or even a boat which folds into a small enough shape to fit into your pocket — list them all under special items.

Flaws: Add colour and believability to your hero and include a flaw or two: irritable in the morning, lazy, overconfident, nearsighted, perhaps even cowardly. Keep in mind that flaws can be personality traits, physical or mental defects, or even harmful relationships. *Hated by the Prince of Moscow* is undoubtedly a flaw!

Ability Ratings: Do not bother describing the level of your hero's abilities, because the game system determines that for you. Thus, whether your hero is a warrior or a master swordsman, his beginning ability rating with his weapons is 17, regardless.

BACKSTORY

Some players like to write much more than one hundred words about their heroes. This helps them find the essence of their heroes. Backstories are not essential to the game, and a narrator should never force her players to write one.





last one for emphasis or rhythmic effect, but not simply to squeeze in more cool things your hero can do.

The 100-word limit encourages you to keep your hero simple. It also

Example: Oleg Birch-Tall (1)

James composes a narrative about his hero:

Oleg Birch-Tall is a veteran captain of the Novgorod militia, as deadly with his Silver Biting Axe as bow, named for his height and distinctive silver hair. Though a loyal soldier, devoted to militant St Moris, he yearns to see the cities of the south of which he has heard so much, even distant Tsargrad. He has saved his silver, bought a magical horse and hired a groom, but though he fears nothing in battle he will not set out until his has convinced his childhood friend Sasha Mikhailovich to join him.

‘That’s 92,’ says James. ‘I’m saving some for later.’ The narrator, Sophie, points out that it is actually only 87, because proper names (Oleg Birch-Tall, Silver Biting Axe, St Moris, Sasha Mikhailovich) only count as one word each.

You can use the backstory to explain where the hero got certain abilities, or to justify the purchase of abilities between sessions. The hero description gives the current condition of the character; the backstory explains how he got that way.

At the end of each episode, check to see how much of your material has actually been heard by the other participants. Turn this to your advantage by choosing a part of the backstory to focus on before each episode and trying to work it into the story, taking one element of your backstory and making it part of the present story, the one everyone is telling together.

CREATING THE CHARACTER

Having come up with some general notion of your hero, you then write a short description of your hero. This must be kept to 100 words, and include all his personal information and abilities. (Note that any proper name counts as a single word.) Rather than a list of abilities or his entire life history, this should be a short narrative sketch outlining what he does, is part of, and feels.

You should include the following in your narrative:

- Personal Information
- Keywords
- Your hero’s other important abilities, followers, and special possessions. See **Abilities** for common ability types, but note that you cannot specify more than one **sidekick** in your narrative.

Compose your description in complete, grammatical sentences. No lists of abilities; no sentence fragments. Your narrator may choose to allow sentences like the

provides a challenge: the 100 words you choose will determine all your hero’s starting capabilities. Don’t bother describing how good your hero is, since such words do not affect his ability ratings.

Not everything in your description needs to pertain to a helpful ability. You may want to describe flaws that disadvantage your hero and give him character, or tell about his past history or current situation. These choices may not make your hero more effective, but they give you some control over the course of the story. Your narrator will draw upon these elements to inspire plots during her campaign. You can also use them to seek inspiration or bonuses to specific situations.

You can save some words for later, allowing you to add additional abilities and relationships during play, but these need to be agreed by the narrator. We also encourage you to add to your hero’s narrative during play, reflecting important changes (such as to his goals).

FINISHING YOUR NARRATIVE

Once your narrative is finished, you need to convert the description into a set of abilities. Mark any keywords with double underlines. Mark any other word or phrase that could be an ability with a single underline. Then write these keywords and abilities on your character sheet.

There is no limit to the number of abilities you can gain from a single sentence, as long as the sentence is not just a list of abilities. If your narrator decides a sentence is just a list, she may allow you the first two abilities, or she may tell you to rewrite the sentence. Note, however, that you cannot specify more than one sidekick in your narrative, and the number of religious keywords at



Example: Oleg Birch-Tall (2)

Oleg Birch-Tall is a veteran captain of the Novgorod militia, as deadly with his Silver Biting Axe as bow, named for his height and distinctive silver hair. Though a loyal soldier, devoted to militant St Moris, he yearns to see the cities of the south of which he has heard so much, even distant Tsargrad. He has saved his silver, bought a magical horse and hired a groom, but though he fears nothing in battle he will not set out until his has convinced his childhood friend Sasha Mikhailovich to join him.

Novgorod indicates his homeland.

Militia indicates that his occupation is as a Foot Soldier.

Devoted to St Moris indicates a magic keyword.

What else can be derived from the narrative?

Veteran Captain could be taken as a single ability, or else perhaps unpacked into a couple, such as *Experienced Soldier* and *Lead Troops*, and he has the relationship *Captain of the Novgorod Militia*. It is always better to give a relationship a nuance or definition, so perhaps this could be *Well-Respected Captain of the Novgorod Militia* – though of course, as a veteran, it could just as easily be *Captain of the Novgorod Militia (who think he's past his best)*. He obviously has *Axe Fighting* and *Archery* as well as a unique magical *Silver Biting Axe*. He is also *Tall* with *Distinctive Looks*. He has the character trait *Loyal to Novgorod* (although again this could instead be taken as both a generic *Loyal* and a relationship *To Novgorod*). He obviously has the trait *Wants to Travel* or *Wants to See Byzantium* (which the Russians call Tsargrad, 'Emperor-City'), and he has the skill *Knowledge of Byzantium*. The reference to his having *saved his silver* will increase his *Wealth* by one level (this is discussed later), and he also has a *magical horse* and a *follower: groom*.

The groom will be noted on his character sheet as a follower (hopefully with a name), and also as a relationship such as *Stern Master of Groom* or whatever James thinks best captures the interaction between captain and servant. Oleg is *Fearless in Battle* but also seems to have the flaw *Dependent on Sasha Mikhailov*. And who is Sasha? Another player hero, or perhaps an ally?

All told, then, the narrative has thrown up three keywords and almost twenty further abilities, items and characteristics over and above those which will be derived from the keywords.

Furthermore, there are all sorts of passions, ambitions and complexities, providing a wealth of hooks on which to hang future play. What if Novgorod needs him, will he still pursue his dream of seeing the glories of Byzantium? Is Sasha a good friend or a selfish soul happy to exploit Oleg to his own ends? And if the latter, what would it take for Oleg to see through him?

This is, of course, only one way of reading the narrative. The reference to his status as a veteran could be used to justify using the advanced experience rules, for example, just as the magical horse could just as easily be considered a sidekick or an ally instead. It is up to the player and narrator together to use the narrative to draw up the hero's abilities through mutual cooperation.

particular levels is limited by the amount of time you can devote to your religious duties: see **Magic**.

Assign Ability Ratings

Each ability starts at 17 beyond flaws, whose levels are determined by the player and narrator.

Next, distribute 20 points to improve the rating of any abilities you choose (not keywords), with no more than +10 going to any one. You may not use these points to add additional abilities; that is the role of the narrative. It costs 1 point to raise any ability by +1.

Optional Rule: Multiple References

You may decide that when a hero's keywords and narrative description mention the same ability more than once, instead of being 'wasted' they mean that the ability in question actually starts at a higher level. Increase the starting level by +1 from the base 17 for each such repetition.

Finally, go over your narrative with your narrator to finish filling out your character sheet.

Note that in some games, heroes may start with lower or higher initial ratings and/or a different number of additional points. For example, a narrator may want to run a good in which the heroes are all adolescents (in which case she may start abilities at 13 and only grant an extra 10 points, or perhaps even limit the number of words in the narrative to 50) or else experienced in the ways of the world (see **Advanced Experience**, in the **HERO POINTS** chapter).

OTHER CHARACTER CREATION METHODS

The narrative approach is recommended, but there are two optional alternatives. The List Method is similar, but uses Keywords and a list of ten additional abilities to describe the hero. Cautious players might wish to use the Quick Start option with either method and write in



descriptive phrases, abilities, and Keywords as they occur to you during game play.

The List Method

The list method is simple: just make a list of the attributes and abilities you want for your hero. Write the following on a piece of paper: his name and personal information, his keywords, 10 other important abilities, followers, and special possessions (see **Abilities** below for common ability types, but note that you cannot specify more than one sidekick in your list) and up to 3 **flaws** (see below) to give your hero personal obstacles and some character. Ability ratings and the like are calculated as for the Narrative Method.

The As-You-Go Method

You can create your hero 'as you go,' discovering things about him as they are needed. This is sometimes the best method if you are in a hurry, but ask your narrator first. Start with your hero's name, his goal (if you know it), one ability that is obvious to observers, and — if possible — a keyword. Decide whether you will use the narrative method or the list method as you develop your hero further. As play goes on, you add abilities until you reach your limit: all of your keywords; 100 words (for the narrative method) or a list of 10 abilities (for the list method); and a total of 20 points added to ability ratings. Creating your hero this way offers both freedom and danger. You can make your hero to suit your needs,

Example: Oleg Birch-Tall (3)

James notes down Oleg's three keywords: Novgorod, Foot Soldier (Regular) and Devotee of St Moris. He also writes down the abilities they provide (including three of St Moris's feats) and chooses those of the relationships and character traits he feels suit Oleg. Then he notes down the additional abilities, relationships, items and characteristics deriving from the narrative.

They all start at 17. Of his 20 additional points, he decides to spend 4 each on his *Axe Fighting* and *Archery* to bring them both to 17, 2 each on his *Tall* and *Magical Horse*, and fully 8 on his *Lead Troops*, to bring it to 57. Maybe he can work his way down south as a mercenary officer?

Sophie looks over his narrative and draft character sheet.

Sophie: 'OK, what does this magical horse do?'

James: 'He's fast. And smart.'

Sophie: 'Can he talk?'

James: 'Yes, sure, that would be fun.'

Sophie: 'Right, but then you'll have to make him a sidekick, at least. I'll let you have him as an additional sidekick to Sasha in this instance, even though usually you can only start with one.'

James: 'Sidekick, fine. That means he gets 3 abilities, then?'

Sophie: 'Yes: he automatically gets the standard abilities of a horse, and from what you've said he also has Talks, Clever and...?'

James: 'Sings.'

Sophie just gives him a look.

James: 'Sings Marching Songs.'

Sophie: 'O...K, Talks, Clever and Sings Marching Songs. They all start at 13 and you get 15 points to divide amongst any of his abilities. And give him a name. Now, what about the *Silver Biting Axe*?'

James: 'Its blade is burnished silver, and it has a phenomenally sharp edge.'

Sophie: 'It starts with a rating of 17. You can use this as an active ability but more often this will just give you a +2 augment when you are using it to chop through wood... or enemies. You can increase its rating later.'

James: 'What, so it gets more magical?'

Sophie: 'Could be. Or it could be that you just become more able to unlock its powers — you tell me.'

James: 'Cool.'

Sophie: 'I also see that you've decided to go for *Knowledge of the Cities of the South* rather than *Knowledge of Byzantium*. That's a bit broad, especially as your character isn't some scholar or travelling merchant. What I am going to do is make it an extra keyword, starting at 17. You can increase your knowledge of specific cities, but each must be increased independently.'



but you also give the narrator power to impose some discoveries upon him in return. You must also decide when you add an ability, whether to allocate to it any of your extra 20 points. You cannot, for example, decide that he has *Swimming* 17 and then, when he is washed

off the deck of his ship, put the extra points into it to make that 7!! All the rules and restrictions of the chosen character creation method apply normally to your hero.

ABILITIES

In **Mythic Russia**, ‘ability’ refers to any skill, power, personality trait, relationship, item, or other aspect of a hero that he might use to affect the course of the game: different kinds of abilities are discussed below. You decide what abilities your hero has: an ability name can be anything you want, subject only to narrator approval. You are not limited to the abilities in your keywords or mentioned somewhere else in this book. Your hero’s real character emerges when you decide how he is different from everyone else.

Each ability has a name (*Running*, *Brave*, *Follower of Prince Viktor*, etc) and rating (13, 20, etc). The name is a word or phrase that indicates the kinds of actions the hero can attempt with the ability. The rating is a number that follows the name and shows how good the hero is, the higher the number, the better.

BROADLY DEFINED ABILITIES

Sometimes players choose abilities that are extremely broad in their application. It is not fair to other players if one person uses *Move Quickly* in every circumstance, whether drawing a sword, swimming, or getting to the dinner table. If your hero has a broadly defined ability, the narrator may deal with it in any of several ways:

1. She may require you to **narrow** it down. *Move Quickly* might become *Run Fast*, for example.
2. She may apply **improvisational penalties** (see **CORE RULES**) every time it is used, so it remains broadly applicable, but is never as good, rating for rating, as a narrower ability. For example, a hero with *Move Quickly* 20 but suffering a -5 penalty, is generally going to be slower at drawing his weapons than one with *Quickdraw* 20.
3. She may rule that the ability is just another name for an **occupation**. In such a case, the player needs to decide what sort of hero he really wants to play, and modify his hero accordingly, changing either his occupation or the broadly defined ability. Thus, for example, *Versatile Musician* 17 might become *Entertainer* 17 (*Versatile Musician*) [keyword, with one specialty].
4. She may even treat it as a **keyword** (see below), and allow you to specify one or more abilities within it. As a keyword, it cannot be improved as such, but particular abilities within it can be. So, for example, *Move Quickly* 17 might become the *Move Quickly* keyword 17 (Quickdraw, Run Fast), and further experience could

later turn it into *Move Quickly* keyword 17 (Quickdraw +2, Run Fast).

KEYWORDS

A keyword is a character ‘template’ that includes a set of abilities (skills, magic, relationships, etc) that the hero picked up, has been taught, or which ‘everyone knows.’ If your hero has a keyword, he has all of the abilities detailed in it. Even abilities not listed in these rules under a keyword can be used at the keyword rating, if the narrator agrees. Your hero starts with several keywords.

Types of Keyword

A homeland keyword gives the name and native abilities of a particular culture or people. It answers the question, ‘Who are my people?’ For example, the ‘Greek’ keyword includes all the abilities a person from Constantinople has, such as *Elegant Speech*, *Byzantine Customs*, *Byzantine Geography*, and so on. This book provides various sample homelands. A hero can normally take only one homeland keyword.

An occupation keyword is the name of an occupation and the typical abilities of that job. It answers the question, ‘What do I do?’ The **KEYWORDS** chapter provides 14 basic occupations. A hero can generally take only one occupation keyword, although as ever there will be exceptions, which need to be approved by the narrator. Special magical occupations are described in the specialised magic chapters.

Every homeland includes one or more Faith keywords: a pantheon, Church or spirit-worshipping tradition. This answers the question, ‘In what do I believe?’ and is the normal religion(s) of that homeland, and unless a player says that his hero does not belong, it is assumed that he participates in its communal worship. In other words, he observes the main holy days and religious injunctions and attends worship services. Membership in a religion provides both benefits and obligations. Each such faith has a religion keyword that essentially adds on to the homeland keyword. The hero automatically gains the abilities in his homeland’s religion keyword. In some cases, there may be more than one available through a homeland, and the player must pick one.

However, beyond the generic Faith keywords, there are also more specialised Power keywords which represent commitment to particular aspects of a Faith, such as worship of a Christian saint or pagan god. Many heroes





have one or more of these magic keywords. They are written as the level of worship and the Power in question: *Devotee of St Vlas*, *Initiate of Stribog*, etc. A hero can take more than one magic keyword during character creation, but generally no more than one at devotee level and two at initiate level. Others may be added with the narrator's permission, and within the terms of the time constraints each requires. A hero created as a devotee also starts with three feats of his choice from those available under that Power's affinity (see **MAGIC**).

A keyword will occasionally require that you choose between two abilities – such as Know Forest Ways or Urban Survival – and you must choose one; you cannot have both as part of the keyword. Alternatively, it might have a term in [square brackets], such as [Favoured Weapon] Fighting. Simply add in the appropriate description, so it might become Axe & Shield Fighting, for example.

Using Keywords

You can often, especially at the start, simply use your Keyword to denote all the specific skills and abilities relating to it. Thus the Warrior keyword includes within it all the abilities a warrior has, like Scouting, Fighting, Endurance, Riding, Standing Guard, Sleeping in the Rough and so on. Your narrator can give you the details relevant to your homeland and occupation, but if you simply note down the Keywords with their ability numbers, your hero is assumed to have all the relevant abilities – you only need note the specific abilities if you begin to raise any of them above the overall Keyword level.

Keywords are as much as anything else a convenient way of denoting expertise in a broad area to save players from being expected to write down all the various characteristics, skills and abilities associated with a particular background. As such, keywords themselves cannot be increased either during play or character generation: instead, the player must create and raise specific abilities within it. (On the other hand, narrator characters may be given a keyword at above 17 simply for convenience – a capable warrior who nonetheless was not a key narrator character and thus not worth detailing could simply be described as *Foot Soldier* 15¹¹ and left at that.)

Likewise, it is entirely appropriate to use a keyword as a wild card in appropriate cases. For example, a hero with the keyword Scholar may not have the particular ability *Handle Delicate Documents Safely*, but it might be considered legitimate that he would have experience doing so, and the keyword could be used as default ability in this case. On the other hand, if the player decided that this was something his hero is likely to do often and wanted to increase it beyond 17, he would have to take it as a particular ability within the keyword and raise it separately.

An ability often appears in more than one keyword, but your hero gains no advantage if this occurs other than to keep the one with the higher rating (unless using the **Multiple References** optional rule described above). If you include an ability during character creation and then discover that it is in one of your hero's keywords, ask your narrator if you can replace it with a different ability.

ABILITY RATINGS

Unless your narrator runs a game with more or less powerful heroes, all starting abilities and keywords start with ratings of 17.

However, each hero is unique and in addition to giving your hero flaws or special items, you have 20 points to distribute to your abilities, with a limit of 10 points going to any one ability. Thus, if you describe your hero as a master swordsman, give him a high rating in his *Sword Combat*. Note that these increases can be applied to any aspect of a hero: skills, personality traits, relationships, special items, and even flaws.

Feel free to come up with different terms for your hero's abilities. One hero might have *Burly*, another *Muscular* and a third *Unexpectedly Strong*: the effect of the three abilities while trying to lift a fallen tree are the same, but they might also have other distinctive uses if used creatively. For example, the hero with *Burly* might use it to augment (assist) his attempt to intimidate an irritating taxman, while the hero with *Muscular* might perhaps use it to impress the ladies. Being *Unexpectedly Strong* could have surprise value in a contest, over above the hero's raw strength. In this way, the more creatively the player frames and uses abilities, the more interesting the game.

Default Ability Rating

If your hero tries an action for which he has no relevant ability, he uses a default rating of 6. Of course, the narrator may rule instead that the hero has no chance of success, say with a foreign language.

MASTERIES

The highest number an ability can have is 20. How do you raise an ability that is already at 20? Instead of making it 21, the ability's rating becomes 1¹¹, spoken as, 'one mastery.' An ability with a mastery will usually beat an ability without, because the mastery gives your die roll a bump up (see **CORE RULES** – essentially, shifts the outcome of a contest by one level in your favour). You want your hero to be a master at his best abilities and powers.





If you continue to raise the ability rating of a **1m** ability, it becomes **2m**, **3m**, **4m**, and so on, until you reach **20m**. Again, you cannot exceed a rating of 20, so the next step is to once again drop back down to 1, but this time with two masteries: **1m2**, spoken as 'one mastery two.'

Endurance, as easily a measure of physical toughness as mental discipline).

SKILLS

A skill is a mundane ability that lets a character do something. This may be primarily a physical skill (such as *Climb* or *Sword Fighting*), primarily a mental skill (such as *Good Memory* or *Debate*), or a skill that could be either or both (such as *Perceptive*, which could reflect keen senses or the wit to interpret what you see or

PERSONALITY

The heroes of **Mythic Russia** are larger than life characters, motivated by powerful passions. Beside which, many of the religions or cultures in the setting expect, encourage, or attract certain behaviours — such abilities are called virtues. Epic passions and strong virtues demand respect. They can command heroes' lives, causing them to do things that most people would consider foolish or crazy, or to act in unnaturally heroic ways. Like any other ability, personality abilities can be

| Ability Rating | How good is this? | What does this mean in terms of a skill or wealth? | What does this mean in terms of a relationship or character trait? |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| 6 | Non-existent | This is the default for any skill you don't have; it is the Wealth rating used for slaves, beggars and the like. | |
| 13 | Low proficiency: maybe one of the basic skills you use in your life but don't really work at | A young man or woman just reaching adulthood would have this in a few skills; this is the Wealth of a commoner, such as a farmer, soldier or lesser priest. | A relationship or personality trait at this level is noticeable but relatively trivial: a minor quirk, or an acquaintance with someone who might do the odd, minor favour for you. |
| 17 | Proficiency: something you do a lot | An ordinary professional who has completed his training but is neither especially experienced nor unusually talented might have this for his main skills. | Something or something meaning a good deal to you. |
| 5m1 | Real skill: you put effort into this, and you're good at it. | This is the level of skill in core skills of an experienced professional, such as a craftsman or a soldier; the Wealth of a skilled professional, minor nobility or a successful merchant. | A personality rated at this level is one of the basic motivators of your life, the sort of passion of which people who know you moderately well will have become aware. |
| 5m2 | Master | A famous craftsman or scholar, a skilled captain or senior religious leader might all have this in their main characteristics. This is the wealth of a merchant magnate or a senior nobleman of a wealthy city. | This is an extremely strong driver: most people will never know a passion or relationship at this level. |
| 5m3 | Extraordinary | A great hero, famed across the land, might have this in his main skills; as rich as the prince of Kiev. | An all-consuming passion, driving your entire life; you would die for this cause or person without a second thought. |
| 5m4 | Fabled | You are the best there is. In terms of wealth, you are as rich as the prince of Moscow. | The balladeers sing songs about your love, your hatred, your obsessions, but even then they hardly capture its full intensity. |
| 5m5 | Mythic | Your talents equal those of minor immortals. This is the wealth at the disposal of the Mongol Great Khan. | These are the kind of passions for which empires burn and from which gods and legends are made. |





used actively by a character in a contest, although they will sometimes affect the hero as a flaw. Indeed, in many ways personality traits can be among the most powerful and versatile of abilities to use. See **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS** for more on this.

Sample Personality Traits: Afraid of Failure, Angry, Avenge Father's Murder, Calm, Crazy, Determined, Emotionless, Endure Setbacks, Fanatical, Fatalistic, Fearless, Focused, Frenzied, Gentle, Hate Mongers, Implacable, Ingratiating, Inquisitive, Live for the Moment, Love Family, Love My Wife, Obey God, Rebellious, Seek Justice for All, Seek Truth, Sensitive, Spiritual, Uncouth, Wanderlust.

RELATIONSHIPS

Your hero's personal ties and commitments are quantified as relationships. It is good for your hero to have connections that can bring help in need. Your hero will often adventure to establish new relationships or change old ones. Relationships can be with an individual or with a community. Your homeland and occupation suggest relationships with which your hero can start. See **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS** for more on this.

Relationship abilities have three parts. First write the type of relationship. This could be *Member in...* or *Employer of...* but ideally should give a clear sense of the nature of the relationship, like *Besotted with...*, *Grudging Respect of...* or *Loyal Member of...* Then name the object of the relationship (such as Retainers, Wife or Temple); and finally write the ability rating. This number measures the strength of the connection.

- Resent the Old Man of Vitebsk 20
- Respected Elder of Chyorny Les village 17
- Love Son, but doesn't understand him 7m
- Druzhinnik (armed retainer) of Prince Pavel, a role model to me 17

Just as the strength of these attachments can change over time, so too can their nature – the numbers essentially measure just how significant a relationship is to the hero. Thus, Irina's *Love Husband 15m* could just as easily become *Hate Husband 15m* when she discovers that Volodya has also been dallying with a river nymph and planned to elope to an otherworldly water palace...

When a hero forms a relationship with an individual, the person is either a follower or a supporting character.

Followers

Followers are minor characters controlled by the players. For instance, your hero might start off with a groom and a bodyguard under his command. The relationship's ability rating starts at 17, but the follower will have one or more abilities of his own. There are two types of followers: retainers and sidekicks.

Retainers have a keyword at a rating of 17. Their commitment is usually not personal, so they are paid

servants, distant relatives, or the like. (Still, it is always more interesting if they have names.) Rather than having a separate relationship with each retainer, you can have one relationship (such as *Leader of Followers*) that covers all of them.

Sidekicks are more individual. They have a keyword at a rating of 17 and three abilities at starting ratings of 13 each. You can then spend a total of 15 points to increase those abilities, giving no more than +10 to any one ability. Sidekicks which are not humans, such as an unusually intelligent hawk, dog or horse, may have higher natural abilities (often as part of their species keyword), but come with their own disadvantages as well.

You should give your sidekick a name and personality. You must have a separate relationship with a sidekick.

Example: Sasha Mikhailov

James decides that the mysterious Sasha Mikhailov is a useful but unreliable friend of Oleg's, whom he will treat as a sidekick. He decides to have *Loyal Friend to Sasha Mikhailov* as the relationship. In the Followers section of his character sheet, he adds Sasha Mikhailov, with his keyword (Trader 17) and three additional abilities (*Cheerful Companion 18*, *Speak Greek 18* and *Unreliable 17*).

Sophie is impressed that in the name of the story, James spent one of those three abilities and 4 of his extra points on *Unreliable*, which is really a flaw, and so allows him to add one more ability at 13: he decides that Sasha has a minor magical talent, *Heal Horse with Song*, which ought to be handy in a travelling companion.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are relationships controlled by the narrator. They include your hero's family, rulers, priests, and even cults and gods.

Five roles describe supporting character functions: adversary, ally, contacts, dependent, and patron. Heroes will have to fully interact with this important group of characters in order to receive help.

The narrator plays supporting characters if they appear in the game. Some have their own abilities; others do not need them because their relationship with the hero is distant.

MAGICAL ABILITIES

Personal magic is by no means unknown to ordinary people: every village will have a few initiates or devotees to saints or gods, maybe a wise woman with her healing charms. However, magic is especially the preserve of heroes, most of whom have some kind of magic. For the majority of ordinary people, magic is something that they experience collectively, when the winter thaws into spring, or when the priest leads them in song.





Unique Abilities

Heroes may well have unique magical abilities derived from their birth or some other blessing. These will start at the usual 17. Typical such abilities found in Russian folklore include the ability to turn into an animal (especially bird, wolf, bear or horse), the power to leap through the air, talking to the trees or rivers or hurling a spear over a mile.

Magical Keywords

However, the main source of magic is generally through worship and a relationship with gods, saints, spirits or other powerful entities. The homelands listed in the next chapter give examples of the kind of magical organisations and relationships open to heroes of that culture, although much more detail is given later in the book. If you start the game with particular magical keywords, they are treated as normal keywords, albeit usually with restrictions imposed by the religion. However, if you establish these magical relationships during play, you do not automatically gain all of these abilities; consult the appropriate magic chapter for details. If your hero does not start off with one or more magical keywords, he will be able to acquire one later.

POSSESSIONS AND WEALTH

Possessions are those prized and special things that people have. Your hero's possessions include any equipment, clothing, goods, or even cash that he carries with him. He can use them to aid him, and can trade them for other goods or services, such as a meal or a place to stay for the night.

Wealth

Wealth matters. Farmers, peasants, and craftsmen work to earn enough to live on. Traders move money and goods around. Bandits and outlaws survive by stealing from others. Princes must have wealth to reward their supporters, raise their armies and pay off the Mongols. Priests require sacrifices to offer up to their gods. However, while money may be important to individuals, counting it is not important in **Mythic Russia**: this is not a game in which every silver coin and petty favour needs to be tallied and recorded.

Most people receive their income in goods, not in coins; the most common currency is food. That said, there are many types of coin in circulation, notably the Mongol *denga* and the silver *grivna*: see **SONS OF KYUKIK** for more on the economics of the period. Even so, outside the market place, people are much more likely to swap goods or services than deal in coin.

Each character has a Wealth rating that represents the sum of his assets and social status. Assets encompass property, commercial ventures, and major possessions as well as less tangible resources such as rich relatives, generous patrons and owed favours. Every Occupation keyword includes a Living Standard entry with a rating for a typical Wealth. This shows the normal status that a

person in this profession expects to maintain, although there are certainly exceptions, such as the very rich peasant or impoverished nobleman. The Wealth level is a starting point for newly created characters and will fluctuate as play progresses.

The main significance of your hero's Wealth rating is to describe his standard of living: how large his house (and maybe household), how well he dresses, how much he can afford. The system is deliberately abstract. Your characters are heroes and shouldn't be spending their time tallying up their money and pricing up every arrow they fire. Furthermore, wealth in this era is not usually about coins in your pocket or money in the bank but how much land you own, how many horses in your stables, even how many favours you can pull in. An average person's Wealth is 13, a slave or a pauper might have a Wealth as low as 6, a nobleman or wealthy trader 50 upwards.

If the character is created specifically with a description of 'Wealthy' or the like, it raises the standard of living one level, so a well-to-do petty nobleman has a Wealth rating of Rich instead of Prosperous. 'Poor' or similar words lower the standard of living by one level, so a poor petty nobleman has a Wealth rating of Common instead. You cannot change standard of living by more than one level during character creation. A Wealth rating may be bought up with Hero Points, as any other ability.

This is an ability like any other: it can be used to augment others (representing buying gifts to help a Relationship, for example) or be augmented by suitable abilities (Haggling at the market, say, or even a Relationship: 'Come on, a special price for your friend?'). Your Wealth can be used to overawe people, to bribe them, or of course directly to buy goods and services.

If you want to buy something, think about what you are asking for. If it amounts to a hero improvement, your coins can be the rationale, but you must still spend hero points (see **HERO POINTS**). For example, if you are

Wealth

| Level | Standard for... | Wealth |
|------------|--|-----------|
| Minimal | Slaves, beggars, etc | 6 or less |
| Poor | Struggling freemen and poorer servants | 8 |
| Common | Most ordinary people: farmers, crafters, soldiers, village priests, etc. | 13 |
| Prosperous | Master craftsmen, shop-owning merchants, junior officers. | 50 |
| Rich | Lesser nobles, important clergymen. | 150 |
| Very Rich | Princes and senior nobles, merchant magnates. | 1000+ |





playing a rich hero who wants to spend hero points to raise his Archery skill, this can be rationalised as the result of your using your wealth to hire a trainer. If you just want some vodka after a long adventure, remember that getting a drink is something no self-respecting hero should ever need to worry about having the cash (or wiles) for. Your narrator will decide how she plans to use Wealth in case of substantial purchases, but generally will set a resistance against which you pit your Wealth. Under normal circumstances, it is presumed that ordinary purchases, especially those relating to a hero's occupation and appropriate to his status, simply happen. Thus, the warrior can afford to buy a new sword after the battle and the nobleman to buy a good meal.

As noted above, Wealth may come from several sources, including income from land use, herds of animals, and of course the work you do in your occupation. You don't need to know the full extent of these sources, but it can be useful to know what they are. This can help the story by indicating what kind of goods are readily available to your hero in a pinch (such as food to a farmer). Additionally, they help the narrator determine if your Wealth is likely to suffer in the face of disaster befalling the community: a drought might affect the wealth of a rich farmer, but not the income gained by a petty noble from the peasants working his lands in a distant principality.

Special and Magical Items

Your hero may have inherited, won, found, or been given a special object. The most obvious examples in a fantasy world are the familiar weapon or suit of armour, but any item can have an ability. It might be magical or simply well made. Either way, such items are abilities, and begin with a rating of 17. Invent a name or description for your item. Learn what secret ability or curse it may have later during play.

Like any ability, the rating of a special or magical item can be improved. This does not necessarily mean that the item becomes more powerful. An item might be intrinsically powerful, but perhaps the hero does not know how to use it properly, or is only partially attuned to it. As the rating increases, more of the item's power becomes available.

Sample Special Items: A dancing bear, a dog who can sniff out Christians, a melancholy bull, boots that leave no footprints or let you run on snowclouds, a shield that is a family heirloom, a jog that always has a little vodka at the bottom, a woollen cloak that is threadbare and worn but still somehow keeps you warm in the coldest winter, a hair from a god's beard, a balalaika that plays itself, a knife that can cut words out of the air, a bronze mouse that lives, a holy icon that cries if a lie is told in its presence, a medallion that predicts the weather, an blunt axe that can still fell a pine tree in one blow, a salve that heals frostbite, the tiny skull of an extinct animal, sunshine in a bag, a whip that can't hurt anyone, a stone that's always warm, a sled that can pull itself, a birchbark sheet that shows a picture of the next person you'll meet, a ladle that can grow to the size of a paddle... and a horse who sings marching songs.

FLAWS

A **flaw** is an ability that is usually a problem, not a benefit. It might be physical, like *One-Handed*; psychological, like *Angers Easily*; or behavioural, like *Drunkard*. A player might take one during character creation, or the narrator might inflict a flaw after some grievous setback or cataclysmic event, like *Seek Revenge on Brother's Murderer* or *Fears Bears*. Even a victory can leave its scars, after all. Start a hero's flaw at whatever rating you and the narrator decide upon. A flaw with a rating 17 is considered minor. How much will this hero struggle with his demons?

Flaws are story devices. They work like any other ability within the game system and can affect certain actions, maybe help kill a hated foe or make it difficult to stay hidden when that foe passes nearby. They can even be used actively as an ability in a contest in certain circumstances, although normally they are a hindrance to a character, an obstacle that he must overcome. The hero with *Seek Revenge on Brother's Murderer* could use that for a bonus when locked in a final life-or-death struggle with the villain in question, but most of the time this morbid obsession would be a disadvantage: the maiden he is wooing is put off by his murderous fantasies of revenge, for example.

Removing a flaw from a character sheet is difficult, not something that can simply be done by spending hero points. Obtaining revenge might take a hero seasons or years of searching, for example, and a fear of giant insects might never be completely vanquished. A hero who seeks to overcome a flaw should first consider what he can do to improve himself and overcome possible penalties. If he is *Afraid of Bears*, perhaps gaining and improving a *Brave* trait will help; he may still fear bears, but he can offset the penalty that might give him in situations with a bonus from his *Brave* ability.

It's one thing when the narrator applies them because of some trauma, but why on earth would a player willingly choose to take flaws for his hero? Because they make the hero more well-rounded and often fun to play, and also because the struggle to deal or live with these flaws is often one of the most meaningful and memorable adventure anyone can undertake



A. KEYWORDS

**“When you meet a man, you judge him by his clothes;
when you leave, you judge him by his heart.”**

Most characters will have three or more keywords: one homeland, one occupation and one or more magical. These are the basic identifiers which start to define a hero: broadly speaking, they answer the questions ‘where do you come from?’, ‘what do you do?’ and ‘in what do you believe?’

This chapter includes the basic homeland and occupation keywords. Magic keywords relating to the various faiths are not included in this chapter; instead they are in the relevant cultural chapters later in the book. However, the general structure of a magical keyword is included at the end.

Making the Keywords Your Own

Keywords are starting points, for the convenience of narrators and players alike, no more than that. If you want to modify a keyword to meet a particular character’s needs, do so. If, say, you conceive of your

hero as being one of the mounted drummers whose beats coordinated the movements of Muscovite cavalry, they by all means modify one of the existing Cavalry keywords, perhaps taking the specialisation Regular or Shock Cavalry, but adding *Play Mounted Drums* as well as the existing abilities or replacing one of them. Likewise, perhaps a hero is Greek, but from a small fishing village rather than gleaming Constantinople: simply replace *Urban* with *Rural Survival Skills* and similarly modify the abilities, relationships and personality traits to suit.

Also, there is no need to take all the personality traits and relationships listed. Indeed, it is best not to, but simply identify those which best suit your hero. It is always tempting, but it is better to concentrate on those which specifically relate to your concept of your hero than to fill up the character sheet with entries which are unlikely ever to be a real part of his nature and story.

HOMELANDS

Your hero’s homeland is his beginning. It taught him what he is and what he is not, how to live. It told him the stories which have opened his eyes to divine powers, passed on its loves and hatreds, prejudices and ambitions, and has given him the skills and magic he needs to survive. It gives meaning and context to his actions, whether he wishes it to or not.

Each homeland entry tells you who the people are, the powers they worship and why a hero may have left home to adventure in the turbulent lands of **Mythic Russia**. Each also provides a homeland keyword and one or more religion keywords (which establishes the basic benefits of community membership).

This section details eight homelands, though the Rus’ one is divided into one core one and three variations. In some cases, the particular home region or tribe adds an additional level of detail: an extra skill, trait or the like.

Format for Homeland Keywords

Occupations Available: Choose your occupation from those found in your homeland.

Native Abilities: Typical things that a person from this homeland can do.

Typical Personality Traits: Typical traits of a member of that homeland. Your hero may take any, all, or none of these as abilities.

Typical Relationships: Regular communities or people with which a hero is expected to maintain a connection. Your hero may have any, all, or none of these as abilities. You are encouraged to give your hero variations, so that he might have *Distant from Family* instead of *Love Family* as part of his keyword, if it is appropriate to his background.

Magic: Each homeland has a dominant faith, and your hero is a member of it unless you state that he is not. Each faith has its own keyword, whose abilities are added to those of your hero’s homeland keyword. Your hero can also join one or more cults, practices, saintly orders or the like, which are explored in the relevant cultural chapter.

Common Names: A sampling of male and female names: choose one for your hero or just get a feel for the style.

Reasons to have Left Home: One or more possible reasons why your hero is off adventuring.

Format for Religion Keywords

Abilities: Typical things that a member learns or does.

Virtues: Desired personality traits of the faith. Your hero may take any, all, or none of these as abilities.

Relationships: Mundane relationships that a member of the religion normally has. Your hero may have any, all, or none of these as abilities.

Disadvantages: Where relevant, any general disadvantages shared by worshippers.

HOMELAND: THE RUS'

The Rus', the Russians, are a varied people, descendants of both the scattered slavic tribes who once occupied these lands and also the 'Varyagi', the Viking travellers, traders, warriors and adventurers who came to them five centuries ago.

As befits both the differences between regions and also the importance of this people to **Mythic Russia**, while there is a core Rus' keyword, there are also slightly different ones to represent three main aspects of the people. The core keyword is most useful either for generic narrator heroes or else player heroes from other cities, which do not fall within the orbit of the three detailed here. However, players may opt to use it instead of an appropriate specific keyword if they choose.

GENERIC RUS' HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Balalaika Player, Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest (Christian or Pagan), Sailor (Sea or River), Scholar, Thief, Warrior.

Native Abilities: [Home City or Region] Geography, [Home City or Region] Politics, Rural or Urban



Three Russians of substance: doughty Mikhail Zvezdov of Kiev, a grizzled warrior who remembers the old days of honour; shrewd Bulat Volkov, a rising Muscovite boyar already calculating his next venture; and Viktor 'the Swede' Aksyonov, the amiably entrepreneurial shipping magnate from Novgorod



VODKA ABILITY

Historically, Russia's love affair with vodka, a potent spirit made from potatoes or grains, is only just beginning at the time **Mythic Russia** is set, with what they call 'little water' only just beginning to supplant staples such as mead, sbiten (a hot drink made from honey, herbs and spices) and kvass (a mildly alcoholic drink made from rye, barley or bread). But what is a game in Russia without vodka? To represent its strong grip on the national psyche, each Rus' hero may choose an appropriate ability based on vodka which best represents his or her approach to the drink.

Examples: Brew Vodka, Drink Vodka Cheerily, Drink Vodka Gloomily, Get Drunk Quickly on Vodka, Hold Your Vodka, Keep On Drinking Vodka, Sniff Out Vodka, Vodka Connoisseur.

If players really don't want to indulge in this particular vice – and their hero doesn't suit an ability like Scorn Vodka Drinker – then they could perhaps substitute another drink, even non-alcoholic ones such as sbiten or tea. For that matter, tea only became widespread in Russia from the 1600s onwards, but again, how can we allow history to deprive **Mythic Russia** of such trusty images as the Russian samovar, or heated tea urn? It also means that heroes, when providing a menial with some minor gratuity can offer it *na chai*, 'for tea.' Of course, whether or not the lucky peasant really will squander that coin on some tea leaves when it could just as easily buy him a beaker of vodka is another matter...

Survival, Russian Customs, Speak Russian, [Vodka ability – see box].

Typical Personality Traits: Hospitable, Moody, Sentimental.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Lord.

Magic: Most Russians either follow the Russian Orthodox Christian Church or practice dvoeverie, combining that with worship of the traditional pagan pantheon. A small minority remain faithful only to the pagan ways.

Common Names: Russians formally have three names: their forename, patronymic and family name. The patronymic is based on the father's name, with the addition of -ovich (son of...) for boys, -ovna (daughter of...) for girls. Thus, Ivan Petrovich Suslov's children Antip and Irina are Antip Ivanovich Suslov and Irina Ivanovna Suslov, respectively. Men – Alexander, Andrei, Boris, Chernek, Dmitri, Evgeni, Grigori, Kirill, Maxim, Orekhov, Porfiri, Ruslan, Sergei, Vladimir, Yuri. Women – Anastasia, Chiudka, Elena, Ekaterina, Feodosiya, Galina, Iona, Katya, Lena, Maya, Nina, Oxana, Peredeslava, Svetlana, Vera.

Reasons to have Left Home: For all their ties with their land and their communities, many Russians enjoy travel or else are forced to roam, whether because there is not enough food at home or fleeing a harsh lord.

KIEVAN RUS' HOMELAND KEYWORD

Kiev was the first and greatest city of the Rus', and while it is now in decline, its people are acutely conscious of their glorious past.

The homeland is also appropriate with minor changes for heroes from regions and cities within the orbit of Kiev, such as Chernigov.

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Balalaika Player, Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest (Christian or Pagan), Sailor (River), Scholar, Thief.

Native Abilities: Kievan Geography, Kievan History, Kievan Politics, Rural or Urban Survival, Russian Customs, Speak Russian, [Vodka ability].

Typical Personality Traits: Hospitable, Mistrust Pagans, Moody, Proud of Kiev, Sentimental, Traditionalist.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Kiev; to Lord.

Magic: The people of Kiev are the least likely to follow pagan ways, and few even practice dvoeverie. Instead, they are usually Christians, proud of their city's role as the cradle of the Russian Orthodox faith.

Common Names: As Generic Rus' Homeland, although names with a historical or religious bent are especially common, such as Vladimir (after their greatest prince) and Mariya (after the Blessed Virgin Mary).

Reasons to have Left Home: Although the Kievans are less prone to wanderlust than many other Russians, they nonetheless have the blood of the original Viking conquerors in their veins. Besides which, for a restless soul unhappy with the conservatism of Kiev and its preoccupation with the past rather than the future, the rest of Russia looks like a far more welcoming and exciting place.



MUSCOVITE RUS' HOMELAND KEYWORD

Moscow is the rising power, thanks to the ruthless and effective way its princes became the agents of the Mongols. While they have now turned against them, of all Russians, the Muscovites have been most shaped by the Mongol Yoke.

This can also be used with minor emendation for the cities under direct Muscovite control, such as Suzdal, Vladimir and Tver.

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Courier, Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Balalaika Player, Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest (Christian or Pagan), Sailor (River), Scholar, Thief, Warrior.

Native Abilities: Mongol Customs, Muscovite Geography, Muscovite Politics, Rural or Urban Survival, Russian Customs, Speak Russian, [Vodka ability].

Typical Personality Traits: Cunning, Moody, Opportunistic, Pragmatic, Sentimental.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Lord.

Magic: What works, works: while the pragmatic Muscovites can be as pious as any, especially now that the Russian Orthodox See has formally moved to their city, they tend also to have a keen awareness of what they might get out of their relationships with otherworldly powers. Dvoeverie is strong here, as it seems to promise the best of both pagan and Christian. There are also a few Muscovites who have even turned to the spirits of the Mongols.

Common Names: As Generic Rus' Homeland, although there are also a few names derived from the Mongol, such as Bekberdei and Utyugen.

Reasons to have Left Home: Many Muscovites saw service in other cities working for the Mongols. Now Mongol power is on the wane, they are instead looking to their own interests. After all, the Russias are divided – and power in the future will fall to whoever manages to gather them back together.

NOVGOROD RUS' HOMELAND KEYWORD

The northern trading port of Novgorod is rich and adventurous. It has huge territories in north-eastern Russia, but its real strength is its wealth, its mercantile connections and the cosmopolitan and inventive spirit of its people. The keyword is also applicable to heroes from other parts of the far-flung territories of Lord Novgorod the Great, such as Ladoga, as well as Pskov, although it has technically been independent since 1348 (replace references to Novgorod with Pskov).

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Gusli Player, Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest (Christian or Pagan), Sailor (Sea or River), Scholar, Thief, Warrior.

Native Abilities: Novgorod Geography, Novgorod Politics, Rural or Urban Survival, Russian Customs, Speak Russian, [Vodka ability].

Typical Personality Traits: Democratic, Entrepreneurial, Hospitable, Open Minded, Proud of Novgorod, Sentimental.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Lord; to Novgorod.

Magic: Dvoeverie is strong in Novgorod; there are even many outright pagans, especially in the snowy wastes to the north and east. However, as Novgorod has contacts with many different peoples, from the northern Europeans and their Roman Church, through the Lithuanians with their Romuva gods, to the animist Sibiriyaks, a wide range of faiths are practiced and tolerated within its lands.

Common Names: As Generic Rus' Homeland, although limited immigration from Northern Europe has also ensured that there is a smattering of Russified names from Germany, Scandinavia and even further afield.

Reasons to have Left Home: Novgorodians are wanderers, explorers, traders and adventurers. Not only do they have their own territories and mercantile routes to explore, they are also well aware that there are other sights to see and deals to make in the rest of Russia and the world.

DVOEVERIE

The notion of dvoeverie (pronounced dvoy-yeh-VER-ee-yeh, as well as the practical advantages and disadvantages, are discussed more fully in **RUS' WAYS**). Put at its simplest, it is a belief system which allows people to follow both Christian and pagan ways, and not consider this (or, seemingly, not be considered by the Powers concerned) hypocrisy. It means that many Rus characters can and will have both a Russian Orthodox and pagan keyword. However, this also has various negative implications, too, not least the dangers implicit in being regarded as a pagan and schismatic by the more extreme Christians – some of whom would have no qualms about burning you at the stake.



PRIMARY FAITH: THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Christianity came to Russia in an organised form in 988, when Prince Vladimir of Kiev – now a saint – renounced his pagan ways, had the statues to Perun and the other pagan gods toppled into the River Dniepr, and instead had himself and the population of his city baptised by similar immersion. Since then, it has spread across the lands of the Rus, but in most cases supplementing rather than completely replacing the pagan ways.

The overwhelming majority of Rus' Christians are communal worshippers; a typical village might have no more than a handful of initiates. Devotees are even rarer. See chapter 13 for more details.

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH KEYWORD

Abilities: Doctrine of the Russian Church, Sing Hymns, Stand for Hours, Worship God.

Virtues: Feel Superior to Pagans, Long-Suffering, Obedient, Reject Roman Catholicism.

Relationships: to Congregation; to Priest.

PRIMARY FAITH: RUS' PAGANISM

It is one of the many distinctive features of Rus' paganism that it has no particular name of its own: when Russians speak of 'our ways' then they know that this is what they mean. It is a rich and varied pantheon of gods, goddesses and primal entities of nature, strongly rooted in the Russian land and climate: see chapters 11-12 for more details.

Most Rus' pagans, especially those practicing dvoeverie, are simply communal members. A typical village will have a handful of initiates, if that. However, levels of initiation and devotion are rather higher amongst those who worship paganism alone.

RUS' PAGANISM KEYWORD

Abilities: Rus' Mythology, Worship Rus' Pantheon. Rus' Mythology may be used as *Mythology of Romuva* with a -10 penalty.

Virtues: Adventurous, Practical, Superstitious.

Relationships: to Community; to Priest or [Charismatic Religious Figure].

HOMELAND: THE COSSACKS

The Cossacks, *Kazaks*, are a cultural group defined as much as anything else by their refusal to accept outside authority except on their own terms. The first *kazaks* were Mongol deserters and renegades, but they were soon joined by the human flotsam and jetsam of war, occupation and repression in Russia: peasants dodging rising taxes, soldiers fleeing from fruitless battles against the invaders, the losing sides of a dozen princely power struggles and ordinary people simply dreaming of a new life, free and independent. The result is a hybrid culture, albeit increasingly shaped by the Russian faith and culture.

They live to the south of the Russian lands, wild border regions in effect outside the control of any prince or potentate. There they have established their own communities as tough and warlike settler-farmers, whose military structure (inherited from the Mongols) means that they are also capable raiders and also highly prized light cavalry. Increasingly, Russian rulers are hiring them as mercenaries or else granting them autonomy and legal rights to the land they have settled in return for military service. See **SONS OF KYURIK** for more on the Cossacks.

COSSACK HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Courier, Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Kobzar [lute-like stringed instrument], Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Skirmish), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Priest, Nomad, Warrior.

Native Abilities: Cossack Customs, Cossack Dance, [Host] Politics, Ride, Rural Survival, Southern Russian Geography, Speak Russian, Wrestling or Whip Fighting. Optional: [Vodka ability]. *Note:* Cossack Customs can be used as Russian Customs or Mongol Customs, with a -5 penalty.

Typical Personality Traits: Fierce, Independent, Passionate, Stubborn, Wanderlust.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Host.

Magic: Although some Hosts are still dominated by their Mongolian roots, most are staunchly Russian Orthodox: dvoeverie, while not opposed, is generally not practiced.

Common Names: Most Cossacks come from Russian stock, but there is also an admixture of Mongol, Polish and other names, reflecting the mixed





THE KHAZARS

One of the many fascinating peoples of the region were the Khazars, a Turkic people whose empire stretched across southern Russia until its eventual collapse at the end of the tenth century, invaded by the Kievan Rus and under pressure from Byzantium and the Moslem world. What was distinctive about the Khazars was that in the eighth century, they converted to Judaism, and with their conquest, many migrated into southern Russia and further into Eastern Europe, creating Jewish communities across the region. A full treatment of their culture and faith is beyond the scope of this book, but the Cossack keyword can be used for them, with the following changes:

Native Abilities: Khazar Customs, Ride, Rural Survival, Southern Russian Geography, Speak Khazar, Speak Local Language, Wrestling.

Typical Personality Traits: Add Enterprising.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Community.

Magic: The Khazars practice the Jewish faith.

Common Names: Men: Bulan, Morut, Samsam. Women: Chichek, Khatun, Parsbit

Reasons to have Left Home: The Khazars are now a nation of exiles, migrants and wanderers.

origins of this people. Russians formally have three names: their forename, patronymic and family name. One of the most feared of their hetmen, for example, is Volodya Galtaiovich Kaposi, who manages to combine a Russian first name, a Mongolian patronymic and a Hungarian family name, a degree of confusion which might explain his legendary temper.

Reasons to have Left Home: The Cossacks are a wandering, adventurous people; many serve as mercenaries, retainers or security on expeditions into Siberia, others travel buying or selling horses or offering their skills training horses or riders alike.

PRIMARY FAITH: THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Perhaps because most come from the relatively Christian lands of Kiev, perhaps as a way of clinging to the Russia they otherwise fled, on the whole Cossacks are fervent believers in the Russian Orthodox faith. Saints such as Andrew, George or Mikhail, known for their independence of will or martial or horse-riding exploits, are especially favoured.

One aspect of this fervour is reflected in the way that Cossacks are more likely to initiate to a saint: perhaps one fifth of all adults are initiates, although the proportion of devotees is no more than one in twenty at best.

HOMELAND: EUROPEAN

The many lands of Europe, to the west of the Russias, are richly varied in culture and identity, even while sharing the ideals of Roman Christendom. However, while Europeans of many kinds may be found in the

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH KEYWORD

Abilities: Doctrine of the Russian Church, Sing Hymns, Stand for Hours, Worship God.

Virtues: Feel Superior to Pagans, Long-Suffering, Obedient, Reject Roman Catholicism.

Relationships: to Congregation; to Priest.

History Lessons



Was there really already a coherent and identifiable Cossack culture in existence by the 1380s? No. Since the start of the century, Byzantine Greek traders and travellers had been reporting the presence of 'Cossacks', roving gangs of bandits to the south of Russia, but these were still essentially Mongol runaways. It was only in the 1400s that substantial numbers of Russians and others also fled their lands and began to mingle with and replace the Mongols and also that Russian rulers – initially Basil II of Moscow (1425-1462) – offered the Cossacks land in return for military service. The 'Hosts' mentioned here are not the organised, military-territorial structures which later emerged, and more like tribes, often anchored around a particular location or charismatic leader – as such, narrators and players are free to create whichever suit them.

lands of **Mythic Russia**, from Italian merchants to English adventurers, Polish émigrés to Hungarian swordmasters, with the exception of the crusading Teutonic Knights – who are detailed in their own



keyword – their cultures are only peripheral to the real focus of the game. As a result, they are presented through this generic homeland keyword, albeit with minor distinctions between major cultures.

These are, of course, all crass over-simplifications, not least in that there were huge variations within such general categories as ‘Italians’ and ‘Germans’. Narrators and players who want to feature heroes from the west are encouraged to add more detail or even come up with their own keywords for specific cultures if the need arises. Likewise, there are many other peoples of Europe: this is just a representative sample, skewed towards those most likely to be found in **Mythic Russia**. More details on Western Christendom are provided in chapter 19.

EUROPEAN HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Regular, Shock, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (appropriate to culture), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Shock, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest (Christian only), Sailor (Sea or River), Scholar, Thief.

Native Abilities: [Home Culture] Customs, [Home City or Region] Geography, [Home City or Region] Politics, Speak [Native Language], Rural or Urban Survival.

Typical Personality Traits: Appropriate to culture; will often include Convinced [People] are the Finest in All Europe and Convinced [Home City or Region] is the Finest in All [Country].

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Community; to Lord.

Magic: Although there are remaining pockets of various forms of paganism, these are suppressed, and the only widespread and legitimate faith is the Roman Church.

Common Names: Appropriate to culture.

Reasons to have Left Home: While most people are born, live and die within the same town or village, there are always those with a yen to travel: perhaps as mercenaries, traders or pilgrims, perhaps fleeing justice or an angry husband. Others may well be sent to the strange eastern land of the Rus’, as diplomats, spies or envoys.

History Lessons



In many ways, writing such two-dimensional cameos of these national cultures and characteristics was one of the hardest tasks of this book, both because I was conscious of the extent to which I was creating caricatures and also because it felt like a betrayal of my training as an historian. Ultimately, though, if these cultures were to be made available in the context of the game – and a good many Europeans did visit and settle in Russia at this time – then this is the only way they could be accommodated within the terms of the license and the constraints of space. That said, most of the characteristics listed do, on the whole, represent contemporary Russian and other perceptions of these people, which if nothing else provides an interesting insight into how national stereotypes can endure the centuries. A typical medieval French peasant or townsman would drink on average at least half a litre of wine each day, for example, while studies of vine growers in Arles suggest they drank four times that! Likewise, the Russians considered the Poles strangely contradictory: at once imperious towards their underlings and defiant towards their masters.

| People | Typical Names | Additional abilities/traits, or +5 if already possessed |
|------------|--|---|
| Dutch | Men: Aernt, Dirc, Jan. Women: Aechte, Lijsbet, Margarethe. | Careful Preparation, Work Hard; Entrepreneurial. |
| English | Men: Adam, John, William. Women: Alicia, Mary, Johanna. | Assess Social Standing, Brawl; Bloody-Minded |
| Germans | Men: Ditmar, Johannes, Wilhelm. Women: Adelheidis, Cristina, Hilderberdis. | Assess Social Standing, Hardy; Dutiful. |
| French | Men: Guillaume, Jehan, Pierre. Women: Marie, Perette, Ysabeau. | Drink Wine, Quick Wits; Boastful. |
| Hungarians | Men: Antal, Janos, Istvan. Women: Ilona, Marta, Zsofia. | Make Self Understood, Ride; Emotional. |
| Italians | Men: Antonio, Guilelmo, Marco. Women: Caterina, Donata, Maria. | Draw On Family Connections, Get By In Latin; Creative. |
| Poles | Men: Bogdan, Jozef, Natan. Women: Agata, Jadwiga, Katryna. | Command Social Inferior, Good Manners; Rebellious. |





PRIMARY FAITH: THE ROMAN CHURCH

The Roman Catholic Church considers itself the only true expression of God's will and word. The present Pope, Urban VI, has had a turbulent and often unsuccessful time in office: his attempts to reform the Church have bred resistance and resentment from within the hierarchy and for a while, much of the west of Europe recognised a rival pope, Clement VII. Nonetheless while the Pope may often be a very fallibly mortal, all good Catholics respect his office as mortal humanity's intercessor with the Divine.

Broadly speaking, only 10% of the population initiates or devotes to a saint, although the proportions are greater amongst the social and religious élite.

ROMAN CHURCH KEYWORD

Abilities: Doctrine of the Roman Church, Sing Hymns, Worship God.

Virtues: Obedient, Pious, Fear Pagans or Hate Pagans.

Relationships: to Congregation; to Priest.

HOMELAND: GREEK (BYZANTINE)

The Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium survived the fall of its Western counterpart, and became a symbol of imperial glory. That was long ago, though, and Byzantium, which still considers itself the inheritor of the mantle of Imperial Rome, is in a long, seemingly inexorable decline. Byzantium's main enemy has been the Moslem Ottoman Empire to the south-east, but in 1204, Constantinople was stormed and plundered by the Christians of the Fourth Crusade, until retaken by Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus in 1261.

GREEK HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Regular, Shock, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Chorister, Organist), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Shock, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest, Sailor (Sea or River), Scholar, Thief.

Native Abilities: Byzantine Customs, Byzantine Politics, Elegant Speech, [Home City or Region] Geography, Know Byzantine History, Speak Greek, Rural or Urban Survival.

Typical Personality Traits: Extravagant, Haughty, Political, Refined.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Community; to Lord.

Magic: The overwhelming majority are followers of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Common Names: Byzantine names comprise a personal name followed by family name. Men: Andronicos, Basil, Christophoros, Georgios, Ioannes, Leo, Michael, Nikophoros, Theodoros. Women: Anna, Eirene, Eudokia, Helene, Kale, Maria, Theodora, Zoe. Family names: Akropolites, Batatzaitis, Chrysolouras, Doukas, Melachrinos, Phokas, Strabomytes, Tzaphas. (The female form of family names generally ends in -ina or -tissa, thus Doukaina or Akropolitissa.)

Reasons to have Left Home: While there are those who consider the Byzantines a decadent and indolent people, it is undergoing a limited revival proving that this is not true of all. There are Greek traders, mercenaries, emissaries and adventurers within the lands of the Rus', especially Kiev. There are also those free spirits for whom Constantinople has become stifling and who instead look to the future rather than the past.

The present emperor is John V Palaeologus, who has only just managed to wrench power back from his erstwhile co-ruler and then virtual master, John VI Catacuzenus. The struggle saw both sides hiring foreign mercenaries they could scarcely afford to pay, though, and left Byzantium sufficiently weakened that John has had to offer the Ottomans tribute and homage in the hope of averting invasion.



Scorned by the Christians of the west, under constant pressure from the Moslems to the south and east, rejected by the Russians to the north, Byzantium flounders amidst the remains of its former pomp. But still, she endures – and the city of Constantinople remains one of the wonders of the world, a haven for faith, scholarship and courtly intrigue.



PRIMARY FAITH: THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Constantinople became the cradle of late Roman Christianity, and still regards itself as the rightful leader of Christendom, creating a conflict with Rome dating back to the Great Schism of 1054. The Kievan princes adopted the Eastern Orthodox Faith, but Russian Orthodoxy has also split away, even if it is still very similar in its ways and rituals. More details are provided in chapter 20.

Very few commoners become initiates, much less devotees: in Byzantium, there is a strong correlation between social rank and religious and magical standing. Thus, the social order is maintained as much by the magic of the aristocracy as their political and military

might. Likewise, the powers of the Church are directed towards supporting that of the Emperor, and thus he and his senior officials have huge reservoirs of magical power on which to draw, which is one of the few factors which has allowed Byzantium to survive against the constant pressure from its Islamic neighbours.

EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH KEYWORD

Abilities: Doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Sing Hymns, Worship God.

Virtues: Hate Moslems, Honour Byzantine Emperor, Obedient.

Relationships: to Congregation; to Priest.

HOMELAND: LITHUANIA

Lithuania is a young country, unified by patriotism, divided by faith. After all, it was only formed 150 years ago, when Grand Duke Mindaugas brought together its various peoples to resist the encroachments of the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Brothers of the Sword.

It is still largely a confederation of tribes, each with its own customs, dialect and characteristics, but there is already a strong sense of Lithuanian national identity. This also holds together a predominantly Christianised nobility and a population largely clinging to its traditions, the form of Baltic paganism known as Romuva. However, the commoners also face conversion, a conversion by decree, owing more to political than spiritual reasons. Facing constant pressure from the Germans and often Poles, the Lithuanians have survived thanks to the cunning use of their territorial advantages (many a crusading war party has disappeared amidst the forests and swamps) and also their pragmatic and inventive willingness to adapt to new challenges and technologies. Yet, these qualities also sometimes lend themselves to a brittleness of morale and a tendency towards division. Even the present Grand Duke, Jogaila, was prepared to forge a temporary alliance with the Teutonic Knights to regain his throne when it was usurped by his uncle Kestutis.

LITHUANIAN HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Kanklės [traditional zither] player, Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Noble, Priest (Christian only), Sailor (Sea or River), Scholar, Thief, Warrior.

Native Abilities: Argue, Forest Lore, [Home City or Region] Geography, [Home City or Region] Politics, Lithuanian Customs, Rural or Urban Survival, Speak Lithuanian.

Typical Personality Traits: Argumentative, Practical, Reserved, Stubborn.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Lord.

Magic: Most of the nobility and some urban professionals are Christians (Roman Church), while the countryside and the urban commons cling to their pagan Romuva traditions.

Common Names: Most Lithuanians have but a single name, with a nickname or 'son/daughter of...' suffix, but surnames are increasingly in use among the Christianised population. Men:

| People | Location | Additional ability, or +5 if already possessed |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|
| Dzukija | Southeast | Cheerful |
| Suvalkija | Southwest | Hard Working |
| Aukstaitija | East | Poetic |
| Zemaitija (Samogitia) | West | Stubborn |



Andrius, Antanas, Aras, Giedrius, Gintaras, Henrikas, Jonas, Jurgis, Karolis, Kazimeras, Mykolas, Petras, Steponas, Tomas, Vytautas; Women: Agnė, Aušra, Daina, Giedre, Jadvyga, Laima, Liudvika, Ona, Ruta, Vitalija.

Reasons to have Left Home: While fiercely attached to their homeland, there are Lithuanians curious about life beyond their native forests or eager to learn about the ways of their neighbours precisely to help defend Lithuania. Pagans may also leave rather than face forcible conversion: this is especially the case of the people of Zemaitija (Samogitia), which has been ceded to the Teutonic Order.

PRIMARY FAITH: THE ROMAN CHURCH

This is the faith of the nobility and the bulk of the educated and urban populations. Lithuanians do not practice Russian-style *dvoeverie* in that they follow either Christianity or paganism, but nonetheless there is a relatively high level of tolerance among Lithuanian Catholics of their pagan brethren. Rather than considering them heretics, they regard them as uneducated, and confidently look forward to the day when the sacred trees will be cut down and even these benighted peasants will be baptised into the true Church. Chapter 19 provides more details on the saints commonly worshipped in Lithuania.

ROMAN CHURCH KEYWORD

Abilities: Doctrine of the Roman Church, Sing Hymns, Worship God.

Virtues: Hard Working, Staunch, Patronise Pagans.

Relationships: to Congregation; to Priest.



PRIMARY FAITH: ROMUVA

Lithuania's traditional faith, Romuva, is one of gods and nature spirits who are never far from them, and is at once life-affirming and yet at the same time emphasises that mortal man is but a single raindrop in the storm. After all, Man was created when Dievas, the greatest god, spat accidentally, and thus is at once of divine origin and yet also of little intrinsic worth. Instead, what is important is the landscape and spirit: better to die loudly than live quietly. Even suicide is a way of affirming your mastery of your own life. Chapter 17 provides more details on the gods commonly worshipped in Lithuania.

ROMUVA KEYWORD

Abilities: Mythology of Romuva, Worship Romuva Pantheon. Mythology of Romuva may be used as *Rus' Mythology* with a -10 penalty.

Virtues: Live Life Fully, Love Lithuania.

Relationships: to Community; to [Charismatic Leader].

ESTONIANS

The Lithuanian keyword can also be used for other Baltic peoples, most notably the Estonians, whose lands have also been occupied by the Teutonic Knights. In this case, use the keyword with the following changes:

Native Abilities: Replace Lithuanian Customs and Speak Lithuanian with Estonian Customs and Speak Estonian.

Typical Personality Traits: Cool, Practical, Stubborn, Taciturn.

Magic: To the Estonians, Christianity is the religion of their oppressors, and linked with servitude. While some have converted (and more have pretended to convert), they generally still hold to their own pagan faith, however this may be persecuted. Although their pantheon is not exactly the same as Romuva, it is close enough for this to be used.

Common Names: Men – Aino, Coomas, Jaak, Jaan, Lembit, Rein, Toomas; Women – Anna, Asta, Haikki, Marga, Marja, Sirje, Vaike.

Reasons to have Left Home: Estonia is under the control of the Teutonic Order, which is at once determined to force Christianity upon them and stamp out their own gods. Some Estonians have been forced to flee lest they be killed, and others have chosen life in exile. However, the Estonians are also pragmatic enough to be happy to be recruited as agents and warriors by the Order, whether to fight the Lithuanians or else spy on the Russians.



HOMELAND: MONGOLS

The Mongols rolled across Russia a hundred and fifty years ago, an irresistible storm of warriors and spirits from the steppes to the east. None could stand against them: their skill and discipline, their speed and savagery, their cunning and numbers made them the masters of Asia and eastern Europe. Convinced of their divine mission to subjugate the world, they were interested in conquest rather than governance and instead ruled through Russian princes. Nonetheless, they were the undoubted imperial masters, in whose shadow every sane Russian abased himself. To outsiders, they were all one, Mongols (or Tatars, as the Russians also called them), but in fact they comprised many nomadic steppe peoples, from the Buryats and Pechenegs to the Tatars and the Mongols themselves.

The khans rule through the tribes, which in turn are divided into numerous clans (*oboks*) and thence families. Though they conquered farming nations from China to Europe, the Mongols have largely retained their nomadic ways, staking out pasture lands for their herds or horse and sheep and treasures for their felt tents. Cities have been occupied and even built, largely full of subjects whom they are happy to let toil on the work of administration and manufacture, while the Mongols themselves enjoy their traditional pursuits: the horse, the hunt and enjoying the fruits of empire.

The Tatar Yoke is loose, now. The unity of the Mongols has been broken, and now it is divided into five: the Great Khanate far to the east, which rules much of China; Tibet; the Chagatai Khanate, ruled from the great trading city of Samarkand; the Moslem Ilkanate to the south-east of the Rus, stretching from the Sultanate of Delhi to the lands of the Middle East; and the Khanate of the Golden Horde, presently under Khan Tokhtamish, which still claims rule over the Russias. Prince Dmitri of Moscow won a great battle against the Golden Horde at Kulikovo, but no one believes that this has freed Russia yet, and that is a struggle still to be won. And meanwhile, the first rumours are drifting in of a new ruler rising in the east, a Moslem and a conqueror, called Timur-i-Lenk, Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane...

MONGOL HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Courier, Regular, Skirmish), Child, Crafter (any), Entertainer (Dancer, Morin Khuur Player, Throat Singer), Healer, Hunter, Noble, Nomad, Priest (shaman), Scholar.

Native Abilities: Find Good Grazing, Hardy, [Home Region] Geography, [Home Horde] Politics, Keen Eyesight, Know Ancestors, Mongol Customs, Ride, Speak Mongol, Survival, Tend Horse.

Typical Personality Traits: Believe in Mongol Superiority, Enduring, Practical.

Typical Relationships: to Family, to Clan, to Leader.

Magic: While traditionally the Mongols follow the spirit ways of Tengrism, to the east, the beliefs of many have been influenced by Tibetan ways, while to the south, increasing numbers have converted to Islam.

Common Names: Mongols do not use family names as such. Instead, everyone has either one personal name, to which may be added an epithet (such as Khulan Erdene, Khulan the Jewel) or else two epithets (such as Bora Chinua, Grey Wolf). Names

may also be based on an epithet, using suffixes such as -dai ('owner of...') or 'jin ('of...'), thus Batudai is 'Possessor of Loyalty'. Men: Arslan, Batu, Burtan, Chingis, Guchugur, Jochi, Khagatai, Mungetu, Onggur, Subetei, Temur. Women: Aigiarn, Borte, Chabi, Goland, Kokachin, Mandugai, Orqina, Toregene, Yesui. Sample Epithets: Arban (Ten), Boke (Strong), Qara (Black), Qutlugh (Lucky), Unegen (Fox).

Reasons to have Left Home: The Mongols are nomads and conquerors, who may ride where they will upon the earth. They may be emissaries of their rulers, warriors sent to tame the unruly Rus or even adventurers and renegades.



A Mongol spirit-mask, every bit as fierce as any Mongol would expect!



ISLAM

The Ilkhanate (a Mongol realm stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Kabul in Afghanistan), converted to Islam at the end of the 13th century. Like the Golden Horde, the Ilkhanate in theory is part of the greater Mongol community, but in practice autonomous. As a result, there may well be Moslem Mongols in **Mythic Russia**, but for reasons of space this book does not detail their faith and powers, and it presupposes that the Golden Horde retains its Tengrist shamanism for longer than it did in reality.

PRIMARY FAITH: TENGRIST SHAMANISM

Mongols believe that there are three worlds: the earth, the sky and the underworld, held together by a pole, and inhabited by spirits, including their own ancestors. The sky is ruled by the distant god of all, the Blue or Eternal

Heaven (Mongke Tengri), and his wife Itügen. Chapter 15 gives details of the aspects of Tengri and the other spirits the Mongols worship.

This is a very practical faith, little concerned with deep issues of theology and morality, despite some penetration of ideas from Tibet: all that is important is that Mongke Tengri has granted dominion over all the world to the Mongols, and that by dealing with spirits, worshippers can gain practical benefits. The shamans, the 'priests' of this faith, are powerful figures who help mediate between man and the spirit world, above all exorcising evil influences.

TENGRIST SHAMANISM KEYWORD

Abilities: Wisdom of Tengrist Spirits, Sing Prayer, Worship Tengri.

Virtues: Respect Ancestors, Strong Will, Superstitious.

Relationships: to Ancestors; to Shaman.

HOMELAND: SIBIRYAKS

The *Sibiriyaks*, Siberians, are the indigenous peoples of the icy wastes and rolling taiga (swampy pine forests) to the north and east of the lands of the Rus'. There are many such tribes and peoples, and as with Europeans this keyword is just a crude approximation, upon which narrators and players can build to personalise it for different cultural origins. Some have been subjugated by the Mongols, others by the Rus' – Novgorod, for example, has made deep inroads into the cold, distant lands of northern Siberia and has conquered most of the reindeer-herding Nenets to their north west. The majority, though, live the same simple lives they have for generations, hunting and gathering and herding reindeer, often migrating along well-established seasonal routes.

Stocky in build, with high cheekbones and dark, narrow eyes, they resemble Mongols to an extent, just as they also worship spirits rather than gods or saints. However, they are a separate collection of peoples, and their spirit worship is equally distinctive. See chapter 16 for more on the Sibiriyaks, their tribes, lives and beliefs.

SIBIRYAK HOMELAND KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Child, Crafter (artisan), Entertainer (Drummer, Singer, Storyteller), Farmer, Healer, Hunter, Priest (shaman), Nomad, Warrior.

Native Abilities: Hardy, Ignore Discomfort, Know [Home Region], Siberian Survival, Sibiriyak Customs, Speak Own Tongue.

Typical Personality Traits: Enduring, Honest, Impassive, Patient, Work Together.

Typical Relationships: to Family; to Community; to Shaman; to Chief.

Magic: The Sibiriyaks are animists, worshipping totems and the spirits of nature.

Common Names: As discussed in chapter 16, each people has its own conventions. Khant names, for example, include Satyga and Vavlo (for men) and Khui (for women), while Sujuroma is a Nenets man's name and Sako a woman's.

Reasons to have Left Home: Life is hard, and there are always some optimistic or disaffected enough to turn their backs on their people and seek something new. Sibiriyaks are also often impressed or hired as scouts, bearers and labourers, especially by the Novgorodians and also Mongols.

PRIMARY FAITH: SIBERIAN SHAMANISM

While every people has its own specific rites and favoured spirits, the Sibiriyaks share a reverence for the spirits of nature, on whom they must rely to eke out their lives in such harsh conditions. Shamans ('those who know') are the intercessors with the spirit world,





whose denizens must be placated, befriended or fought if the community is to survive. To the Sibiryaks, everything has its own spirit, from a blade of grass to a mountain, from a stream to a storm.

Of course, respecting nature's spirits does not mean that the Sibiryak feels constrained from killing the fish he has just plucked from the stream or felling a tree for firewood. But it does mean that he respects that the spirits concerned have played their role in the great scheme of things. The fish will be thanked before being eaten, and if the tree was especially magnificent, then perhaps a little food or drink will be thrown into the fire

to appease its spirit.

SIBERIAN SHAMANISM KEYWORD

Abilities: Drum, Know Stories of the Spirits, Sense Spirit, Worship Great Spirits.

Virtues: Respect Nature Spirits.

Relationships: to Shaman.

| People | Location | Additional abilities and Traits (+5 if already possessed) |
|---------------|-------------------------|--|
| Chud | Banks of Lake Ladoga | Fishing, Swimming, Wrestling; Fierce |
| Khant | Along the Ob River | Archer, Command Dogs; Brave |
| Nenets | NW Siberia | Arctic Survival, Herd Reindeer; Taciturn |
| Samis | Kola Peninsula | Archer, Ski, Work Together; Melancholy |
| Tavgy | Taymyr Peninsula | Arctic Survival, Dog Sledding, Hunting; Pragmatic |
| Votyak | Central Siberian taiga | Farming, Forest Survival, Sing; Placid |
| Yenets | Along the Yenisei River | Arctic Survival, Hunting; Merry |

HOMELAND: TEUTONIC KNIGHT

The Teutonic Knights, the *Deutschritter Orden*, are members of a brutal and effective holy order dedicated to expanding their territory in north-eastern Europe, not least by the conquest and conversion of the pagan and schismatic Russians. They control much of what we now think of as northern Germany and the Baltic states and are traditional enemies of Novgorod. Their most famous invasion was in 1242, when Russian forces under Prince Alexander Nevsky broke their armies on the ice of Lake Peipus, but since then they have maintained steady pressure. Some think they are preparing for a new crusade, as an ambitious new *hochmeister*, or Grand Master, prepares to assume power.

Most Teutonic Knights are ethnically German. However, membership of this zealous and dedicated monastic order of crusaders entails years of dedication, training and catechism, and this is the special keyword for those who have truly dedicated themselves to the *Orden* and its messianic goals. The order's servants, retainers, specialists and ordinary foot soldiers, who may be committed to the order but have not experienced the same intensive upbringing within it, will take their home culture's keyword, typically but not exclusively German.

TEUTONIC KNIGHT KEYWORD

Occupations Available: Cavalry Soldier (Shock), Foot Soldier (Archer, Shock), Healer, Noble, Priest.

Native Abilities: Endure Discomfort, Know History of the Teutonic Order, Know Rules of the Teutonic Order, Know Teutonic Lands, Speak German, Speak [Other Language].

Typical Personality Traits: Chaste, Disciplined, Fanatical, Fierce, Grim, Hate Pagans, Superior.

Typical Relationships: to Grand Master, to Order.

Magic: All are members of the Roman Church and no other.

Common Names: Knights retain their names from their home culture.

Reasons to Have Left Home: The knights usually leave home armed and armoured for war, smiting the foes of God and the order. However, individual knights may be travelling as emissaries, on a personal penance or because they have turned their back on the brutal ways of the order.





PRIMARY FAITH: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

All members of the order must forswear any faiths or beliefs other than the Roman Catholic Church, on pain of excommunication and death (in that order, to ensure that the sinner's soul goes straight to the darkest and hottest depths of hell). All are at least initiates of one of the appropriate saints approved by the order. Chapter 19 provides more details on those commonly worshipped within the Roman Church, but knights of the order are encouraged to concentrate on a small range: St George of the Teutons is the most popular, followed by St Mary of the Teutons and St Elizabeth of Thuringia, detailed in chapter 18.

OCCUPATIONS

Here are fourteen starting occupations to choose from. Your homeland keyword lists the occupations available there, and your narrator may also offer guidance. Once you have decided, write down the occupation on your character sheet and later fill in the details, such as specific abilities your hero excels at, when needed.

Format for Occupation Keywords

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Suggestions for ways a member of this profession might become involved in adventure in **Mythic Russia**.

Abilities: Typical activities of the occupation, the things a person can do when they have been in it.

Typical Personality Traits: Usual temperament of a member of the occupation. A hero may take any, all, or none of these as abilities.

Typical Relationships: Communities or people that can be counted as a relationship. A hero may take any, all, or none of these as abilities.

Typical Followers: Typical, suggested, or possible followers. You can choose to make these into either retainers or sidekicks.

Standard of Living: Typical living standard provided by the occupation; where more than one is given, choose whichever is most appropriate to your character.

Typical Equipment: Typical equipment carried or owned by members of this occupation.

CAVALRY SOLDIER

“Horse and rider: who is the lord?”

The cavalry is the decisive force on the battlefield in the era of **Mythic Russia**, especially given the way the Mongols used their mobility to such great effect in conquering much of what was then the known world. The Mongols remain a nomad nation, and the Russians

knights may worship other saints, but the level of worship in one of these three must be equal or higher to any other, and their *Initiate of...* or *Devotee of...* greater.

ROMAN CHURCH (TEUTONIC KNIGHT) KEYWORD

Abilities: Doctrine of the Roman Church, Pray for Hours, Sing Hymns, Worship God.

Virtues: Hard Working, Staunch, Zealous.

Relationships: to Congregation; to Priest.

have learned much from their conquerors. To the west, Europe is entering the true age of the knight in all his armoured glory, while the armoured *Kavallarioi* and lighter *Stratiotai* remain at the heart of the armies of Constantinople to the south. The anvil of battle may be the infantry, but every cavalryman knows that he is the hammer his general wields to pound his enemy to defeat!

Cavalry soldiers are professional warriors, trained and equipped by an organisation or patron (rather than from their own resources) and trained to fight in a unit, under the command of their officers. Cavalry soldiers must specialise as one of four types:

- ❑ **Regular cavalry** wear some armour, and may use both missile weapons to skirmish and melee weapons for close combat. In many armies, these are the heaviest cavalry units fielded: the Russians and Lithuanians, for example, did not rely on knights, but on cavalry wearing mail or lamellar armour.
- ❑ **Shock cavalry** are heavily armoured, intended to break up enemy formations with lance charges, then cut them to pieces hand-to-hand. The best example would be a knight of the Teutonic Order in his suit of mail and plate armour.
- ❑ **Skirmishers** shower their foes with arrows or javelins but avoid close combat, relying on their speed and manoeuvrability. Skirmishers' horses carry less weight, and so skirmishers are generally faster than regular horse soldiers, who are in turn faster than shock cavalry.
- ❑ **Couriers** are riders who serve not so much as warriors (though they have to know how to look after themselves if need be) but messengers and scouts, quickly and reliably taking orders across the battlefield or important letters from one ruler to another.





Note the different cavalry options listed as available in each homeland keyword. To learn more about the cavalry weapons, armour, tactics and culture of the various peoples of **Mythic Russia**, see the relevant background chapters.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Starting player heroes are likely either to be ex-soldiers or else the retainers of some prince or other noble. Heroes might be cast into adventure because their term of service is over, they were wounded, their unit was disbanded or exterminated, or they have deserted. However, it is also possible that they are still in service, agents of their lord.

Abilities: Army Regulations, Care for Horse, Identify Foe, Make Camp, Riding, Scan for Danger, Scouting, Swear like a Trooper, [Unit-Style Mass Combat], [Unit Melee Weapon], [Unit Missile Weapon], [Unit] Traditions.

Fighting Skills: Modify cavalry soldier starting abilities based on specialisation:

- ❑ Regular: No bonuses or penalties.
- ❑ Shock: Disciplined +3, Melee Weapon +5, Scouting -3; no Unit Missile Weapon.
- ❑ Skirmisher: Disciplined -3, Melee Weapon -5, Missile Weapon +5, Scouting +3.
- ❑ Courier: Disciplined -3, all combat skills -4, Riding +5, Scan for Danger +5.

Typical Personality Traits: Brave, Combative, Disciplined, Loyal, Obedient.

Typical Relationships: to Commander or Unit; to Old or Present Comrades. Ex-soldiers usually have no obligatory or contractual relationships, but commonly form lifelong friendships in the ranks. Retired soldiers often maintain strong contact with their military roots.

Typical Followers: Horse. A squire or groom may accompany a knight and typically has his own small horse too.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Choose Your Horse

Details on the standard horse are given in chapter 22, but there are many breeds, ranging from agile little ponies to the mighty steeds of the European knights. If you want, your hero can ride a mount with a particular additional ability:

Agile Horse: Sure-Footed 3mf.

Fast Horse: Run Fast 2ofm.

Long Distance Horse: Run Long Distance 3mf.

Strong Horse: Strong 12mf.

Does your horse have a special ability? Maybe it comes when you whistle or has an additional ability to fight? It might even be magical, like Oleg's. Such special animals must be listed as followers.

Typical Equipment: A horse, weapons, possibly booty from the battlefield. Generally:

- ❑ Regular: Agile horse, melee weapons, missile weapons, medium armour (typical mail, made of interlocking rings, or else lamellar shirts, of layers of leather).
- ❑ Shock: Strong horse, melee weapons, heavy armour (such as the European knight's or a Russian warrior's mix of mail and scale).
- ❑ Skirmisher: Fast horse, missile weapons, light melee weapons, light armour (perhaps a leather jerkin).
- ❑ Courier: Fast horse, light melee weapons, light armour, seal or other sign of his office to ensure safe passage and assistance on his duties.

CHILD

"Little children, little troubles; big children, big troubles."

You're going to be a hero, some day, when you're as big and strong as your dad and as wise and loving as your mother. In the mean time, you learn, and grow, and work, and play, and do all the other things children do.

In all the societies of **Mythic Russia**, children have their place in the community and are expected to work from a very young age, whether tending the horses on a Mongol encampment or learning the ways of a ruler in a prince's kremlin. But that doesn't stop them from being children.

In games where children are interacting with adults, the narrator and players can either choose to start child heroes at lower ability levels, related to their age, or simply remember that they are children. Thus, a child using his *Pester Grown-Up* to infuriate the enemy soldier trying to search his house would be at full ability, but his *Kick and Shout* would be at a substantial penalty if used as an attack against this armed and armoured adult. (Of course, there would be no penalty if the child were simply using *Kick and Shout* to distract the man, while his elder sister snuck out of the house behind his back.)

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Russian folklore is full of tales of children who find themselves in extraordinary and often dangerous situations. Sometimes children become heroes because they are fated for great things, but often it's just the way things work out: they are the ones who take that wrong turning in the forest, or are spared when the rest of their family are captured, or simply hear and see what they should not when playing hide and seek...

Abilities: Carry Out Simple Chores, Climb or Run or Precocious, Kick and Shout or Look Innocent, Pester Grown-Up or Avoid Grown-Up, Squirm, Surprisingly Resilient.

Typical Personality Traits: Curious, Imaginative, Naive.

Typical Relationships: to Parents; to Siblings; to Playmates; to Favourite Toy.

Typical Followers: Perhaps you have your own gang of kids, or maybe a pet cat or dog.

Standard of Living: Minimal (6).

Typical Equipment: Favourite toy.

CRAFTER

“Diligence makes an expert workman.”

You are a creator, one who works with his hands and his skill to make items of value to others, whether the simple necessities of peasant life or the warrior’s sword or a work of art to grace a prince’s palace. Crafters must specialise as one of two types:

- ❑ **Artisans** produce practical and usable goods, though they may also be exquisitely well-made or decorated, too. They range from blacksmiths and bowyers to potters and wheelwrights.
- ❑ **Artists** create objects of beauty and meaning to their people. The difference between arts and crafts is that art is aesthetic and refined, and has no need for practicality. Artists concentrate on a medium and a style, whether the icon painters of the Russian or Greek Orthodox Churches, painters, sculptors or even carpet-weavers.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: While most crafters stay put, plying their trade, there will be those either driven out by circumstance or misfortune, or else travelling in search of new patrons, new skills or the wherewithal for their creation.

Abilities: [Appropriate Craft Skill], Identify Market, Prepare Raw Materials, Recognise Artistry, Sell Own Wares.

Craft Skills: Modify starting abilities based on specialisation:

- ❑ Artisan: No bonuses or penalties.
- ❑ Artist: Practical -3, Proud +3.

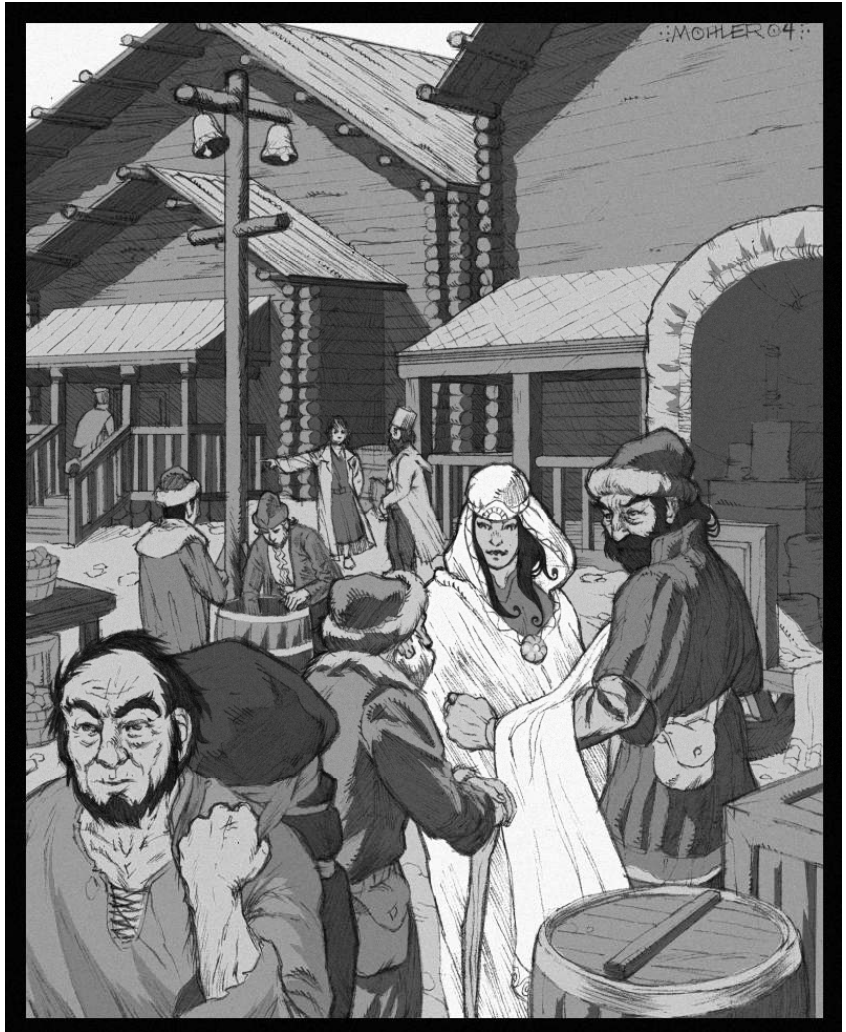
Typical Personality Traits: Clever, Creative, Hard Working, Practical, Proud.

Typical Relationships: to Community; to Patron.

Typical Followers: Maybe an apprentice in training. Artists, especially those of wealth or with a patron, may have a servant.

Standard of Living: Poor (8) or Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Dagger, tools of your profession.



ENTERTAINER

“A joke lasts a minute but stays for an hour.”

Every society needs distraction from everyday life, and entertainers make a living out of providing it, whether diverting the commoners with ribald songs and conjuring tricks or else performing plays and reciting verse to the elite. Entertainers may be freelancers, perhaps wandering from town to town telling stories and passing on news, or else working for a patron, who expects them to entertain his guests and perhaps also bolster his reputation. Unkind souls, for example, claim that the reason Alexander Nevsky became such a famous hero after his defeat of the Teutonic Knights in 1242, are because it was *his* chronicler’s account of the battle became most widely known thanks to his patronage of many wandering storytellers!

They spread news on their travels and their songs, stories, and dramas remind people of their history and traditions. Many work as individuals, but others band together into troupes. Most entertainers have a specialty, such as minstrel, bard, singer, acrobat, juggler,



or poet; your hero should select such a specialty. Note the different types of entertainment listed in each homeland keyword. Amongst the Russians, there is a particular reverence for the *skoromokh*, a wandering minstrel, juggler and story-teller who provides not just entertainment, but also a link with the myths and stories of the pagan faith. As such, they are often – though by no means always – wandering holy men as much as simple entertainers.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Wandering entertainers go everywhere, and often have no home. Some may be sent about on business for their employer.

Abilities: [One or Two Appropriate Entertainment skill(s)] (eg, Dance, Juggling, Knife Throwing, Play Harp, Poetry, Sing, Storytelling, Train Dancing Bear), Compose Entertainment, Concentrate, Good Memory, Group Performance, Know Local People, Play Audience, Presence, Spot Trouble.

Typical Personality Traits: Clever, Eloquent, Merry, Out-going, Proud.

Typical Relationships: to Patron; to Troupe.

Typical Followers: Maybe an understudy who works in trade for training. Entertainers with a patron may have a servant. A *skoromokh* who has a dancing bear may take this as a sidekick, especially as many tales tell of intelligent and even talking bears who work with a *skoromokh* as a partner.

Standard of Living: Poor (8) or Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Dagger, musical instrument or other props.

FARMER

“A handful of dirt is pleasing, if it’s your own land.”

Farmers work the soil, plant crops, and harvest them according to the methods of their homeland. Among everyone but nomads, most of the population are farmers who do the backbreaking daily work to grow food. The shape of the plough, the type of crops sown, and the livestock raised all differ from place to place, but in general all farmers have the same job.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Farmers are not adventurous by nature. But amidst that vast population are always people born for greater things, dreamers looking for more than fate dealt them, and reluctant heroes dragged out of their routine lives by unexpected events.

Abilities: Bring in Harvest, Farming, Know Crops and Animals, Know Local Area, Make Tools, Manage Farm, Predict Weather, Tend Farm Animals, Work Hard.

Typical Personality Traits: Cheerful, Conservative, Dour, Stubborn, Thrifty.

Typical Relationships: to Community; to Headman or Lord.

Typical Followers: Every farmer has dependent family members. Adventuring wanderers probably have none.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Tools or other equipment, a plough-horse or other animals, perhaps a small farm.

FOOT SOLDIER

“Many are generals in their armchairs.”

For all the proud boasts of the cavalry, the foot soldiers know that they are the basis of all military power; it is their serried ranks which hold the enemy and win the battle, they who storm their cities and then garrison their lands.

Foot soldiers are professional infantry who, unlike the individual warriors of untrained armies, are trained to fight in units and under orders. Soldiers must be part of an army, which expects obedience. Officers must obey the commands of their leaders and relay them to their underlings.

Foot soldiers must specialise as one of five types:

- ❑ **Archers** stand in ranks and shower the foe with arrows or crossbow bolts. They can stand against regular foot soldiers if attacked, but usually do not close for melee. Amongst the Russians, Europeans and Byzantines, the crossbow is the usual weapon; these soldiers will typically also wear light mail, scale armour or a heavy quilted cloth coat. Handguns are just beginning to be used by the Russians and Europeans, but they are slow, expensive and unreliable.
- ❑ **Regular** foot soldiers wear some armour and may use both missile weapons to skirmish and melee weapons for close combat. A typical Russian foot soldier, for example, wears a long shirt of mail which reaches down to his knees and a conical metal helmet and bears a kite- or teardrop-shaped shield and a spear. Most also carry axes, although increasingly this is replaced or even supplemented by a sword, a straight-bladed longsword in the north-west, a Mongol-style sabre towards the south and east.
- ❑ **Shock** or heavy infantry are experts in hand-to-hand fighting., wearing more substantial armour and often wielding longer weapons, such as halberds, great swords and the Russian *berdysh*, or poleaxe.
- ❑ **Skirmishers** sneak around, shower their enemy with arrows or javelins, then run away from close combat, relying on their speed and manoeuvrability. Skirmishers can generally outrun soldiers or archers, who are in turn faster than shock infantry.





- ❑ **Artificers** are the technical specialists of the battlefield: the engineers who build and destroy fortifications and the artillerymen responsible for the stone-throwing catapults and, increasingly, crude cannon used more often in the siege than on the battlefield. They are rarely heavily armoured and will generally have no more than an axe or sword for self-defence, as they are neither trained nor expected to fight, except when something goes wrong.

Note the different foot soldier options listed as available in each homeland keyword. To learn more about the infantry weapons, armour, tactics and culture of the various peoples of **Mythic Russia**, see the relevant background chapters.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Starting player heroes are likely either to be ex-soldiers or else the retainers of some prince or other noble. Heroes might be cast into adventure because their term of service is over, they were wounded, their unit was disbanded or exterminated, or they have deserted. However, it is also possible that they are still in service, agents of their lord.

Abilities: Army Regulations, Identify Foe, Make Camp, March, Scan for Danger, Scouting, Swear like a Soldier, [Unit Style Mass Combat], [Unit Melee Weapon], [Unit Missile Weapon], [Unit] Traditions.

Fighting Skills: Modify foot soldier starting abilities based on specialisation:

- ❑ Archer: Unit Melee Weapon -5, Unit Missile Weapon +5.
- ❑ Regular: No bonuses or penalties.
- ❑ Shock: Disciplined +3, Scouting -3, Unit Melee Weapon +5; no Unit Missile Weapon.
- ❑ Skirmisher: Disciplined -3, Scouting +3, Unit Melee Weapon -5, Unit Missile Weapon +5.
- ❑ Artificer: Add [Relevant Professional Skill, such as Engineer or Use Cannon], no Unit Style Mass Combat or Unit Missile Weapon.

Typical Personality Traits: Brave, Callous, Disciplined, Loyal.

Typical Relationships: to Commander or Unit; to Old Comrades.

Typical Followers: Infantry soldiers of note or renown may have a couple of people following them around after discharge. Ambitious cousins wanting to learn the trade will lug stuff around, servants can be hired, and friends from the service may be hanging on.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Typical Equipment: One or two weapons, appropriate armour, and camp equipment and possibly booty from the battlefield. Generally:

- ❑ Archer: Missile weapon, light armour, melee weapon.

- ❑ Regular: Melee weapons, medium armour (such as a shirt of mail); may have a javelin or other missile weapon.
- ❑ Shock: Melee weapons, heavy armour.
- ❑ Skirmisher: Missile weapon; possibly some light armour; may have a melee weapon, possibly just a knife for personal defence.
- ❑ Artificer: Melee weapon, possibly light armour.

HEALERS

“There is a remedy for everything but death.”

The world can be a terrible place: no wonder the Russians often use ‘struggle’, *bor’ba*, as another word for ‘life.’ Healers help the injured, cure the ill, and soothe the troubled. They are vital after the battle or tending the sick of the village. They know all kinds of basic care, whether the wise woman whose hut is full of herbs and faith medicines, or the solicitous doctor caring for the prince’s ailing wife.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Healers have plenty to do in **Mythic Russia** and are welcomed by most adventuring groups. Many armies have healers attached to units, thus offering those opportunities for adventure stories.

Abilities: Calm Patient, Carry Wounded, First Aid, Herbalist, Make Medicine, Recognise Disease, Treat Disease, Treat Poison.

Typical Personality Traits: Calm, Caring, Comforting, Empathetic.

Typical Relationships: to Community or Patients.

Typical Followers: Accomplished healers often have a student or two who serves in exchange for training.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Typical Equipment: First aid kit with bandages, salves, and ordinary medicines.

HUNTERS

“Don’t sell the bear’s skin before you have caught the bear.”

Hunters ambush, stalk, or trap animals for a living, working in the wilds where people normally do not go. They know the habits and habitats of animals. They can prepare the bodies of their prey for food and goods, such as hides, fur, or other special parts. The bow and arrows are the most widespread hunting weapons.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Hunters have useful survival abilities. Hunters often serve as scouts for the military, outriders for traders, and bandits.

Abilities: [Archery or Other Appropriate Missile Weapon], Butcher, Dodge, Hide, [Individual or Mass Hunting Style], Keen Senses, Knife





Fighting, Know Animals, Know Local Area, Retrace Path, Track, Wilderness Survival.

Typical Personality Traits: Patient, Solitary, Wily.

Typical Relationships: to Hunting Band.

Typical Followers: Most hunting involves teamwork, and a couple of followers are common. They can carry equipment and game, set up camp, help out on watch, and so on. Alternatively, ask your narrator if you can have a pack of hunting dogs as a retainer (Hunting Dogs 17) or a single dog as a sidekick (Hunting Dog 17, with Help Hunt as one of the three additional abilities).

Standard of Living: Poor (8).

Typical Equipment: Missile weapon, knife, traps, survival gear, furs and other spoils of the hunt.

MERCHANT

“Gold is tested by fire, men by gold.”

Mongol domination has, ironically, been good for trade within Russia, not just cutting down on costly wars between cities but also because the Mongols expect their tribute in silver and thus most princes had to trade what goods they could tax from their people for this essential medium of exchange. The city of Novgorod is the undisputed hub of all trade within Russia, linked with foreign markets from northern Europe all the way down to Constantinople.

Merchants buy and sell food, goods, exotic imports or even services. Some are specialists who deal with particular commodities, others trade in anything and everything; some may be happy working out of one market, others travel widely (usually on a regular route), but all work with an eye for opportunity and a nose for business.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Merchants might leave their shops to find new markets because they went out of business, because they are peddlers, or they are looking for a new source of goods to buy.

Abilities: Bargain, Carry Heavy Loads, Cudgel Fighting or Staff Fighting or (with the narrator’s permission) another Melee Weapon, Estimate Market Value, Know Customers, Know Local Area, Load Pack Animal, Persuasive, Tend Pack Animal.

Typical Personality Traits: Canny, Eloquent, Entrepreneurial, Greedy, Outgoing, Shrewd.

Typical Relationships: Loyal to Customers; Member of [Trade Guild or Mercantile Group].

Typical Followers: Poor peddlers have none; others may have a beast of burden (perhaps a horse or ox) and a couple of helpers. A wealthy merchant may have a whole household of guards, flunkies and porters.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Trade goods, pack animal, staff, perhaps a small shop or wagon.

NOBLE

“The prince’s silver glitters no more than the peasant’s.”

There are rulers and ruled in every culture, from the *dvorianin* gentry of Russia, to the courtiers of mighty Constantinople. Nobles are individuals born or raised into privilege. In most cases, they derive their position from their birth, and in return for power and privilege assume social obligations such as protecting their constituents, regulating trade, and enforcing the will of their lords. Petty nobles are the only ones likely to adventure; important nobles have serious obligations and are generally too busy to leave their duties to be player heroes.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Social climbers and younger children of rich families are great candidates for heroes. Petty nobles often seek success through adventure and intrigue, travelling foreign lands, undertaking dangerous ventures, in their pursuit of glory and reputation. Of course, folklore is also full of tales of the heirs of mighty rulers adventuring before settling down to the serious duties of kingship, tricked into some venture or else thrown into the world by some coup or intrigue in their court.

Abilities: Exert Authority, Grooming, Identify Social Status, Politics, Protocol, Ride, Sing (or some other refined pastime), single Trademark Skill (eg, a particular style of combat, knowledge of a foreign people or language, even Carousing).

Typical Personality Traits: Ambitious, Aristocratic, Dutiful, Snobbish.

Typical Relationships: Court Contacts; to Family or home City or State.

Typical Followers: A body servant, a groom, and a bodyguard are common for petty nobles.

Standard of Living: Prosperous (5M). Playing a rich hero is a privilege, though, and you should expect your narrator to limit his access to his assets, at least to start with. He might receive a small annual stipend, enough for him to live on and keep a few retainers, but not enough to support all his friends (in other words, the remaining player heroes – who could even be his lackeys and retainers).

Typical Equipment: A horse, weapons, fine clothes, perhaps even a fine home.

NOMAD

“It’s always better, wherever we happen not to be.”

Nomads are wanderers, who either live constantly on the move or else settle in one place for a while and then



move on, after a week, a season or a year. They may be migratory farmers or else perhaps follow their herds, either domestic or wild. Likewise, they may be horse nomads, like most of the tribes within the Mongol Horde, or else foot nomads, like the Sibiryaks. Life is difficult, typically in harsh terrain, and these people are generally tough as a result: those who are not, rarely survive.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Nomads are by definition mobile, and seek new places to live, hunt or stay. Furthermore, hardy nomads are often prized as hunters, scouts and skirmishers and thus hired by cityfolk. Or perhaps you are sick of being poor? Did your herd die, was your family murdered, or did you flee a battle?

Abilities: Care for [Herd Beast], Find Good Pasture, Hardy, Herding, Know [Land], Listen, [Melee Weapon], [Missile Weapon], Ride or Walk Far.

Typical Personality Traits: Confident, Free-Spirited, Reliable, Uncomfortable in Towns and Cities, Wanderlust.

Typical Relationships: To Family; to Leaders. Special steeds may merit an individual relationship.

Typical Followers: A nomad may have a servant or assistant, who has his own mount. You can list a special steed as a follower. More often, though, the only likely followers will be younger relatives or older dependents.

Standard of Living: Poor (8) or Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Weapons, a place in the family tent. Mounted nomads will also have a steed – see the Cavalry Soldier entry for information on choosing a horse.

PRIEST

“If you love the priest, be kind to his dog.”

‘Like priest, like people’ goes the Russian proverb. Priests are full-time religious leaders of the various faiths: Christian clerics, pagan priests, shamans of the Mongols or the Sibiryaks and so forth. They are responsible for the spiritual and moral well-being of their flock, which means both interceding with higher powers on their behalf and also chastising them when they fail to live up to the standards expected of them. They may work within large religious communities or be the only priest for miles around.

This is a job rather than a description of relative piety. Some priests are pious and zealous figures, others lazy and corrupt. Many will at least be initiates in their respective faith, some devotees, but there are also those who are no more than common worshippers. This does not make them bad priests, just not magically potent. It may well be that their other abilities, to lead, motivate, educate and inspire their flocks and conduct the rituals of their faith make them every bit as important to their community’s lives.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Priests are generally tied to a particular community, but they may travel as missionaries, accompany armies or political leaders or act as the emissaries, agents or representatives of their religious superiors.

Abilities: Chant (or Sing or Pray or Dance) for Hours, Charismatic Presence, Know Local People, Know Local Magic, Lead Worship, Sense Lack of Faith.

Typical Personality Traits: Pious. Most faiths and individual powers also have particular traits they expect of their worshippers.

Typical Relationships: To congregation; to religious leaders.

Typical Followers: The poorest priests, those perhaps living in small villages, are unlikely to have any servants, but others may have one or more servants and perhaps junior priests or acolytes in training.

Standard of Living: Common (13) or Prosperous (5M).

Typical Equipment: Accommodation, fine clothes, ritual regalia and implements.

SAILOR

“Praise the sea, but stay on land.”

Sailors are tied to life on their ships, whether they course the Black or Baltic Seas or whether they travel the rivers which are such important trade routes across Russia. They may be captains, crewmembers, or boatmen with their own smaller crafts. Sailors must be prepared to brave the elements and accept that life for a sailor can be full of excitement, yet also often very short and hard, whether clinging to the tiller during an unseasonal storm or else carrying a boat and its cargo across land at one of the portage points whereby riverboatmen can switch from one river to the next.

Sailors must choose to specialise in one of two areas:

- ❑ **Sea:** You travel the open seas, a hazardous profession, but one which brings you into contact with all sorts of other cultures.
- ❑ **River:** You travel the mighty rivers of Russia, the fastest and most reliable routes through the dense forests. This is still often a dangerous and demanding trade, not least at the portage points, where you must carry your boat (intact for smaller ones, in pieces for the larger) from one river to the next.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Sailors are obvious choices for coastal and sea-based campaigns, but given the importance of the river trade, rivermen can be found throughout Russia. Sailors could be adventurers, wanderers, and fugitives from justice or simply carrying on the ways of their families or communities.



Abilities: Agile, Brawling or Dagger Fighting, Climb, Endure Weather, Hold Drink, Navigate by Stars, Swim, Tie Knots.

Sailing Skills:

- ❑ Sea: Add Know Foreign Ways, Know [Sea], Sail [Ship Type]
- ❑ River: Add Boating, Brawny, Know Local Rivers.

Typical Personality Traits: Boisterous, Dour, Superstitious, Swashbuckling, Wanderlust.

Typical Relationships: to Captain or Ship; to Fellow Sailors.

Typical Followers: None, in general. Maybe an old friend hangs around to help out his shipmate, or the sailor might even be a captain, with his own boat and crew.

Standard of Living: Poor (8) or Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Dagger, rope, trinkets brought back from distant journeys.

SCHOLAR

“The one who seeks is the one who finds.”

Some people seek learning, for its own sake or for the power or wealth it can bring. Scholars have knowledge and lore, as well as the skills to write and count. Therefore, scholars work as administrators, advisors, and teachers: even such cultures as the Mongols appreciate the importance of such people.

Most are supported by a patron, whether a prince or a rich man, who often expect them to chronicle the world around them as the master would have it. Scholars usually lack survival skills, but their wisdom, authority and their hunger for learning can make them valuable allies.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Adventuring scholars might be off on their own, seeking new information. Home-loving scholars might be roused out under instruction from their patrons, and are often used as agents, emissaries and even spies.

Abilities: History, Know Customs of Strangers, Know Trivia, Make Writing Materials, Memorise Text, Read [Language], Speak [Other Language], Write [Language].

Typical Personality Traits: Authoritative, Curious, Pompous.

Typical Relationships: to Patron.

Typical Followers: A scholar will commonly have a servant, apprentice, or student to help him.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Books or other forms of written text (such as birch bark rolls, or wax tablets), writing equipment.

THIEF

“No man is a thief, until he’s caught.”

Thievery is common in towns and cities. Thieves are not sheep-rustlers or bandits, but urban predators: burglars, pickpockets, confidence men, and muggers. Some work in gangs, but thieves are as often lone agents. Thieves must specialise as one of three types: burglar, mugger, or pickpocket.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Thieves have professional advantages, able to act comfortably outside law and convention. They may be entirely mercenary, or may have taken to crime for the excitement or because they were driven out of legitimate society. It is generally wise to ensure that there is some reason why the thief-hero does not prey on his fellow player-heroes, because while a little suspicion and dissention amongst them is fun for a short while, it can quickly tear a gaming group apart.

Abilities: Brawling or Cudgel Fighting or Dagger Fighting, Evaluate Victim, Hide, Know Local Area, Urban Survival, Word on the Street.

Specialisations: Add additional thief starting abilities based on specialisation:

- ❑ Burglar: Climb, Move Quietly.
- ❑ Mugger: Hide in Shadows, Knock Out.
- ❑ Pickpocket: Persuasive Voice, Pick Pockets.

Typical Personality Traits: Callous, Cunning, Devil-May-Care, Greedy, Selfish.

Typical Relationships: to Gang (but many thieves have no such loyalty, even if they belong to a gang).

Typical Followers: Thieves generally act without a follower, though many have a lookout or decoy.

Standard of Living: Minimal (5) or Poor (8).

Typical Equipment: Weapons, hideout, tools of their trade, loot.

WARRIOR

“A brave arm makes a short sword long.”

Warriors are specialised, full-time fighters, often from barbarian cultures. They are the elite fighters in their societies, trained to defend their village or homeland in single combat and in battle. They fight as individuals or in tribal or clan groups, not disciplined military units.

Beginning Hero Suggestions: Warriors are natural adventurers, whether seeking glory or defending their people.

Abilities: Endurance, Guard Camp, Know [Enemy] Tactics, Know Local Area, Listen, [Melee Weapon] Fighting, [Missile Weapon] Fighting, Recognise Foe, Strong.

Typical Personality Traits: Bloodthirsty, Boastful, Brave, Determined, Grim.



Typical Relationships: to Community; to Leader; to Comrades.

Typical Followers: As a warrior gains renown, he may acquire followers eager to learn from him

and gain booty and fame through fighting at his side.

Standard of Living: Common (13).

Typical Equipment: Appropriate weapons and armour.

MAGIC KEYWORDS

There are two kinds of magic keyword: the basic Faith Keyword, which represents a general commitment to an overall belief system, and then the more specialised Power Keywords, which reflect a specific commitment to a particular religious figure within a faith, such as a Christian saint or pagan god.

Format for a Faith Keyword

Entry Requirements: Specific requirements for the character to take the keyword. These might include gender, occupation, culture, or family restrictions, or even specific abilities and ratings.

Abilities: Typical things that a person can do when they have been in this religion. Your hero can select some of these in which to specialise, thereby setting himself apart from the normal membership. This will generally include one ability which reflects the worshipper's *piety*, typically rendered as Worship God or the equivalent, and another representing his *knowledge of the religion's rituals and teachings*, which might be called Doctrine, Mythology or the like. These are two core abilities: the first denotes the hero's relationship with the deity in question, the second his understanding of its ways.

Virtues: Desired personality traits of worshippers. Your hero may take any, all, or none of these as abilities. Heroes are not required to take these mundane abilities, but those that do often gain greater favour, while those who stray may find their religious advancement more difficult. Religions vary in their requirements of adherence. Most see that perfect accordance is unrealistic, so normal people have some leeway. Dedicated members are held to a stricter standard, however.

Relationships: This section lists mundane relationships, over and above the appropriate *Piety*, as noted above. As with Virtues, your hero may or may not choose to take these typical relationships for members of the faith.

Disadvantages: Unusual restrictions or challenges faced by worshippers.

Format for a Power Keyword

A description of the worshipped entity, often very brief, is followed by the actual keyword. Your hero receives all keyword abilities if he takes a magic keyword during character creation, but does not automatically gain all of them if he joins a religion during play.

Entry Requirements: As above.

Abilities: As above.

Virtues: As above.

Affinity: The specific magical affinity and feats available through the religion – see the **MAGIC** chapter.

Secret: The secret that devotees can eventually learn from the Power, if any.

Other Side: The Otherworld home of the worshipped entity.

Rites & Representations: Particular holy days and celebrations, as well as how the Power is generally portrayed.

Connections: Other Faiths and Powers to which the worshipped entity has some ties; usually these will be within the same Faith, but not always.

Antagonisms: Conversely, any particular enmities, whether towards rival Faiths and Powers or other agencies.

Disadvantages: As above.



5. PERSONALITY TRAIT'S & RELATIONSHIPS

“Tell me who your friends are, and I’ll tell you who you are.”

Mythic Russia is a game about people: their hopes, dreams, fears and quirks, as well as their relationships with those around them. Gold is spent, power dwindles, cities fall and knowledge is lost – but friendships (and hatreds) are eternal, and love, duty and rivalries – both friendly and bitter – are often the driving engines behind the tales of Old Russia.

The tales of **Mythic Russia** are full of larger-than-life passions and enmities. This is reflected in the game system: a hero’s personality and relationships matter as much as his skills and his magic. Sometimes this will be through contests in which a trait is used as a primary ability, but most often it will be when heroes augment other abilities with their personality traits and relationships.

PERSONALITY

Many players and narrators face uncertainty when using personality traits in this way. Which ones are relevant? How many should be used? Can a positive personality trait sometimes become a flaw?

Personality traits are no different from skills, relationships or any other ability and can be **used directly in a contest**. Thus, it would be just as appropriate for a hero trying to force his way home through a deep snowdrift before he freezes to use his *Determined* trait as his *Strong* or *Force Way Though Snow*.

More often, though, traits will be **used as augments**. Like Relationships, they do not need to be invoked specifically by direct actions to be used as augments, and as many as are appropriate can be applied at once. The key question is that of relevance: a personality trait is appropriate as an augment only if it is passionately engaged in the contest. It cannot be something that the hero doesn’t care that much about, or which doesn’t make a statement about who they are in the situation, or that just plain isn’t relevant to the roll.

So how do heroes make sure they can use their personality traits to augment themselves in important situations? How do they make sure they are passionately engaged? By interacting with the story and creating

opportunities to engage their personality traits so that when a contest comes up, their heroes already care about it. This effort will combine the attempts of the players to get as many augments as they can for their heroes with their personality and the development of the story. Then everything – game power, hero stats, and story – come together at one point. Players will want to get their heroes involved and to make a story that depends on their heroes’ passions because it gives them both a good story and a mechanical bonus.

Example: Demetrea tells a Tale

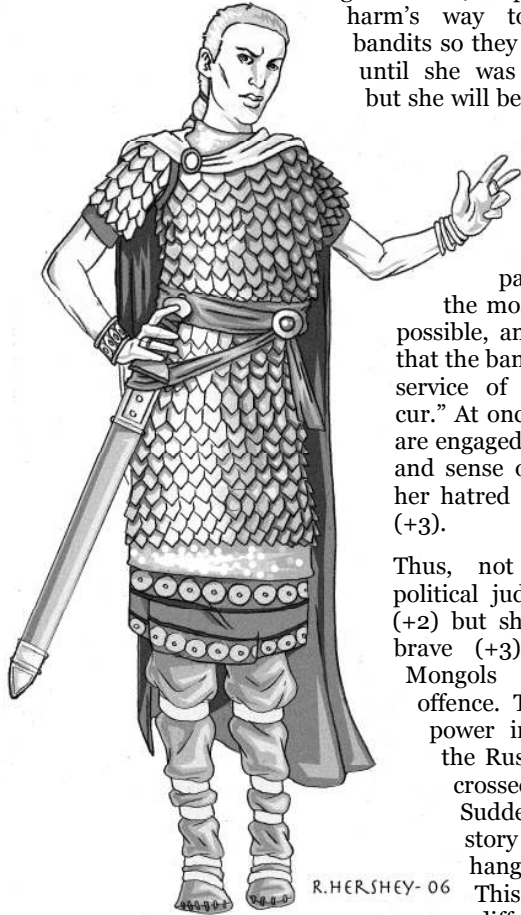
Demetrea of Adrianople, the wandering Greek mercenary, can hardly use her *Brave 5m* to chase two beggar-children out of a village because there is nothing brave about the action. Nor could she use it sparring in a friendly contest in which no one is going to be hurt. Even in battle, her *Brave* only comes out if she is at the front of the battle, not if she is hanging back and playing safe. If not being especially brave, she doesn’t get to use her bravery to make herself stronger!

As well as being *Brave 5m*, Demetrea is *Proud 3m*, *Honourable 20*, *Political 19* and *Hates Mongols 6m*. When a guest at the court of the prince of Nizhny Novgorod, she is asked to tell a tale of her recent exploits saving Maxim, the prince’s younger brother, from some



bandits. None of these traits really apply to a simple story-telling, so she is relying just on her *Elegant Speech* 17. However, it becomes clear that the prince is simply a pawn of a Mongol potentate 'visiting' the city. He wants to use her story to discredit Maxim, no friend of the Mongols ("saved by a woman," she hears in the kind of sneering whisper no doubt meant to carry throughout the feast-hall). Not only does she owe Maxim a debt of

gratitude (he put himself in harm's way to distract the bandits so they did not see her until she was among them), but she will be damned before she lets the Mongols use her.



She decides to paint Maxim in the most positive light possible, and even suggest that the bandits were in the service of "some Mongol cur." At once, several traits are engaged: her pride (+2) and sense of honour (+2), her hatred of the Mongols (+3).

Thus, not only is her political judgement in use (+2) but she is also being brave (+3), because the Mongols might take offence. They are still a power in the lands of the Rus' and not to be crossed lightly. Suddenly, a dozen story possibilities hang on the contest. This also shows the difference between

a contest in which the hero is not especially engaged and one in which she feels a passionate commitment: augmented by all these traits, Demetrea's *Elegant Speech* rises from its base 17 to 9!!!

RELATIONSHIPS

Everyone has relationships. Relationships in homeland keywords are usually required for full participation in society — your hero was raised with a sense of belonging because no one has a choice on such things. Most heroes also have personal relationships: followers, friends who travel with them, allies and patrons who help them, and other supporting characters. You hero will probably have several community relationships as well: his family, religion, home city or professional group.

BALANCING PERSONALITY TRAITS

There is the temptation to see traits as universal bonuses, especially in the case of those which are likely often to be applicable, such as *Determined* (which could as easily be used in a duel as bringing in the harvest). When heroes have extremely high ratings in personality traits — and this is entirely in keeping with the larger-than-life figures with which Russian folklore abounds — the result can seem unbalancing. Obviously, the narrator always has the right to veto such use and also it is worth remembering that positive personality traits can sometimes become flaws. This trick should be used lightly, though, to avoid the perception that players are being 'punished' for taking lots of personality traits.

Traits as Flaws

Especially powerful passions can more easily become weaknesses, especially if a hero undertakes actions that go directly against them. Thanks to her *Brave*, *Proud* and *Hate Mongols* traits, for example, Demetrea should have trouble backing down from a fight in which a Mongol warrior belittles her skills and then calls her out. Everything about the hero means that she should leap into the fray. Similarly, that Half-Man Vakhtang is a most unusual Cossack with *Pacifist 15!!!* not only means that he faces the scorn of his people, but that he will be at a disadvantage in a fight because of his aversion to violence.

The balancing point to using a personality trait as a flaw is to give the hero a chance to turn it around. If a hero can reverse the situation in which the trait was used as a flaw (or comply with it in the case of situations in which the flaw is urging him to do something), he is automatically passionately engaged. So, if Vakhtang gets to a place where he can try to stop the battle, or Demetrea is able to take up the gauntlet in the next fight, their relevant personality traits automatically augment them. After all, the traits are obviously important, because the heroes wouldn't be in the situation in the first place were it not for them!

RECORDING RELATIONSHIPS

Under Relationships on your character sheet, list the special people or groups to whom your hero has connections. Some relationships come from your hero's keywords, others your narrative or list, and still others during the course of the game.



Each relationship is recorded in three parts. First, describe the nature of the relationship — it could be Stern Master, Archrival, Business Partner, Casual Acquaintance, Tyrant, Brother in Arms, Best Friend, or a relationship to which a short phrase is added to expand, qualify or explain it. Next, record the name of the person or group. Religious associations, such as initiation or devotion to a deity or saint are also counted as Relationships but are not qualified by any adjective. Finally, indicate the relationship's ability rating, which represents the relationship's depth of sentiment.

Friend to Roman of Chernigov, although despairs of his drinking habit 17

Devoted Husband of Anastasiya Maximovna 20ff12

Loved by the People of Tver 3ff

Stern Master of the Druzhina of Prince Vsevolod 18

Infatuated with Princess Irina, although he knows he ought to know better 20

Initiate of St Gleb 19

Relationships generally start at 17. The story may determine that some people start with closer relationships. Maybe the narrator decides certain narrator characters are childhood friends, lovers, or dependent kin to whom the hero has deep or intense connections.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Personal relationships are defined within two broad categories. Followers are under the control of the players and often accompany the heroes on their exploits. Other social and personal relationships are formed with supporting characters, played by the narrator.

Mythic Russia divides followers into two types: retainer and sidekick.

► **Retainers** are part of your hero's retinue — the faithful groom or handmaidens, the warriors who ride at his back. In TV or film terms, they are extras: they may feature as individuals once in a while, but they are essentially faceless bit-part players.

► **Sidekicks** are loyal (but subordinate) friends and junior partners of your hero. Again to use the TV or film parallel, if your heroes are the stars, these are the second-string characters who may well get some good lines or moments in which they operate independently, but ultimately they take second place.

There are also narrator heroes with whom player heroes may have a relationship, but who are generally not followers as such. They are described more fully later, but in brief, the varieties are:

► An **adversary** is an archenemy or bitter rival. They will generally not be followers but independent narrator characters. However, a hero will have some kind of

relationship with a recurring adversary, even if just *Hated by...*

► An **ally** is a friendly or helpful peer who appears from time to time. Allies could be followers, or else autonomous narrator characters, with whom heroes have relationships but do not control.

► Many heroes have **contacts** in their profession, community, or religion. These are the helpful friend in the army, the street urchin, and the priest at the church on whom the hero calls on for a tip. These are almost always autonomous narrator heroes.

► **Dependents** are the hero's friends and family who seem to exist only for the hero to rescue or take care of: the boyfriends/girlfriends, old maiden aunts, or sick kid brothers. They do provide moral support and comfort, and occasionally the unexpected helping hand. They might be autonomous characters, or else treated as followers (albeit often rather hapless ones).

► A **patron** is a more powerful and/or well-informed character who often shows up at the beginning of the adventure to give the heroes their assignment, or makes a cameo appearance to provide information or resources. They are always autonomous: indeed, if anything the player heroes might in effect be considered their followers!

Followers and supporting characters need not be sentient or even living beings. If your horse or dog is important enough, you can have it as a dependent or follower. You can even have a relationship with an item, such as a magic jewel that aids and advises your hero or a bloodthirsty sword that demands acknowledgement as an individual.

FOLLOWERS

Followers are minor characters controlled by the players, not by the narrator. For instance, your hero may start off with a bodyguard who will do what he wants. A follower might just as easily be an advisor, herald, shield-bearer, apprentice, or hunting beast. Your hero must have relationships with his followers; the relationship's rating starts at 17.

Like any other ability, a follower is considered part of the hero. Followers are either faceless **retainers** or the more distinct **sidekicks**. In general terms, a retainer or a sidekick may not be more powerful than the hero. They may well have a specific ability at a higher rating, but if overall they are more powerful than the hero, they are best considered allies, contacts or even patrons.

Retainers

Retainers typically receive one keyword or maybe two (usually an occupation and/or homeland), to use in the game at the normal level of 17, but they cannot be improved using hero points. At the narrator's discretion, this keyword may improve over time.





A retainer's commitment is not very personal. He is a paid servant, distant relative, or the like. Rather than having a separate relationship with each retainer, you can (but need not) have one relationship (such as *Leader of Followers*) that covers all of them.

Example: Oleg gets a Shield-Man

Before setting out from Novgorod, James decides that as well as his groom and rather feckless friend Sasha, Oleg could do with a shield-man, a warrior retainer to back him up in a fight, stand alternate watches at night and generally help out on the long way south. He asks Sophie if he can hire one of his former soldiers from the Novgorod militia.

Sophie: 'Sure. Are you looking for anything or anyone in particular, or just some generic, reliable muscle?'

James: 'Nothing special, he's just a retainer.'

Sophie: 'No problem, then. He's a retainer, and his occupation is Foot Soldier (Regular). No special abilities, just his keyword. Spend 1 hero point, add *Retainer: Foot Soldier (Regular)* 17 to your Followers (give him a name at some point and note that he comes from Novgorod, in case that becomes a factor in the future), and *Leader to Retainers* 17 in your Relationships – ideally, add some colour and make that *Disciplinarian Leader* or *Indulgent Leader* or whatever.

James: 'But I was their captain, I've got *Lead Troops* 5ff: can't I get my relationship at that rating?'

Sophie: 'Good try, but while you're a good commander, your relationship to the Novgorod militia is only 17. Maybe you hadn't been there long enough, or you made some enemies while whipping them into shape. Still, as in a way your existing relationship with the militia ought to play some role here, I'll let you have *Leader to Novgorod Warriors* 19 – but this won't apply to any other followers you pick up who don't share this historical connection to you.'

Sidekicks

Sidekicks are individuals, not anonymous retainers. They can be trusted to go away to perform assigned tasks and to do their best, and are capable of some independent decision-making. Most importantly, you can use hero points to continue to develop them during the game.

A human sidekick has a keyword at 17 and three additional abilities that start at 13 each. The sidekick's keyword is often the same as one of your hero's. Nonhuman sidekicks always gain the benefits and disadvantages of their natural abilities, including a species keyword for intelligent nonhumans. They can have a keyword if the hero wishes, but more likely use only their natural abilities. Thus, a dancing bear sidekick gains all of the normal bear abilities at their base ratings rather than a Bear keyword. Any additional abilities you give the nonhuman sidekick start at 13, as described above, unless it already has a similar ability in its statistics. Regardless of the nature of the sidekick, once you have its base abilities you can spend a total of 15

points to increase up to three of them, adding no more than +10 to any one ability.

That said, if some of those abilities might be considered Flaws rather than useful abilities, the narrator may be prepared to show some latitude. Indeed, the narrator may assign extra abilities to develop a sidekick. Use the story to give the sidekick some colour, challenge, and personality. A flaw or weakness might reflect a failure or wrongdoing. Events of a story might reveal *Brave*, *Shy*, *Great Cook* or *Know Kiev's Backstreets*. Less welcome, yet possible, might be *Nitpicking*, *Mean*, or *Drink Mead At Every Opportunity*.

Your hero must have a separate relationship with each sidekick, which normally cannot be subsumed under a general Relationship to Followers ability.

Example: Dry-Eyed Raisa gets a Confessor

Carrie decides that it is time Raisa – who is, after all, an exiled princess, with pretensions above those of a common fugitive – begins to gather an entourage.

In the course of play, she spends a month lying low in the woods outside a monastery, loyal monks smuggling her food as she hides from the Mongol patrols looking for her. When it is time to leave, Carrie declares that she has been speaking with one of the monks, who is keen to see the world and also worried about her soul, and wants to make him a sidekick.

Sophie has no objections, and as it does fit within the logic of the story in play, Carrie can get her sidekick for 3 HP rather than 6 HP. Is the monk a mighty warrior of God, a wise counsellor, an inspirational preacher? Actually, Carrie has an image in mind of a well-meaning but rather ineffective dreamer, with some magic but above all an unexpectedly melodic singing voice, and opts for:

Yuri Broad-Buttocks

Keyword: Priest 17 (occupation)

Significant Abilities: Initiate of St Andrei 18, Sonorous Singing Voice 19, Fat 17.

Seeing this character, Sophie notes that Carrie has put 4 of the 15 extra points into Fat, which is generally going to be a Flaw rather than an advantage, and she likes the original concept. With Carrie's approval, she matches those 4 points with 4 'free' ones, bringing Yuri's Fat to 1ff. Raisa acquires the Relationship *Followed by Yuri Broad-Buttocks, who fears for her soul* 17. She will not need to make any roll to ask Yuri to pray for a safe journey or otherwise conduct himself as her priest and confessor, but she will to make him do something outwit his usual activities and inclinations, like take up arms – or go without dinner.

Recording and Describing Followers

On your character sheet there are two places to write information about followers:

Under *Relationships*, put down the nature of the relationship with the follower. Then, decide if you want



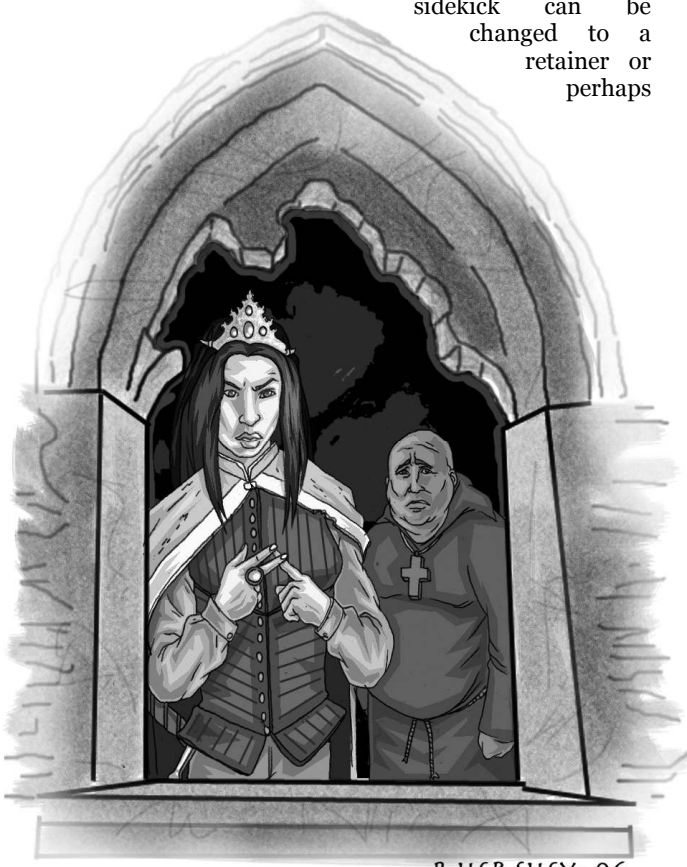
to group together the followers as one collective unit (for example, *Employer to Retainers 17*) or list them individually (*Friend of Sidekick Sasha Mikhailovich 17*). The ability rating represents connection's strength. Typically, two-dimensional extras will be listed collectively.

In the *Followers* section of your hero's character sheet, list the followers, their keywords, and any sidekick abilities. This keeps all of the necessary ability information ready for easy reference during play.

Followers *can* be used as faceless cannon fodder and bland plot elements, but they are more interesting and useful when fleshed out. You should at least give each follower a name, and you are free to go into as much detail as you wish about their relationship with the hero, personality, and background. Such details enliven the game and feed into the story. Losing a nameless and boring hanger-on has no meaning, but parting with a named and trusted supporter can be a poignant event.

Changes to Followers

During play, you can change a follower's role. You can 'promote' a retainer to a sidekick at a cost of 2 HP. With the narrator's permission a sidekick can be changed to a retainer or perhaps



Yuri Broad-Buttocks may always seem despondent as Raisa comes up with another cunning plan to restore her birthright – but nonetheless he will be there to provide moral counsel and practical help when the scheme goes wrong. Again.

'released' to be a supporting character instead. You do not get any hero points back for such changes.

Changing a retainer to a sidekick reveals more about the nature of the follower, and allows you to select three additional abilities for the follower, as described above under Sidekicks. The former retainer's keyword does not change.

Heroes can spend hero points to improve a sidekick's abilities. A narrator may decide that a follower acquires new abilities or improves existing ones over time. However, this generally applies just to sidekicks, and while generally a boon for the player, may have unexpected consequences. A follower may, for example, begin to feel confident enough to be more assertive, to see himself as the hero's ally or equal. This kind of interaction can then be resolved in play.

Using Follower Abilities

In a contest, a follower may:

- ▶ **Augment** a character, the least risky option.
- ▶ **Use its ability directly** instead of the hero's.
- ▶ **Provide its AP** for the hero to use: see Followers and Advantage Points in the **CORE RULES**.

You cannot use a hero point to bump a follower's die roll.

Commanding Followers in Play

Followers will generally do what they are hired to do. Someone with *Combat*, *Fight*, or *Bodyguard* will fight; a groom will tend horses; a cook or householder will do all the dull daily tasks of cleaning clothes or dusting off ceremonial equipment; and so on. If your hero asks a follower to act beyond his duty, you may need to roll a contest pitting the hero's relationship with a resistance based on how unusual or dangerous the task is: from 14 for a reasonable one that just happens to be outside the follower's usual duties to 20 or upwards for something unusually dangerous, immoral or otherwise inappropriate. Even warriors, for example, may balk at being ordered to fight when it is clearly a suicide mission or an act of murder.

Replacing Followers

Followers are useful, but they are also fragile, with a higher mortality rate than heroes.

Between adventures, your hero can replace **retainers** who die or otherwise leave for no hero point cost, assuming a suitable pool of replacement candidates exists. Your hero's [Relationship to Followers] ability is what allows this. Naturally, replacements will be harder to come by if your hero acts in a way that discourages loyalty. If he has abandoned or sacrificed a retainer, for example, the narrator might require you to roll his [Relationship to Followers] ability against an appropriate resistance to recruit a new one. She might even assign a penalty if the hero loses his follower in a particularly callous or horrible manner.



Sidekicks are more personal than retainers. They must be acquired afresh, by spending hero points.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Supporting characters are controlled by the narrator and can include your hero's family, rulers, religious hierarchy, and even enemies. Your narrator will help you to detail them as needed. Some supporting characters have their own abilities. Others do not need them, at least initially, because of the nature of the hero's relationship to them. If the game were a television series, they would be the supporting cast. Some may appear once and then fade from memory, or be killed off in a memorable adventure. Others may grow into more prominent roles.

The relationship's ability rating marks how close the supporting character is to your hero. This could be depth of loyalty (for an ally), willingness to give support (for a patron) or even hatred (for a nemesis). It is your chance to affect another character's activities in the story. Your hero might put pressure on an ally, for instance, and this would require a contest.

You can gain or replace a supporting character for 1 HP. You cannot spend hero points to improve a supporting character's abilities, but can improve the rating of the relationship.

Adversary

An adversary stands in your hero's way. Perhaps a detestable villain, but just as easily an honest person with goals contrary to your hero's. The rating of the relationship represents his hatred of or rivalry with the hero. The narrator decides when the adversary appears to make trouble, and will decide his significant abilities when needed.

Ally

An ally is about as accomplished as the hero, with roughly equal status. He may come to the hero's aid when needed, provided he is not busy doing something else — he has a life and goals of his own and is not at the hero's beck and call. Sometimes an ally will save the hero; sometimes he will get in trouble and the hero will need to rescue or protect him.

Contact

One of the best ways to solve problems is to seek out colleagues and old acquaintances. Rather than acting directly, contacts provide information and other indirect aid. As the relationship's rating increases, your hero can get more and better assistance. Contacts may be an individual or a category of people, such as *Respected by the Womenfolk of Tver* or *Contacts within the Hanseatic League*.

The rating represents your hero's chance of locating one of the contacts and getting useful information or minor favours from him. Contacts will give direct help only if the cost is trivial, or if it is somehow in their interest to

do so. Bigger or dangerous things accrue penalties when exercising the relationship. Contacts can usually be gifted with money, favours, or the like, which are figured as a bonus. When a hero finds a new contact, the player or the narrator will assign a name, abilities, and personality traits as the story demands.

Dependent

A dependent is a supporting character whom the hero is obliged to protect or support, but who can do little to aid him in return. Family members are common dependents. Having a dependent is often viewed as a flaw because the hero's enemies may strike at them, and sometimes the hero's options will be reduced because he has to care for them. Yet dependents provide comfort and support, and occasional aid or advice. Besides, they make a hero sympathetic — who could fail to admire a hero who sacrifices his own immediate interests on behalf of his loved ones?

Patron

A patron is a supporting character of greater accomplishment or social status than the hero. The patron may aid the hero on occasion, but expects favours and service in return. In other words, the narrator uses patrons as a device to get the heroes involved in her plot lines, and perhaps to aid them when they are stuck. In effect, the hero is a follower of the patron. A patron's primary ability is generally rated much higher than the hero's, but is often a relationship or Wealth rather than a mundane or magical ability. The patron often provides help by calling upon one of his other connections, not joining in himself.

Adding New Supporting Characters

Forming new relationships is common, and might be the goal of an adventure. Alternatively, charismatic or powerful heroes may attract supporting characters of any type. Adding a supporting character costs hero points, just like any other ability.

Changes to Supporting Characters

Like heroes, supporting characters change over time. A hero gains new supporting characters as he matures or grows in fame, and his existing supporting characters can grow and improve with him. A supporting character might leave or be killed (and perhaps replaced). A supporting character can also grow and change until they no longer fit their previous role. A dependent kid brother may grow up to become a follower, an ally, or even an adversary. A parent who has always been there to lend a hand and give you tasks (patron) may become old and infirm and come to rely on you for help (dependent).

Changing a supporting character's role costs 1 HP if the story moves it that way, although the narrator might allow you to make the change for free. Sometimes you can keep the ability rating of the relationship when the type of relationship changes. Thus, a *Friend of [Ally]* 2m may develop into a *Friendly Rival of [Ally]* 2m.



COMMUNITIES

Heroes are parts of communities, and communities have a lasting impact on their lives. Relationships to communities show your hero's place in the social world. They can be used to determine if the community gives him help with a problem.

Your hero is a part of some communities automatically: his family (unless he has been disowned); his village or clan or city; his religion; and his temple or congregation. He may belong to a nation, a regiment, or a cult. He can leave a community or join another, if they approve.

Being part of a community means your hero has to meet requirements and obtains support. A community can heal, equip, and shelter its members. Its people can even provide magical support, especially when the hero journeys into the Otherworlds. But communities require that their members back them in return, even when they have other cares.

Types of Communities

Communities vary in power, resources, and makeup, and also in how people become members and what is expected of them. For example, **families** are largely constituted by birth and marriage and expect both to offer support from members and also to receive it. **Religious** communities operate at all sorts of levels: in general only princes, bishops and the like will have a relationship with a whole Faith, but on the other hand a hero's local church is an obvious place to find support

and spiritual guidance. **Governments** are communities, and again there are many different levels of 'government' – a hero could have a relationship with the village elder who governs his community, as well as with the prince in whose lands the village lies. Political office gives an individual great personal status and power. Such status demands a commitment of time and attention to the everyday tasks of political life. Normally, a political leader can call on his followers to perform above and beyond their normal duties with little difficulty, but if he is callous or despotic he will find resistance, and even rivals, to his power. Then there are other communities sometimes given the generic title of **unions**, including guilds, leagues, military units, and societies. Unions often have a political, economic or ideological goal and are often selective about membership and progression within their ranks. Many unions are supportive of members in good standing, but others look on their members as replaceable parts that need no consideration other than paying them on time (and some are not even that conscientious!).

Defining Communities

Most unions do not need to be defined – what they can and cannot do will simply be determined by common sense and by the story. However, there are situations in which it makes sense for them to be defined, almost as if supporting characters. For example, in a game in which the heroes are all princes of different cities, it may be worth giving a sense of the relative power, strengths and flaws of their communities.

Contest: Request Support from Community

Abilities: Member of Community; *Augments:* Reputation, Support from a Related Group (see 'Support from Multiple Communities').

Resistance: Depends on scale of request: Total support: 20 \mathbf{m} plus [total support bonus]; Extraordinary support: 5 \mathbf{m} plus [total support bonus x 1/2]; Moderate support: 17 plus [total support bonus x 1/10]; Ordinary support: Automatic success or 14 (narrator's option).

Modifiers: Circumstances (see below),

Outcome:

Complete Victory: Hero receives one level of support greater than he requested.

Major or Minor Victory: Hero receives requested support.

Marginal Victory or Tie: Hero's request turned down without prejudice. He still receives ordinary support, and may be referred to another group for the requested support.

Marginal Defeat: The community provides limited resistance, but not enough to cause a penalty.

Minor Defeat: The community actively opposes the hero, resulting in objection.

Major Defeat: The community actively opposes the hero, resulting in forbiddance.

Complete Defeat: The community actively opposes the hero, resulting in condemnation.

Sample Circumstance Modifiers:

The request violates the community's morality: -20.

The plan sounds stupid or dangerous: -10.

The request will not benefit the community: -10 or more.

The hero has brought trouble down on the community in the past: -5 to -20 or more.

The group has had bad omens about this: -5 to -10.

Past aid from the hero to the community: +3 to +10 or more.





In this case, then either they should be written up as 50-word narratives, like characters, or else simply defined in terms of a basic rating (which encapsulates their total power, whether political, economic, magical, military or otherwise) and distinctive abilities and flaws.

Moscow, for example, would have a basic rating of 1M5, Novgorod 1M4, Kiev 10M3, a smaller town such as Tver 20M1 and a peasant village 17. Constantinople would be 1M7! Beyond that come the specific strengths and weaknesses. For example, Moscow has such attributes as Stone Kremlin 1M3, Intrigue at Every Corner 1M2 and Mistrusted Widely 5M1. Kiev, on the other hand, has Christian Majesty 20M2, Chivalric Tradition 10M1, Pride 15M1 and Once We Were Great 10M1.

This same approach can be used for military units (the heroes might be competing captains), castles, villages (a game of rural intrigue and cooperation), trading companies or even such unusual unions as travelling bands of minstrels.

Community Requirements

All communities have conditions for membership: it might be acceptance of a religious credo, proof of skill or simply the favour of the man in charge. Many require that members give time and help the group. They may have to work the fields, join religious ceremonies or stand guard. Depending on the hero's rank within the community, this can represent a serious time commitment. This requirement may be informal, but even a member of a family will find his relationship with his kin suffering if he is never around to help them.

All communities expect some degree of loyalty and obedience to its leaders: **community relationships go both ways**. Members who harm the community or its members, betray its secrets, or give away its possessions will face increasingly severe reprisals. These can range from ill will from other members to a withdrawal of support to expulsion from the group. In hierarchical communities, reduction of rank is a common punishment for disloyalty. More to the point, communities may well turn to members for practical assistance or financial support (whether the tithe going to the local priest or a prince's assumed right to take first pick of any booty). Of course, a hero can always lay claim to an item by cementing it with a hero point.

Many also encourage or require members to display certain attitudes or behave in a specific way. This may be as simple as showing pride in the community, or may require the member to adopt specific personality traits as abilities.

Community Support

A community supports your hero in a mundane way and, with some persuasion, can support his grander deeds of warfare or magic. This relationship is mutually dependent: the more the community supports the hero, the greater the benefit to the community if the hero succeeds, but the worse it suffers if he fails.

Community Support Bonus

| Number of Supporters | Total Support Bonus |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 2 | +1 |
| 4 | +2 |
| 8 | +4 |
| 16 | +6 |
| 32 | +8 |
| 64 | +10 |
| 125 | +13 |
| 250 | +16 |
| 500 | +20 |
| 1,000 | +25 |
| 2,000 | +30 |
| 4,000 | +35 |
| 8,000 | +40 |
| 16,000 | +50 |
| 32,000 | +60 |
| each x2 | +10 |

Any community will conserve its resources and avoid reckless ventures. It may refuse to support your hero's request or even oppose his actions if it feels that they are too risky. People with close relationships to the community have a better chance of getting help than a less committed member.

Mundane Support

Communities provide a range of resources to their members, depending on the nature of the group. The primary benefit is the sense of belonging. Individuals within a community can – surely? – trust each other without fear of being robbed, cheated, or attacked by their fellows. Communities also provide training and knowledge, and so can be a source of new abilities. Religions in particular provide members with access to magical abilities.

Heroes falling on hard times may find some relief in the community, at least for a while. Many communities will help keep members well fed, housed, and cared for. If a member gets into trouble, the community may be able to sway opponents with political or social pressure, or if a member is captured, they may work together to raise ransom money. Community leaders often try to ensure that their members have the best possible armour, weapons, and equipment, although this depends on the member's social standing.

More directly, communities can give heroes a bonus with their support to almost any sort of contest. Community members might fight for the hero, give money and goods to aid a trade venture, or perhaps just cheer the hero on in his adventures.





Levels of Support

| Level of Support | Bonus | Mundane Benefits |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Total Support | The total support bonus listed in the Community Support Bonus table. | In addition to the benefits of extraordinary support, the hero gains: Unique grants. These are powerful items or magic, and their loss is permanent to the donor. |
| Extraordinary Support | 1/2 the total support bonus. | In addition to the benefits of moderate support, the hero gains: Loan of ritual items, spirits, or other magic 'for the duration.' |
| Moderate Support | 1/10 the total support bonus. | In addition to the benefits of ordinary support, the hero gains: Followers lent for specific purposes. Loan of better equipment for a specified duration. |
| Ordinary Support | Possibly a +1 'morale bonus' (narrator's option). | Members in good standing of a community can expect ordinary benefits: Food and lodging (likely minimal). Welcome at social functions and religious rites. Protection from strangers. |
| Objection | 1/10 the total support bonus applied as a penalty to the action. | The hero is denied the benefits of ordinary support if he proceeds, and suffers: Possible interference by individual members of the community. The base resistance to requests made of individual community members in the face of objection is 5M. |
| Forbiddance | 1/2 the total support bonus applied as a penalty to the action. | The hero suffers the effects of objection if he proceeds, as well as: Loss of previous gifts and support given by the community. Likely interference by individual members of the community. Increased resistance to support by other related communities, such as religious communities, political institutions, and even the hero's own family. The base resistance to requests made of individual community members in the face of forbiddance is 20M. |
| Condemnation | The total support bonus applied as a penalty to the action. | The hero suffers the effects of forbiddance if he proceeds, as well as: Withdrawal of support by other related communities. The base resistance to requests made of individual community members in the face of condemnation is 5M3. |

Supernatural Support

A community can support your hero magically when he performs a ritual or other momentous undertaking. For instance, a hero setting off to enter the enemy camp and challenge a champion in ritual combat might get such a bonus, at the narrator's discretion. Supernatural support is a type of magical bonus granted by a community. The bonus is applied to an ability, often while trying to cross the veil into the Otherworlds.

Levels of Support

The narrator must decide to what extent a community is willing to support the hero. Depending on the results of a contest, the aid he seeks, and the possible outcome, the community might provide anything from total support to rejection of the request to complete condemnation of the hero.

► **Total Support:** The community pledges itself completely to assist the hero, to the exclusion of everything else. A hero can generally receive total support only when he is the focus of the community, whether in this world or the Otherworld. Anything that

happens to him, mundane or magical, for good or ill, happens to them as well. Total support can go beyond mundane relationships into the supernatural. Any blessings or harm received by the hero accrue to the community as well. Only a hero working exclusively on behalf of his community, or who is recognised by them as a great hero, will receive this commitment, which is the equivalent of worship. In a mundane pursuit, this means that the community drops everything else it is doing and commits itself to the hero's cause, even to the death.

► **Extraordinary Support:** The community supports the hero, putting all available resources to the task without interrupting normal functions. For example, it might send all its warriors to go and fight for the hero, or all the available reserves of food and silver to bankroll a trading mission. In supernatural activities, the community is not directly affected by the hero's good or bad fortune. It can, of course, be affected indirectly by events set into motion by the hero. Heroes who seek to gain benefits that they will use for the community often receive this level of support.



► **Moderate Support:** The community supports the hero, but only cautiously or casually. Perhaps some members are assigned to help the hero, or a moderate share of its available resources. The community is rarely affected by the actions of the hero, who does gain some help with large-scale actions. This level of commitment is often the highest members can receive if their request stands to benefit themselves alone.

► **Ordinary Support:** The community does not actively support or resist the hero, but provides its normal benefits. It does not intervene in any issue, and the hero receives no effect for good or ill in large-scale actions such as warfare or magical rituals.

► **Objection:** The community objects to the issue and/or the hero, possibly with hostility, even though the community is rarely affected by the hero's actions. Followers from within the community will need to be coerced to go against the community's objection.

► **Forbiddance:** The community expressly forbids the hero from pursuing the issue. Followers from within the community may desert him for the duration of the mission (although probably return after it is over).

► **Condemnation:** The community condemns the hero for even asking such a thing. If the hero continues, the narrator should assign large penalties to his relevant relationships and possibly ability ratings. Community members might even show up as opponents, supporting the hero's enemies. The hero and any who support him are likely to be expelled. Any blessings received by the hero come at the expense of the community, which ties its future to the failure of the hero.

Requesting Community Support

Heroes cultivate relationships with groups so they can ask for something. Communities are self-serving and cautious, and need to be convinced. The risks they are asked to take are real, so they will not risk their resources, magic, or lives to help a stranger.

As a starting point, a community provides ordinary support to its members: individuals with an established Relationship to the community. This is normal aid: farmers provide food, warriors fight, and so on. Heroes without a community relationship have no home, and cannot rely on aid from other people.

Greater levels of support require that the hero convince the community and its leaders. A prince's job is to protect the community interests selfishly, and to allocate resources wisely. The selfish desires or reckless hopes of heroes often incite fear from leaders, and so can increase resistance. On the other hand, if the hero has aided the community in the past beyond what is expected, he is more likely to receive support, especially if his request promises to benefit the community as well as himself. The level of support requested sets the base resistance for the contest. Larger communities have more resources to provide but are typically harder to convince, so the size of the group directly affects the resistance.

At the narrator's option, several heroes with a relationship to the community can either seek individual support or can pool their resources and ask for support collectively. In the latter situation, one hero makes the formal request, augmented by the other heroes; if victorious, the heroes may divide the bonus among themselves in any way they wish.

Support from Multiple Communities

Your hero can ask for support from as many communities as he has relationships with. Each community requires a separate contest to convince. Each bonus can be used for only one contest.

When determining the size of communities, groups can sometimes share members and sometimes they cannot. A hero's family and local church may have some members in common, and these shared members count for both communities. On the other hand, hierarchical communities cannot share members when dealing with support requests: a hero who approaches his family and his village separately cannot count the family members in the total membership of his village as well. The narrator has the final say as to whether members count towards more than one community at a time based on the relationships between them and the types of benefits they offer.

A bonus gained from one community can be used to augment your hero's attempt to gain a larger bonus from another community when the two have clear links and compatible goals and opinions. In this way, if a hero's family supports him, he might have an easier time approaching the local church; if the church supports him, he might be able to sway the prince who rules over them all.

Consequences of Failure

If your hero seeks support from a community and is rejected, he suffers the normal consequences of failure described in **Contest Consequences**. The penalty affects the relationship used, and can affect other abilities as well. A failed request can cause the community to actively oppose him. The hero receives a penalty to his ability instead of the bonus he sought.

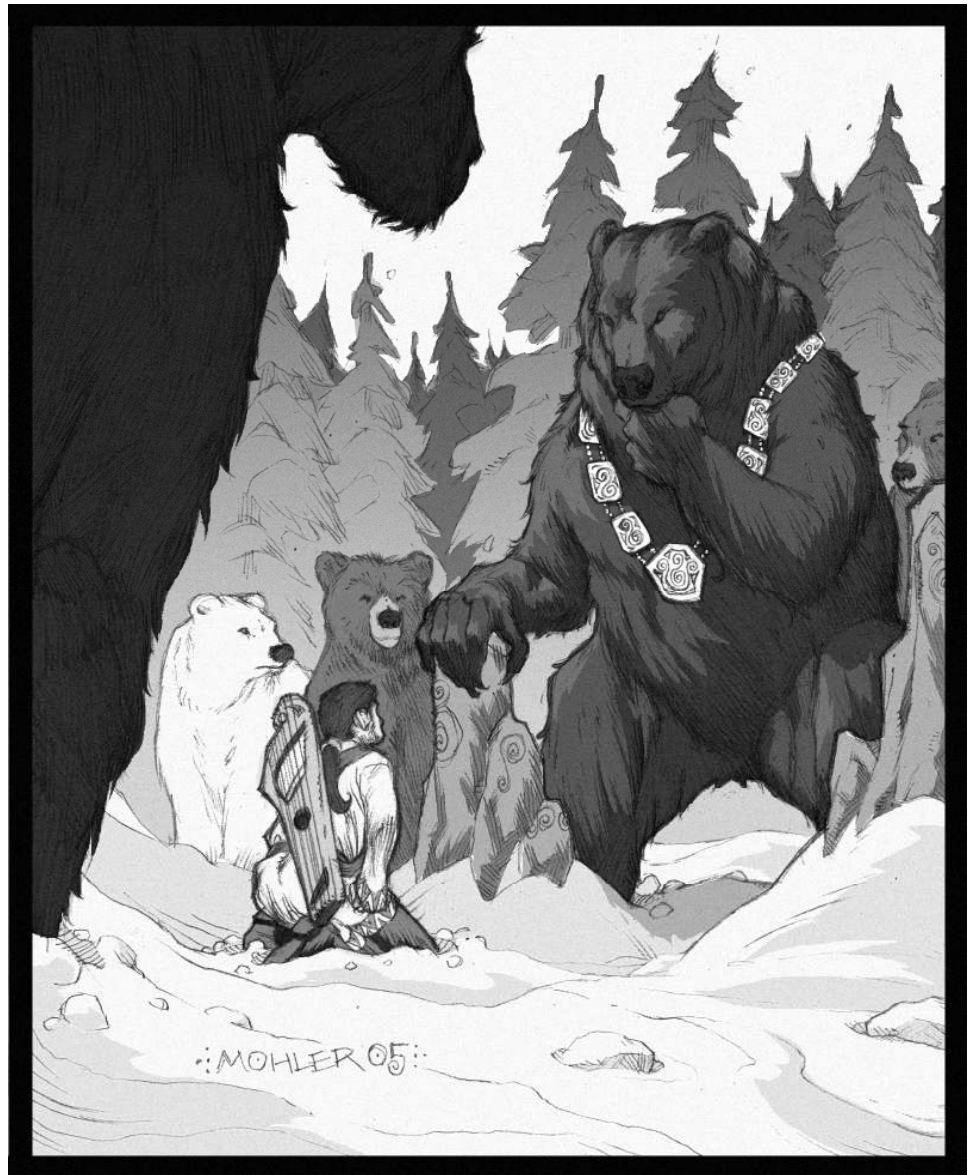
When a community does support a hero it may suffer the consequences of defeat if he fails. If he receives a marginal defeat, they are unlikely to be connected with him at all. If he receives a complete defeat, the victorious foe might decide that anyone who would keep the hero as a kinsman deserves to die too. Similarly, if a hero is supported by his family and then is banished by the clan, his entire family might have to go with him if they supported his efforts or tried to defend or conceal his actions.

Example: Daniil and the Bears

Not every community is human. Laughing Daniil, the Novgorodian sailor and minstrel, is desperate to free Princess Alexandra of Suzdal from capture by the Kam, but she is guarded by First Son of Zmei Gorynich, a huge and dangerous dragon. Faced with such a magical enemy, Daniil realises he needs an even more formidable ally. A prophesy from the wandering vedun – fortune-teller – Afanasy the Heretic sent him deep into the forests, along untracked tracks and along impassable passages, into the Otherworlds. There he stumbles upon no less than Tsar Medved, King Bear, and his Grand Growl. No place for a human, but Daniil is desperate and recognises the paw of Fate when he feels it on his shoulder. He prostrates himself at Tsar Medved’s feet and makes his case. Under normal circumstances – normal, that is, for attempts to enlist the help of an army of magical bears – he would have no chance, because he is not a member of this community. Not only does he have the special blessing of *Bear Friend* 11M, though, from the time he rescued the Two Bronze Cubs from the evil Greek beastmaster, but he notices the white form of Dyadyushka Pripolyusno, emissary to Tsar Medved’s court from the Far Far North. Daniil knows Dyadushka: he helped the white bear find the Pole of the North, and the two struck a friendship of sorts.

Daniil is asking a big favour: First Son is a mighty foe. The narrator deems this Extraordinary Support. The Growl has only 20 members, but they are all powerful, so the narrator counts them as ‘worth’ 10 each, for an equivalent membership of 200, for a +13 Community Support Bonus. The resistance is thus 511M + (1/2 of 13 = 6, as fractions are always rounded in favour of the hero) or 111M.

Against this, he can pit his *Bear Friend* 11M – rescuing the Two Bronze Cubs earned him that, so he cannot use it again; his relationship with Dyadushka is worth +3, but the plan is both dangerous (-10) and has no obvious gain for the community (-10), so at present he is at just (111M +3 -10 -10) 4! Pitting this against a resistance of



111M, even with hero points, is asking to become a bear’s lunch.

He has two options. He could scale down the nature of the request. But anything less would probably not be enough, and he would still have a very low rating. Or, he can try to augment his own rating. Fortunately, Tsar Medved’s love of music is well-known, and Daniil has both a *Fine Singing Voice* 20 and *Play Gusli* 9M. Add that to his *Spin A Yarn* 8M and his *Infatuation with Alexandra of Suzdal* 5M, and he has a rating now of 4+2+3+3+3 or 15. Pitting it against a resistance of 111M will be risky, but at least now success becomes possible. He stretches his snow-chilled fingers, assays an introductory strum on his gusli and begins singing a tale of love denied and terrible wrongs righted by the upright Tsar Medved and his heroic Growl...

6. HERO POINTS

“Fortune and misfortune ride the same sled.”

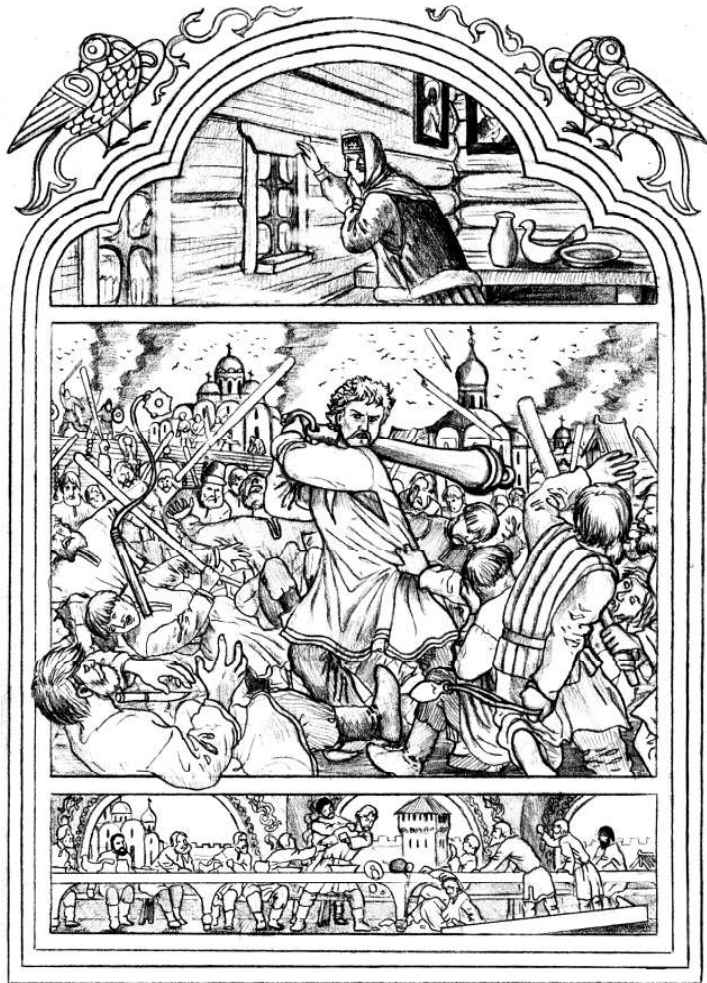
Hero Points are an abstract game convention with very practical uses. They represent all sorts of things: experience, the favour of the gods, even a reward for exciting or dramatic play which enriches the game for everyone.

GAINING HERO POINTS

The narrator decides how many hero points you gain, and when.

Hero Points Per Adventure

- ❑ Your beginning hero typically starts with 3 hero points, to reflect his uncommon potential.
- ❑ At the start of each adventure, the narrator assigns each hero 1 to 5 hero points.
- ❑ During play, the narrator may give you an individual hero point for especially good play. This is not a competitive issue of who plays ‘better’ but a reward for an outstanding contribution to the collective game.
- ❑ At the end of a long, difficult, or multi-session adventure or quest, the narrator should give each hero another 1 to 5 hero points, depending on the group’s success or failure and how well you roleplayed your hero.
- ❑ The narrator may give your hero additional hero points after an adventure for individual success, good role-playing, or achieving personal goals.



In addition, as discussed later in this chapter, the narrator may, when appropriate, simply award heroes extra abilities or increase existing ones.

Optional Rule: ‘Good Citizenship’

Hero points may also be used as rewards for those who contribute to the overall experience of the game out of direct play. For example, if a player turns up having collected the previous session’s events into a ballad for his minstrel character to play to the prince, it has the same in-game effect as simply saying ‘my character sings about our exploits’ but it shows a commitment to the game that the narrator and group might wish to encourage and reward with a hero point. But this ought to be a rare event and used with care to make sure players do not begin to treat it as a reward for regular ‘homework’!



SHAPING FATE

Hero points also reflect luck and the favour of the saints, gods, ancestors or in whatever else your character believes. As such, they can be used in play to change your player's luck or even play a more direct role in shaping the situation.

BUMPS

When you roll the die in any challenge, you can spend a hero point on a **bump up** to affect the outcome in your favour. Hero points are valuable and powerful, and you should pick a time when the bump really makes a difference. By spending a hero point this way you can actively affect the course of the story when the time is right. Bumps are dealt with in detail in the **CORE RULES** chapter.

PLOT EDIT

Hero points can also be used in the midst of play to change or modify 'reality'. What does this mean? Ordinarily, **Mythic Russia** is in any case a game in which the narrator ought to work with the players to frame the scenes comprising the story and create interesting and compelling stories. If the players chip in

with reasonable and credible contributions to the situation – which, admittedly, will usually be to their advantage – unless there is good reason not to then the narrator should accept that.

⚔ Other Heroes, Other Quests

The **Plot Edit** rules should be considered optional: they do not feature in HeroQuest. However, they are strongly recommended, firstly because they can be a powerful aid to the kind of collective style of play **Mythic Russia** encourages, and also because the outrageous coincidences and unexpected developments these rules create fits many of the conventions of Russian folklore.

For example, the heroes are tracking a ferocious beast through the wintry wastes when they suddenly realise that the child of the elder of the last village they passed through is tagging along. One player says that at that moment, the kid is just walking under a tall tree laden with snow. To teach him a lesson, he'll use his *Clap of Thunder* to half-bury him in snow. The narrator didn't specifically say that they were passing through a copse at the time, but she's happy to play along: it's a nice idea, the player gets the satisfaction of using his powers and the narrator can weave it into her story and decide that

Plot Edits

| Level of Plot Edit | Hero Point Cost | What does this mean? | Examples: <i>Captured by Teutonic Knights while they try to find the Old Man of Vitebsk, the heroes are being marched into the dungeons below their castle...</i> |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--|---|
| Minor | 1 | A minor and entirely credible change to the situation which will not in itself change matters, but might give the players an edge or an opportunity. | "Although they searched me, they missed the thin knife I wear strapped to my thigh." "As we are led down into the damp dungeon, the Knight in front of us slips on wet stone and falls." |
| Moderate | 2 | A substantive change to the situation, but one still in keeping with the context and backstory and which does not solve the heroes' dilemmas in itself but gives them a new or better opportunity to do so themselves. | "Suddenly the Knight guarding us starts in recognition; as he peers at my face in the torchlight, I realise that it is the Knight I saved from wolves last year and who swore an oath to repay the debt some day." [Presuming this actually happened in previous play.] |
| Major | 4 | As above, but the deus ex machina is out of keeping with the context or not drawn from the backstory of the game or hero. | The above example, if completely invented on the spur of the moment |
| Extreme | 8+ | Quite ridiculous strokes of fortune which either solve the hero's problems at a stroke or have major and direct impact on not only the present situation but longer-term game developments. | "There is a sudden earthquake, The castle splits in two and collapses. In the chaos, the Knights guarding us are swept away and buried in falling stone, but a way has opened for us to scramble out to safety." |





their prey is alerted to their presence by the noise.

However, with hero points, players can go further and inject changes into the game of more substantial nature. At *all* times, the narrator has the final say on whether a plot edit will be allowed, or how many hero points it will 'cost' – the Plot Edit chart below is just a guideline. The basic rule of thumb ought to be whether it makes the game more enjoyable for everyone involved. If, for

example, it would benefit one player at the expense of the others or short-circuit a carefully-planned storyline, then it may be appropriate to say no, or better yet find some way of modifying the player's suggestion to make it more generally acceptable. Of course, this works best in the more improvisational sort of games which are driven not by such a pre-planned storyline but by the interaction of the heroes, their personalities and ambitions, and the world around them.

CHARACTER IMPROVEMENT

You spend hero points to improve your hero's skills, magic, relationships, equipment and so forth – indeed, to make any permanent change. Hero improvements are generally made between adventures, and there is no limit on how many abilities can be added or improved at a time.

Improvements to a hero should generally make sense in the context of the story. Some improvements, however, seem to come from nowhere – the player just decides that it would be fun or useful to have a certain ability or to get better with a skill he has never used before.

Required Hero Point Expenditures

As hero points represent in part personal commitment, membership of a religious organisation makes demands not only upon a hero's time and resources, but also hero points. A hero has to spend the same proportion of hero points on abilities related to a Power or Faith as to the time they require (see **MAGIC**). That said, the narrator should adopt a broad attitude towards just what is 'related' abilities – for a healing saint, any ability listed under the Healer occupation is appropriate, but also points spent developing relationships within the cult or profession, raising the hero's Piety related to the saint and so forth. These percentages apply only to hero points spent on improvements, not hero points used on bumps.

1. Adding New Abilities

Add a new mundane ability to your hero for 1 hero point (or 2 if not explained by context or backstory). New abilities begin with a rating of 13. If your narrator decides it is part of one of your hero's keywords, its rating is instead equal to 18 (the keyword's initial rating +1 for the hero point spent). If not part of, but close to the keyword, then 1 hero point buys a rating of 17.

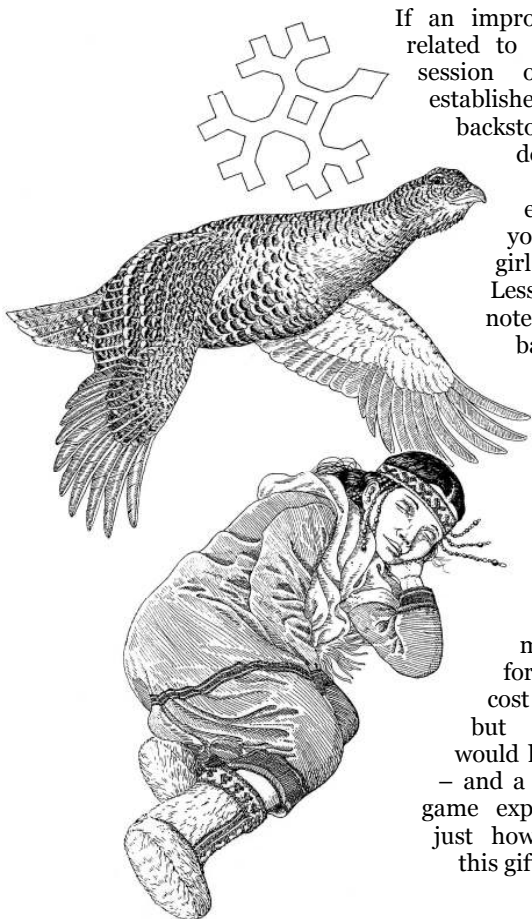
2. Learning New Magical Abilities

For a hero to acquire a new standalone magic power, there has to be some in-game rationale: it is better for this to become the basis for an adventure than simply something that just happens 'off camera' between games. The narrator must also agree the new power. This costs 3 hero points, and starts at 13.

3. Improving Abilities

You can spend hero points to permanently improve your hero's abilities. This represents training, practice, a greater commitment to a community or cult, deeper intimacy or trust in a relationship, and so on. To improve an ability by 1 costs one hero point. The cost to improve magical affinities by 1 is three hero points. Keywords cannot be improved with hero points, although individual abilities within them can be.

You can improve an ability faster than normal, but this costs more hero points – see the **Hero Improvement Cost Multipliers** table below.



If an improvement is not related to a recent game session or the hero's established goals and backstory, you pay double the hero point cost. For example, the young Sibiryak girl Iguri of the Lesser Votyaks has noted in her backstory that her mother's spirit soars through the world as a capercaillie (wood grouse). Thus, if her player sought to establish that natural magical power for her, it would cost 3 hero points, but otherwise it would have required 6 – and a pretty good in-game explanation as to just how she acquired this gift of the spirits!





4. Overcoming Flaws

You cannot remove a flaw by spending hero points alone. One option to combat a flaw, build up a positive trait until it is stronger than the flaw. The flaw may then be ignored for normal play (with the narrator's permission), though it remains, dormant.

Alternatively, your hero may overcome the flaw during play. A crisis might offer a chance to redeem old failings. Overcoming a desperate confrontation despite the flaw might end it: an especially brave deed, slaying an adversary, or completing a particular quest, for example, and at that time the narrator may either reduce the flaw by a certain amount or permit the player to spend hero points to buy it down, at a rate of 1 for each point spent.

5. Gaining Followers

Hero points can be used to acquire or replace followers, as noted in **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS**.

6. Cementing Gains

Characters in serial adventure shows and books often succeed at goals — wealth, love, or magical knowledge —

only to forget them by the next adventure. If your hero wins some advantage and you want to ensure that this benefit continues, you must spend hero points to cement it and add it to your character sheet. Otherwise, your narrator may deprive your hero of it without recourse, usually before the next adventure begins. If the benefit gained is a standard one, such as a sidekick, the normal hero point cost applies. If the ability is not standard, such as a magical item, the cost to cement it is 1 hero point.

It is up to the narrator whether a special item acquired in this way starts at the usual beginning rating of 13 or else at whatever level it had when they acquired it. After all, the rating of 13 reflects not necessarily its total effectiveness but its strength in the hero's hands, and it may take time for him to learn how properly to harness its full capabilities. Normally, though, it is best to keep it at its existing level, although the narrator might demand that it cost two or even three hero points to cement.

Abilities cemented with hero points may still be lost during the course of the game, but the hero will have an opportunity to keep or 'rescue' the ability. Of course, the narrator always has the option of charging fewer or even

Hero Improvement Costs

| Improvement | Hero Point Cost if Related to Play |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Gain a new mundane ability, relationship, etc at 13 | 1 |
| Improve a mundane ability, relationship, etc by 1 | 1 |
| Cement a benefit gained in play (if no other hero point cost applies) | 1 |
| Gain a retainer or supporting character (with Relationship at 13) | 1 |
| Gain a sidekick (with Relationship at 13) | 3 |
| Change retainer to sidekick | 3 |
| Change supporting character's role | 1 or 0, narrator's choice |
| Replace retainer or supporting character | 0 |
| Replace sidekick with an equivalent | 1+ |
| Become a communal worshipper (gain Worship [Deity] or like at 13) | 3 |
| Become an initiate (gain Initiate of [Power] and one affinity at 13 for free) | 3 |
| Become a devotee (gain Devotee of [Power] and three feats in each affinity already known at 13 for free) | 3 |
| Gain religious role (shaman, priest, etc) | 3 |
| Gain an affinity at 13 | 3 |
| Improve an affinity by 1 | 3 |
| Gain a feat within a gained affinity (devotees only) | 1 |
| Improve a feat by 1 | 1 |
| Gain a religious Secret at 13 (devotees only) | 3 |
| Gain a new natural magical ability in play | 3 |
| Improve a natural magical ability by 1 | 1 |

Hero Improvement Cost Multipliers

| Improvement | Multiplier |
|--|------------|
| Improvements unrelated to play | cost x2 |
| Improve an ability by +2 at one time | cost x3 |
| Improve an ability by +3 at one time | cost x6 |
| Improve an ability by +4 at one time | cost x10 |
| * Note that all multipliers are cumulative. Thus, to improve a mundane ability by +2 costs 3 points if related to play, but costs 6 points if unrelated to play. | |





no hero points for a standard benefit gained during play.

COST OF IMPROVEMENTS

The **Hero Improvement Costs** table lists the hero points required to improve or gain mundane and magic abilities, as modified by the **Hero Improvement Cost Multipliers**. These also apply to hero points spent to improve a sidekick's abilities.

Free Raises and Abilities

As well as simply awarding hero points, narrators may during or at the end of a session of play award heroes either **free raises/abilities**.

For example, if a hero had just saved some Lithuanian refugees from a Teutonic raiding party, the narrator might award the hero two new relationships: the gratitude of that group of Lithuanians and an enmity with the leader of the Teutonic raiders. These will generally start at 13, but are at the narrator's discretion. The Russian proverb has it that "gratitude kindles less quickly than hatred" so maybe she will decide that the Teuton's hostility is actually 20! If that particular Teuton was already a foe, then perhaps the narrator might increase the existing rating.

Example: **Dry-Eyed Raisa Begins to Think About the Future**

Evading Mongol plots and pursuit, avoiding forced marriage to the Sibiryak hunt-master Three Spears and preventing the sullen boy-prince Andrei of Pereslavl-Zalessky from outlawing Russian Orthodoxy out of pique, Raisa has had a busy time of it, but has been essentially reactive. In her last adventure, she won the Palace-on-Wheels in a riddling contest with a Leshy, the mighty spirit-king of its forest. She almost drove it into a river, though, when inexpertly trying to catch up with her confessor, Yuri Broad-Buttocks, before he got back to Pereslavl-Zalessky and raised the city guard, convinced as he was that she had been turned into a goose. It's a long story.

Anyway, she spends a hero point to cement the Palace-on-Wheels, reckoning that this opulent self-propelled caravan is a suitable vehicle for a princess. Had she not done so, the narrator could simply have declared at the start of a future game session that she had had to sell it for food, or it had been 'accepted as a gift' by the prince.

She also spends a hero point to increase her *Riddling* by 1 and another to gain the skill *Drive Wagon* at 13 – both relate, after all, to the story. She suspects that with this rather obvious mode of transport, she might have some need to bluff her way past Mongol patrols in the future, so she decides to invest in a new skill, *I'm Too Important to Bother*. This is not linked with her immediate adventures or environment, so she has to spend 2 hero points to gain it. Normally, new abilities start at 13, but this links with her Petty Noble keyword, without being part of it, so while it still costs 2 hero points, the narrator allows it to start at her keyword level of 17.

Raisa was clearly moved that the seemingly timorous and ineffectual Yuri was prepared to strike across bandit-ridden roads (and at an uncharacteristic jog) in order to, he thought, rescue her. She spends one last hero point to raise her relationship with him to 18 – and the narrator chips in with a directed hero point award to bring it up to 19.

ADVANCED EXPERIENCE

Players cannot use hero points to increase whole keyword ratings in play – keywords are intended just as convenient ways of summarising a whole body of skills and experiences.

However, increasing keywords above the starting 17 is often a useful shorthand way of representing characters who have particular experience. The narrator may decide that certain player heroes who are mature in years or otherwise have reason for such advanced experience should start their keywords at a higher level.

A good rule of thumb is +1 to a *single* keyword or related group of abilities for each year of advanced experience. The narrator should work with the player to figure out what will best fit the story and group of players.

However, the most common use of advanced experience is simply to reflect certain narrator heroes: rather than detailing all the various abilities of that middle-aged Suzdalian trading magnate, just give him *Merchant* 15^{HP} and be done! (Though to make him more colourful and distinctive, adding *Honest but Cunning* 5^{HP} and *Irritating Hum While Thinking* 20 or the like also help make him more three-dimensional.)

Optional Rule: Adventure, not Improvement

In many stories, characters do not change markedly from episode to episode, or if they do it is in the form of specific responses to particular incidents, from meeting a new love to have a hand lopped off by a nemesis. Rather than engage players in a slow effort to build up their heroes (and in the process hoard their hero points), a group could decide that HP – which should therefore be distributed a little less generously – can only be used for bumps and plot edits. From time to time, to reflect major plot developments or reward especially inventive or inspiring play, the narrator can just hand out specific character changes (which, after all, can just as easily be complications such as *Reputation as Lady's Man* as obvious boons such as +1 to an exiting *Muscular Strength* because of the rigours of rowing in a Greek galley for a year).

DOBRYNYA NIKITICH

DRAGONSLAYER

Even heroes can learn from experience. Of all the bogatyr, Dobrynya Nikitich is best known for his bravery, above all his feat in killing the mate of the terrible dragon, Zmei Gorynich. Thus, while there are still dragons to be found in the Mortal World, there are none as fearsome as the First Dragon.

Dobrynya Nikitich was born of minor boyar stock, a Christian warrior who was not too proud to bring in the harvest, too, and look after his widowed mother, Amelfia Timofeyevna. Hearing that dragons were ravaging the lands around Sorochinsk Mountains, he sallied forth and killed every one.

He was young, he was proud; little did he know that he had just killed the youngest children, mere dragon-babes of Zmei Gorynich and his mate, Goryshche. Ignoring his mother's warnings, he passed through the mountains on his way to offer his services to the Christian prince of Kiev, Vladimir Bright Sun. There was ambushed by 12-headed Goryshche herself. Long was the struggle, but eventually Nikitich prevailed, only to spare the dragon's life when she promised no longer to trouble the lands of Men.

When he reached Kiev, though, he learned that Goryshche had carried away Vladimir's favourite niece, the princess Zabava Putyachinya. Sly Alyosha Popovich noted that Nikitich seemed to know about dragons and even had chatted with Goryshche and before he knew it, Nikitich was being told to return the princess or face the headsman's axe.

For three days and three nights, they battled until Nikitich was victorious, standing amidst a lake formed from the dragon's blood. The princess was freed and returned to Kiev and Nikitich was honoured and taken into Vladimir's service.

Yet after years of heroic exploits, Nikitich came to realise that he was lonely. This time he listened to his mother, who counselled that he travel. Out on the steppes, Nikitich came upon a female warrior, a Russian-nomad mixed blood, who spurred her black steed away, clearly on some dark deed. They fought and for the first time, Nikitich lost the battle and his heart. The warriorress, Nastasya Nikulichna was similarly smitten, and they were soon married.

Happy was he, yet dutiful, too. When Vladimir asked who would lead a mission to Lithuania and sly Alyosha noted that Nikitich had travelled there in the past, he reluctantly agreed to undertake the task.



There he was bewitched by a Lithuanian hedge-wizard and cast into a deep sleep, such that none knew if he lived or died. After three years, Alyosha Popovich said that he had heard that Nikitich was dead, and asked Nastasya to marry him, but she declined. After another three years, he did so again, but she refused. After another three years she turned him down. But after 12 years, she reluctantly accepted his claims and his hand.

At this time, Nikitich awoke and returned to Russia. Hearing of the wedding, he masqueraded as a musician then revealed himself. Nastasya begged his forgiveness, which he willingly granted, but Alyosha he threw to the ground and would have killed, had Ilya Muromets not stayed his hand. Even so, he then left Vladimir's service, saying that it was time he devoted himself to his wife, and he never spoke to Alyosha again.

Thus, Nikitich still lives. He has learned wisdom and humility, and that not all is about battle and adventure, but also the simple pleasures of life and family. He is no coward – he fought at the final battle of the bogatyr – but likewise he is no fool and he withdrew when it was clear the day was lost. He now lives in some distant corner, but can be called on to dispense wisdom and advice, especially on the subject of dragonslaying.

Dobrynya Nikitich

Russian Hero 1M18, Dragonslayer 20M16, Devotee of St George the Brave 1M14, Listen to Mother 20M1, Good Advice 1M13, Love Wife 10M14, There's More to Life than Adventure 20M12, Suspicious of Lithuanians 20M1.

7. CORE RULES

“The greater the obstacle, the greater the honour in overcoming it.”

Mythic Russia is game played in the imagination and one in which all the players collaborate in creating a fun, immersive and exciting game. Often this is purely cooperative – a hero is going to undertake something at which there is no real chance of his failing, or which the narrator is happy to allow, possibly adding some additional dimension or development. However, for there to be drama and tension in the game, it has to be possible for the heroes sometimes to fail, and these contests can be resolved by the (20-sided) dice.

Example: Eljigidei is a young Mongol courier, but already an experienced huntsman. At the end of a day’s travel, if his player says he will bag some game for dinner, there is no reason to bother with die rolls. Even in deep winter, it generally best just to say that it is hard, but eventually he spots a snow-pigeon on the wing and downs it with an arrow. However, if an evil spirit is deliberately trying to starve him by driving away prey, or if he has just incautiously boasted that he can feed all five beautiful sisters he has just met on the road (he’s young, and brash, or else he might wonder why they set out on a long journey without food or servants, but we hope he’ll survive to learn wisdom), then it might be worth a contest. The important thing is never to bog down the story with unnecessary contests.

The core rules involve Contests and their Consequences: Automatic Success, Simple Contest, and Extended Contest. Modifiers and Augmentation help the players and narrator figure out how circumstances, armour and weapons, augmenting abilities, and other elements of the story affect a hero’s (or opponent’s) abilities. Healing and Recovery allow heroes to overcome the effects of defeat. A key point to remember is that contests are not just combats: solving a puzzle, scaling a cliff or making the princess laugh are all contests.

Heroic Uncertainty

Mythic Russia encourages you to use many of the same narrative conventions that make the tales of ancient heroes – and indeed contemporary adventure films and TV programmes – entertaining. This is the dramatic logic used by storytellers since people first huddled round a fire to listen and be entertained.

Even in the most over-the-top action film, the hero may suffer defeats and setbacks on the path to eventual success. Russian tales are often rather more downbeat, though, and the heroes of **Mythic Russia** cannot assume they are invincible. They will often fail and may





even die, whether a glorious sacrifice that their friends may live or a sad and tawdry end brought about by bad luck, stupidity or arrogance. Roleplaying demands fallible heroes so that their creators — you, the narrator and players — are as surprised by the course of the story as you would be when watching a TV show or reading a novel.

This uncertainty sets a roleplaying game apart from other forms of storytelling. There's no replay button. Your hero takes risks with consequences. Bold heroes seek these challenges.

CONTESTS

In situations where the task is simple and there is no chance of failure the narrator can decide it is an automatic success, with no roll needed. However, things are not always so straightforward, and even a hero can fail, whether because he was over-ambitious, or unlucky, or faced a tougher opponent. No one knows quite what will happen until it occurs, so **Mythic Russia** has rules to determine if your hero succeeds or fails. When the story throws up a challenge, you use one of your hero's abilities in a contest.

failure or the intrusion of some other plot point, the family friend, even if unsuccessful, would probably be politely informed that the Petrovs regret that they are unable to entertain guests.

Usually the challenge is settled with a **simple contest**: you decide what to try and what ability to use, the narrator does the same for the opponent or other resistance, and then both roll a die one time. The rolls decide who wins. A simple contest can be used to resolve actions that take just moments or the outcome of a battle or a week-long ritual. For especially dramatic confrontations, the narrator can use an **extended contest** instead, as described below, but the overwhelming majority of contests will be simple.

What if the hero doesn't have the right ability for a particular action? Well, life is like that — sometimes you might have to do something for which you are not prepared. For everything but the most ridiculously difficult or esoteric actions, the default ability rating is 6. That is pretty low, though, so why not improvise with the abilities you already have? If you have an ability that is fairly close or one for which you can make a convincing case, try it within the framework of the story. Your narrator will determine how this affects your hero's chance to succeed in the action (see **Improvisation**).

Remember: you always want to roll a number that is equal to or lower than your target number (which is your ability rating after applying modifiers).

Example: With his attempt to 'borrow' one of their horses discovered, Vytautas is being chased by some angry and burly Muscovites. Suddenly, the path ends in a narrow but still frightening chasm. Vytautas has no Jump ability, so he could rely on his default 6, but he also has *Run Fast* 20. The narrator agrees that he could use this to build up momentum to carry him over the ravine, although he must take a modifier penalty of -6. Still, 14 is better than 6!

Whatever the type of contest, the basic pattern is the same. You pit your target number (an ability of your hero's, possibly modified by other complementary abilities, conditions, equipment used and similar factors) against a rival's, whether an enemy's combat skill or the resistance offered by the door you are trying to barge through.

Modifiers

Anything that influences the effectiveness of a hero's ability calls for a modifier (see **Modifiers and Augmentation**). Improvisation, magic, equipment, help from friends, and other conditions can affect a hero's actions.

ABILITIES

At the start of a contest, the player whose character is initiating or responding to it should choose the ability on his hero's character sheet he is using. Remember that there are often different ways of using abilities, each of which may work in different ways.

To this end, the narrator must also consider the vocabulary of abilities in light of the situation. For instance, in one speed contest the abilities of *Run*, *Run Fast*, *Sprint*, *Cross Country Racer*, and *Move Quickly* may be equivalent and all used with their full ability rating. But if the race is a short one, *Cross Country Racer* ought to take a penalty because it is a very different ability from the one used in a short race, whereas *Sprint* is so precisely the skill at hand that it may get a bonus to its target number. Similarly, abilities like *Lie*, *Fast Talk*, and *Bargain* may have different

For example, if you are trying to sweet-talk your way past a suspicious porter into the Petrovs' country house, *Lie* and *Relationship: Petrovs (family friend)* will both do, but each will have a different process and outcome. The player whose character is using *Lie* must come up with a convincing ruse, and if he fails, then the porter might attack him or simply slam the door and report him to his masters. By contrast, barring a disastrous





modifiers depending on whether the contest is between scholars, lovers, rivals, or merchants.

Target Number

The total of the ability rating plus or minus all modifiers is called the target number. The target number shows how capable the character is for the current contest.

Contestants

In a contest, there are often only two contestants: the hero and his opponent. Player heroes normally act individually during a group contest, so each is a contestant. However, followers usually support the hero rather than acting separately: they do not roll a separate die for their actions. A trio of hungry and threadbare bandits can be three contestants (with the narrator rolling a separate die for each), but such insignificant foes are often better treated as a single 'contestant' with one die roll.

Sample Resistances

Climbing

- Shallow slope: Automatic success.
- Very steep slope: 14 to 20.
- A cliff: 17 to 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ 2.
- A city wall: 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ to 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ 2.

Combat Abilities

- Peasant: 10 to 14.
- City militiaman: 17 to 18 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Prince's *druzhina* (personal guard): 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ to 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ 2.

Finding Your Way

- Find your way in a familiar region: Automatic success.
- Follow an animal's tracks: 14.
- Follow verbal directions in a familiar region: 14.
- Follow a map in a foreign land: 17 to 5 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Retrace your steps in a foreign land 20 to 5 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Follow someone's verbal directions in a foreign place: 10 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Follow an animal's tracks in the rain or over bare stone: 20 $\mathbf{r1}$.

Romance

- Seduce a willing, interested partner: Automatic success.
- Seduce a potential partner: 20 to 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ 2.
- Come across as a lovable rogue: 1 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Seduce someone who is married or in love: 5 $\mathbf{r1}$ to 20 $\mathbf{r1}$ 3.

Social Conflict

- Spread rumours: 14 to 20.
- Spread malicious rumours: 17 to 5 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Passionately sway a friendly crowd: 17 to 20 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Deny malicious rumours: 20 to 10 $\mathbf{r1}$.
- Win over a hostile crowd: 15 $\mathbf{r1}$ to 10 $\mathbf{r1}$ 2.

RESISTANCE

In all contests, your hero's ability is opposed by a resistance number. Resistance may be an active opponent with his or her own ability, a natural force, or even an attribute (such as the height of a tree). A more difficult task presents the hero with a higher resistance. The narrator can use the **Sample Resistances** below to help determine the resistance.

The default resistance for natural and ordinary things is 14.

Use this number for normal tasks or "passive" resistances, or if the resistance is hard to gauge. 14 is the normal minimum resistance — if a hero has no appropriate ability to resist in a contest, he can at least "passively" resist and hope that his opponent makes a mistake. The narrator may decide that a hero offers a lower resistance, typically the default ability rating of 6. However, such an easy task might be an automatic success, even for the hero's opponent. Thus, a hero who has been drugged into unconsciousness might offer a resistance of 6 to being tied up, but the narrator is more likely to simply declare that he can do nothing about it.

Magical abilities sometimes use the default resistance instead of a more difficult value. See **Natural Resistance** in the **MAGIC** chapter.

Why Do Passive Resistances Try To Succeed?

Although it is obvious why some resistances try to succeed (for example, a lock resisting a thief's efforts), some resistances seem 'passive.' A wounded hero may wonder why his injury is trying to resist treatment when he definitely wants to get better! The resistance roll here represents the unpredictability of the hero's condition. Maybe he responds badly to medicine, or the broken bones might not easily set in the right alignment, or the wound not mend. The narrator should warn players that things do not always go their way, and some problems end up being harder than they look.

DIE ROLLS: SUCCESS AND FAILURE

To determine how well your hero uses an ability, roll a 20-sided die (abbreviated as d20). Compare the rolled number with the target number (ignoring masteries for now); low rolls are better than high. At the same time, the narrator rolls for the resistance.

Critical: If the die roll is a 1 (even when the target number is 1), you succeed so brilliantly that the narrator may reward your hero with an additional, unexpected effect.

Success: If the die roll is greater than 1 and less than or equal to the target number, you succeed, but there is nothing remarkable about the success.





Failure: If the die roll is greater than the target number but not 20, you fail. Things do not happen as you hoped.

Fumble: If the die roll is a 20, you fumble (even when the target number is 20). This is the worst result possible, and you may suffer a disturbing or entertaining catastrophe.

However, just rolling a success, for example, is not enough to guarantee that you have accomplished your goal, because your roll must be compared with that of your opponent or the resistance of the task being undertaken. The degree of success or failure of the hero and narrator's rolls are compared in either a simple or an extended contest. The result can also be affected by 'bumps'.

Bumps

A bump affects the degree of success or failure of the die roll. A bump up improves the degree of success by one step, changing a fumble to a failure, a failure to a success, or a success to a critical. Bump ups come from two sources: masteries and hero points (applied in that order). A bump down reduces the degree of success of your opponent. Bump downs come from one source: masteries.

Bump Up with Mastery

You get one bump up for each level of mastery your hero has greater than your opponent's. Opposed masteries cancel out (based on target numbers, not beginning ability ratings), so if your opponent has as many or more masteries as you do you will not get a bump up.

Example: Vytautas managed to get across the chasm, but one of the Muscovites followed him and has him cornered. Reluctantly, Vytautas draws his knife, while the other approaches with a club and a sneer. Still, he should know better, because for all his aversion to getting into brawls, the Lithuanian is no mean knife fighter, and will pit his *Knife Fighting* 10M against the Russian's *Cudgel Fighting* 17. With a mastery advantage, Vytautas is rolling against his ability 10, but bumps his level of success up by one. So, a 20 will be a fumble, bumped to a fail, a roll of 11-19 a fail bumped to a success, 2-10 a success bumped to a critical, and a 1 a critical with an 'unused' bump (as you can't get better than a critical), which will actually bump his enemy down, as described below.

How Good are Masteries?

- A hero with the same ability rating as an opponent will win about half the contests they fight.
- A hero will beat anyone who is a full mastery lower about 75% of the time.
- If the hero is two full masteries higher, the chance of victory is about 95%.
- At three levels, he is all but certain to win.
- At four, the hero will always be victorious, although the opponent might survive to tell the tale...

Optional Rule: Blind Hero Points

Some players dislike the way allowing hero points to be used after the roll, as it reduces some of the potential for tension in the game. A character with a hero point left can, for example, always avoid a fumble. One response is to rule that hero points must be spent *before* the die is rolled. This way, players will generally use them as 'insurance' for contests which are especially important to them or dangerous. If this option is used, then the narrator should rule that it is also possible to bump down with hero points. It is worth noting that in this case hero points will probably be burnt through at a faster rate, as rolls which otherwise would be regarded as good enough to stand unassisted will have been pre-emptively allocated a hero point just in case. See the **HERO POINTS** chapter for more.

Bump Up with Hero Points

You can spend a hero point to bump up any result by one step. You cannot spend multiple hero points to gain more than one bump on a single result, and you may only bump your own rolls, not a friend's, follower's, or opponent's. You can decide to use a hero point for a bump after the die roll results are calculated (including any bump ups resulting from masteries).

Bump Down with Mastery

A bump down works like a bump up, in reverse. It decreases the result by one step: a critical to a success, a success to a failure, or a failure to a fumble. If you have a critical and still have one or more "unused masteries," you can use them to bump down an opponent, since you cannot get a result better than a critical for yourself. The opponent receives one bump down for each level of mastery remaining. Bump downs come from masteries rather than hero points (though see the suggestion if using the **Blind Hero Points** optional rule).

Example: Vytautas rolls a 1, his enemy a 14. The Russian has rolled a success, but Vytautas rolled a natural critical and yet also had a mastery advantage, which instead bumps his enemy down to a failure.

VICTORY & DEFEAT

In all contests, the degrees of success or failure of the opposed die rolls are compared to find the level of victory or defeat. **Mythic Russia** uses five terms to designate levels of victory or defeat: *marginal*, *minor*, *major*, and *complete*, plus a *tie*. Simple and extended contests determine this in different ways, but the effect is the same. Both victory and defeat have the same level: if your hero wins a marginal victory, his opponent suffers a marginal defeat. The level of victory and defeat guides the narrator in describing what happens as a result of the contest.

Tie: Tie means no result. Effort was expended, but the net result is that nothing consequential occurs, or else both sides lose or gain equally.





Sample Contest Results

Climbing

Complete Victory: You reach the top in record time, helping your companions along the way.

Major Victory: You climb quickly and competently to the top.

Minor Victory: You make slow but steady progress to the top.

Marginal Victory: You took a long time and had some problems, but you reached the top.

Marginal Defeat: You got nowhere, and may be hurt.

Minor Defeat: You made no progress, and are tired, sore, and perhaps impaired.

Major Defeat: You fall during the climb, and are injured.

Complete Defeat: You fall from a great height, and are badly wounded, perhaps even dying.

Combat

Complete Victory: Your opponent is down, probably dying; or they surrender.

Major Victory: Your foe is badly injured and stops fighting.

Minor Victory: Your foe takes a significant wound.

Marginal Victory: Your opponent is slightly wounded, but otherwise intact.

Marginal Defeat: You are hurt enough to affect your ability and want to get out of the fight.

Minor Defeat: You are wounded enough to affect your abilities significantly.

Major Defeat: You are injured badly enough that your ability to escape is compromised.

Complete Defeat: You are dying.

Finding Your Way

Complete Victory: You got there the best and easiest way, and now know a shortcut.

Major Victory: You are very sure of your way, and get there quickly and without problems.

Minor Victory: You know where you are going, and get there easily.

Marginal Victory: You get there, but it takes a while.

Marginal Defeat: You thought you knew where you were going, but take a wrong turn.

Minor Defeat: You went off track somehow.

Major Defeat: You are utterly lost.

Complete Defeat: You are lost, and in a dangerous place.

Romance

Complete Victory: She is like putty in your hand, besotted by your presence and eager to do whatever you want.

Major Victory: She smiles and stares into your eyes, rapt in your presence.

Minor Victory: She smiles at you and stares into your eyes.

Marginal Victory: She smiles at you.

Marginal Defeat: She turns away.

Minor Defeat: She frowns.

Major Defeat: She gives you a very cold look and makes an accusation of impropriety and insult.

Complete Defeat: She makes a detailed accusation of lewdness in front of a crowd, and wants you run out of town.

Social Conflict

Complete Victory: You have driven your opponent from the company in disgrace.

Major Victory: You have acutely embarrassed your opponent in front of his peers.

Minor Victory: You made your opponent look foolish.

Marginal Victory: You seem to be in the right, but it is debatable.

Marginal Defeat: You are uncertain of your behaviour.

Minor Defeat: You embarrass yourself.

Major Defeat: You are abashed and cannot look people in the eye. Your social standing is affected.

Complete Defeat: You are mortified to the point of having to leave, or do something drastic to repair your reputation. Your social standing is permanently affected and you may face exile, demotion or some kind of punishment.

Marginal: A nominal victory or defeat, with little gain or loss. The victor gains only the immediate benefits of winning. The loser suffers no lasting effects of his defeat beyond the end of the contest.

Minor: A clear victory or defeat, with a significant but limited effect. The victor gains the immediate advantage of his victory. The loser suffers penalties, typically annoyances, that last for at least a day, possibly longer.

Major: A resounding victory or defeat, with serious consequences. The victor may gain fame or glory. The loser is prevented from pursuing his plans until he somehow counters the results, and will likely suffer lasting penalties. For both, the effects are long-term, lasting weeks or even seasons.

Complete: A total victory or defeat, with momentous consequences. Repercussions are often permanent or irreversible. The victor may become famous (at least for a while). The loser suffers a severe penalty.

The exact effect the level of victory or defeat has on your hero is described in the **Contest Consequences Chart**.

No Repeat Attempts

The point of contests is to introduce suspense and uncertainty, so that not even the narrator knows ahead of time exactly what is going to happen. Therefore, a contest represents all of your hero's attempts to overcome an obstacle. If you are defeated it means that no matter how many times you tried to solve the problem with your ability, you finally had to give up. You can try again only if you apply a new ability to the task or your narrator agrees that special circumstances exist.





SIMPLE CONTESTS

You use simple contests to resolve conflicts that are quick or minor. Simple contests are also suitable for events that are dramatic but abrupt. Further guidance on when to use which type of contest is given in the **NARRATING** chapter.

SIMPLE CONTEST SEQUENCE

1. State what your hero is trying to do, and which ability he uses.

State the action clearly, but don't describe the effects in detail, because you don't know what will happen yet.

2. Work out your target number using the ability rating and any modifiers.

3. The narrator selects the resistance.

The narrator opposes your hero with a resistance—the harder the task or tougher the opponent, the higher the resistance. If the narrator is not sure of the resistance, she can use the default resistance of 14.

4. Roll a die to determine your degree of success or failure, then apply any bumps. The narrator does the same.

Roll a twenty-sided die for your action. At the same time, the narrator rolls for the resistance. Compare the number you roll with your target number to see how well you succeeded or failed with your ability, as described in **Die Rolls: Success and Failure**. Remember to apply any bumps from masteries or hero

points, as described previously under Bumps.

5. Determine level of victory or defeat.

Compare your success or failure with the narrator's on the **Simple Contest Results** table to find your level of victory. It is possible for a character to succeed at his die roll but still be defeated.

6. Determine contest consequences.

Describe the result based on **Contests: Victory and Defeat**. If necessary, compare the level of victory or defeat with the **Contest Consequences** table.

Occasionally, the result of a simple contest will be inconclusive. For example, a hero tries to cross a river, and both the player and narrator roll a 20. If neither has a mastery, the result is a tie. What happens — does he cross the river or not?

In situations like this, the narrator must decide what happens. The hero might actually succeed in crossing, but only after being swept several miles downriver. Maybe he fails, but can immediately try again with the same ability, even though the rules normally do not allow repeat attempts. Perhaps one of the other players can augment him, even though no one stated that they were doing so during the contest. As with any unclear situation, the narrator should make her decision based on what is best for the story.

Example: Vytautas has escaped his pursuers, but is lost and hungry, and a cold Russian winter night is beginning to draw in. He consults his Know-It-All Shell,

Simple Contest Results

| <i>Player's Roll</i> | <i>Opponent's Roll</i> | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | <i>Critical</i> | <i>Success</i> | <i>Failure</i> | <i>Fumble</i> |
| Critical | Low roll wins Marginal victory, otherwise a Tie. | Player wins Minor victory | Player wins Major victory | Player wins Complete victory |
| Success | Player suffers Minor defeat | Low roll wins Marginal victory, otherwise Tie. | Player wins Minor victory | Player wins Major victory |
| Failure | Player suffers Major defeat | Player suffers Minor defeat | Low roll wins Marginal victory. Otherwise tie. | Player wins Minor victory |
| Fumble | Player suffers Complete defeat | Player suffers Major defeat | Player suffers Minor defeat | Tie* |

* In a group simple contest, the narrator may declare that both contestants suffer a marginal defeat to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants.





and its tiny little voice whispers into his ear that there is a hut with a warm fire not far from him. Following its directions, he comes to a river. He can see a ramshackle bridge downstream, but even in the evening gloom he can also see figures gathered around it. Suspecting that it might be his erstwhile opponents, and eager to get to shelter before the sun sets, he decides to swim the river.

Vytautas has *Swimming* 17. The narrator decides that the river is flowing quite strongly but isn't too wide, and sets a resistance also of 17. Vytautas thus has a 50% chance of success. His aim is to get safely across, and so a defeat might mean that he fails to get across, or it might mean that he does so, but is injured or otherwise experiences some setbacks in the process.

The player rolls a 15, which is a success, but the narrator rolls a 7 – also a success, and with a lower roll this means that Vytautas suffers a minor defeat. At first, the narrator plans to rule that he is washed back the original bank, wet and miserable, but then she has a new idea. Vytautas manages to swim the river – but misjudged its strength, and has been washed downstream some way. As he drags himself from the waters, cold and weary, he hears angry shouts of recognition from the Russians on the bridge...

EXTENDED CONTESTS

Extended contests are longer and more dramatic than simple contests. You use extended contests when the outcome of the struggle is important, to generate suspense for the players, or when the narrator wants a back-and-forth struggle. It is something the players and narrator should visualise and describe. Again, further guidance on when to use which type of contest is given in the **NARRATING** chapter, as well as a simpler option, **Chained Contests**.

An extended contest consists of one or more rounds, in which the contestants perform actions that are similar to simple contests. However, actions and rounds do not decide the outcome of the whole contest, only who gains or loses advantage points (AP) at that time. Contestants take actions in turn, losing and gaining the advantage, until one of them runs out of advantage points and so is defeated.

EXTENDED CONTEST SEQUENCE

At the beginning of an extended contest, you and the narrator explain your overall goals in the contest: to work out who murdered Klavdia Petrovna, convince the Chapter General to make peace with Novgorod, kill the Byzantine renegades before they can get away with the icon, and so on. It is possible to change this overall goal during the contest: for example, you may start off trying to subdue the scruffy-looking bandits you come across, but you may later just be happy to escape them when you realise that they are a band of Cossack heroes!

GROUP SIMPLE CONTESTS

A conflict between three or more characters or forces can be resolved by a sequence of simple contests. The contestant with the highest target number goes first and singles out one or more opponents. Then, if still in the contest, the second highest picks an opponent, until everyone has acted or is out of the contest. If opposing people remain then additional 'rounds' of simple contests ensue until one side wins or one side cuts its losses and beats a hasty retreat.

A group simple contest can have strange results, because a simple contest cannot take into account the benefits of many followers, or all the players working together as a team to accomplish a single goal (such as win a game of tug of war). In such cases, an extended contest may give more believable results. For contests that are not important or dramatic enough, the narrator can instead have the players select a 'leader' for the action, with the rest of the heroes acting as his followers; see **Mass Effort** in the **NARRATING** chapter.

Although you will likely change the ability you use to accomplish this new goal, your AP do not change since the contest has not yet ended.

Events almost always make it clear who acts first, usually the character who initiates the contest. The sequence below assumes it is your hero, but it could just as easily be a narrator character.

Starting an Extended Contest

1. State what your hero is trying to do and which ability he uses for his first action.

Identify your eventual objective: this is not the first step, but where you want to end up. It makes a difference, for example, if your aim is to defeat the enemy guards, or simply to get through them and into the citadel. In the latter case, a success might mean that you manage to knock them out of the way, leaving them dazed but unhurt, while a minor defeat might mean that you manage to kill them all – but while you are doing that, other guards bar the gate and lock you out.

Then state the first action your hero takes to achieve his goal, choose an ability to use, and figure your target number.

2. Figure your starting AP total using the target number plus any source of additional AP you may have.

Advantage points (AP) measure how well a hero is doing against his opponent in an extended contest. Each





contestant's starting advantage point total equals the target number of the ability he uses in his first round of the contest, including all modifiers and augments. The AP include +20 for each level of mastery, and can also be increased by followers.

3. The narrator selects the resistance and figures its starting AP total.

The narrator selects the goal of the opposition (often just 'stop the hero') and opposes the hero's action with a resistance — the harder the task, the higher this rating will be. If the narrator is not sure of the resistance, she can use the default of 14. This resistance to the hero's initial action determines the opponent's starting AP total; this can be a different ability from the one the opponent will use when his turn to act comes. This resistance may be an active source (such as an opponent), and so may have modifiers, followers, magic, or other sources of additional AP.

Because the opponent's starting AP total is based on his response to the hero's first action, it is always clever to take an initial action that forces your opponent to resist using an ability with a low rating. That way, his advantage point total will be lower for the rest of the contest.

4. Carry out one or more rounds.

Each round is an action and immediate response; it might represent a few seconds (in a fistfight) or a season (blazing a secret trail through the mountains).

For your action, you risk a number of your AP in an attempt to reduce your opponent's, but if you fail the attempt you lose AP yourself. When you have finished, it

is your opponent's turn to do the same. Thus, each contestant's advantage point total rises or falls during the contest as he gains the upper hand or is driven back.

Roleplay each glorious advance and bitter setback of your hero's struggle — describe the events as an onlooker would see them. The ebb and flow of AP is a tool to help the players and narrator in narrating the contest; see **Advantage Points and Combat**.

The Round

1. State your hero's attempted action, ability used, and AP bid.

Say what you are doing and what you intend to accomplish, but don't describe the effects in detail, because you don't know what will happen yet — it will depend on whether and how well you succeed. Give a sense of how much risk the hero takes. You can specify your AP bid if you want, but otherwise the narrator will determine this based on the amount of risk taken. Extreme or aggressive actions mean a high AP bid, and cautious actions require less. Cooperation between player and narrator is in order to figure this. See **Sample Bids** for examples of inconsequential, cautious, normal, determined, and reckless bids.

2. The narrator selects the resistance.

The narrator should determine what the exact resistance to the current action and ability is. This does not have to be the same as it was during the last round. Additionally, the ability used to resist your hero's 'attack' does not have to be the same ability the opponent will use when it is his turn to act.

Extended Contest Results

| Player's Roll | Opponent's Roll | | | |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Critical | Success | Failure | Fumble |
| Critical | High roll transfers 1/2x bid, else tie | Opponent transfers 1x bid | Opponent transfers 2x bid | Opponent transfers 3x bid |
| Success | Player transfers 1x bid | High roll loses 1/2x bid, else tie | Opponent loses 1x bid | Opponent loses 2x bid |
| Failure | Player transfers 2x bid | Player loses 1x bid | High roll loses 1/2x bid, else tie | Opponent loses 1x bid |
| Fumble | Player transfers 3x bid | Player loses 2x bid | Player loses 1x bid | Tie* |

* In a group extended contest, the narrator may declare that both contestants lose 1/2x bid to indicate that, although their results cancel out with respect to each other, their situation worsens compared to other contestants'.

1/2x, 1x, 2x, 3x: The AP bid is multiplied by this number before applying the results. Thus, if a player bids 3 AP and the result is 'Opponent loses 2x bid,' the loser loses 3 x 2 = 6 AP. Round half points up.

Loses: The bid is subtracted from the loser's advantage points total.

Transfers: The AP bid is subtracted from the loser's AP total and the same number is added to the winner's AP total. The victor can never add more advantage points than the loser actually had, but the loser still loses the full amount, possibly driving his AP below 0. Thus, a hero may have to transfer 6 AP, but have only 2 remaining. He falls to -4, but his opponent adds only 2 AP to his total. Because of transfers, a contestant can temporarily have more advantage points than he had at the start.

Tie: Neither contestant loses AP.





3. Roll a die to determine your degree of success or failure, then apply any bumps. The narrator does the same.

Roll a d20 for your action. At the same time, the narrator rolls for the resistance. Compare the number you roll with your target number to see how well you succeeded or failed with your ability, as described in **Die Rolls: Success and Failure**. Remember to apply any bumps from masteries or hero points, as described previously under **Bumps**.

4. Compare your result to your opponent's to determine AP gains and losses.

Compare the results of the two die rolls on the **Extended Contest Results** table to determine who loses AP; only when a player has a critical can his character gain AP from his opponent.

5. Now it is your opponent's turn.

The narrator describes the opponent's action, you say what your hero does about it, and it is resolved as described above. The narrator makes her bid, and your hero provides the resistance.

6. Repeat as necessary.

Once the hero and his opponent have both performed an action, a new round occurs if both have positive AP totals. In most cases, the same contestant will start each round. Future rounds follow essentially the same except that the overall goal has been set and the AP tallies just carry over from the previous round. Once your opponent has lost or won APs during the current contest, you can ask the narrator at any time what his AP total is. Exchanges continue until one contestant reaches 0 AP or fewer. At that point, the contest is over (even if it is the middle of a round). The loser's final AP total determines whether the victory and defeat are marginal, minor, major, or complete; see **Contests: Victory and Defeat** and, if necessary, **Contest Consequences**.

Once the contest ends and consequences have been applied, advantage points 'dissipate.' Your hero does not have any until the next extended contest begins, when you calculate them all over again.

ADVANTAGE POINTS

Bidding Advantage Points

The size of your AP bid needs to reflect your hero's action in the round. Describe his action and intent, and say how many AP you want to bid. Your bid must be consistent with your hero's stated action: if you describe an all-out offensive with your sword cutting vicious arcs, you need to bid a lot of AP; if you say your hero is circling his foe cautiously, a low bid is in order. The narrator will look at the level of risk your hero is taking, and may suggest that you change your bid to better match your hero's action. If you do not declare a bid before rolling the die, she will decide how many points

are bid (using 3 as a default), with riskier actions calling for higher AP bids.

How Much Should I Bid?

Some players will want to let story and hero considerations dictate their choices: when their heroes feel like taking risks, they will bid high. When they feel cautious, they will set small stakes. This is a fun way to decide how much to bid, and is certainly a good approach to take when getting used to the system.

However, we cannot avoid looking at the numbers. Until you have played through a few contests, it is hard to know how many advantage points to bid on any given action. On a mathematical level, some choices are more likely to succeed than others. The cautious route is to start out with a low stake in the first round. Wait until later rounds (when you can ask for your opponent's current AP total) before betting big.

If you think your opponent has a better target number than you do, limit the contest to as few rounds as possible by making large bids. The fewer the rounds, the better the chance that luck – and hero points – will counter his superior skill. On the other hand, if you think your target number is higher than your opponent's, you can afford to pick low stakes for a while, letting statistical odds work in your favour. Not that this is especially heroic.

Don't stake more than half your advantage points until your opponent's AP total is low enough for you to put him out of the contest with one action. Even then, think about the consequence you want him to suffer and the consequences you risk if you fail. Decide if the benefits outweigh the risks.

When the story is at its most exciting, though, don't be afraid to let the story outweigh the math. There is no drama without risk.

Sample Bids

Inconsequential, it does not matter at all: 1 or 2 AP

Climbing: "I'll just look for an easy way up."

Combat: "I'm just parrying, making the odd exploratory feint: I just want to keep him busy while I work out how good he is."

Finding Your Way: "I'm being cautious and won't commit myself yet."

Romance: "I'll glance at her and see if she's looking at me."

Social Conflict: "It's no concern of mine."

Cautious, petty: Around 3 to 5 AP

Climbing: "I'll take it slowly, finding good foot and hand holds as I go."

Combat: "I'm going to slowly whittle him down."

Finding Your Way: "I'm going to take a cautious look and not go too far."

Romance: "I'll smile at her."

Social Conflict: "Is that so?"

Normal Engagement, trying hard: 1/4 to 1/3 of starting AP total





- Climbing: "I'll push on and make some real headway."
- Combat: "I will press him hard, stabbing with my spear whenever I see an opening."
- Finding Your Way: "I'll scout nearby, checking for good possible routes first."
- Romance: "I'll make small talk and joke with her."
- Social Conflict: "I doubt that. Look, is there a point to this?"

Determined Effort: 1/2 to 3/4 of starting AP total

- Climbing: "I'll try that short, difficult-looking part of the cliff over there."
- Combat: "I'll go for the killing blow, even if it means taking chances."
- Finding Your Way: "I'll make everyone be still, scrutinise the signs and ways, and take as long as it takes."
- Romance: "I'll take her hands and kiss them."
- Social Conflict: "That's a lie. You have any proof or are you just looking for a fight?"

Reckless: All AP are bid/Desperation Stake

- Climbing: "I'll climb up there as fast as a spider. Safety rope? Nah."
- Combat: "I'm going to hurl my shield at him, and as he ducks it, run at him, screaming my battle cry, and skewer him so far along my spear that his face is in mine as I smile and say 'that's for Vanya.'"
- Finding Your Way: "After my careful exploration I can confidently say, 'Follow me, no Mongols here!'"
- Romance: "I'll take her in my arms and kiss her."
- Social Conflict: "That's enough! If you don't shut up now, I'll shut you up myself, and if I ever hear you're still peddling these lies, I'll come and find you and rip out that tongue!"

Followers and Advantage Points

Followers can act in different ways during a contest, augmenting the hero with their abilities or allowing him to use one of their abilities as if it were his own. Alternatively, a follower with a relevant ability or keyword can simply add its AP to the hero's at the beginning of the contest. Remember to figure any modifiers into the follower's ability before adding it to your hero's starting AP total.

Neither the player nor the narrator makes action rolls for the followers. Instead, their actions are subsumed into those of their leader. The follower's relevant ability or keyword is used solely as a source of advantage points.

One hero can assign his followers to another, although the hero may have to command a reluctant follower to do this.

Tracking Followers in Extended Contests

You may wish to track each follower's own fate, rather than treating them as a generic 'AP pool.' The simplest way is to list each follower with the advantage points he contributes. As the hero loses AP, assign the loss to one follower. When that follower's points are 'used up,' he drops out of the contest and the next follower on the list begins taking AP losses.

A follower 'comes back' when the hero's AP once again rises above his threshold.

Advantage Points and Combat

Contests are not exclusively or even primarily about combat. There is as much fun and drama to be had in a theological debate with a Greek philosopher or a desperate horse-race against a spoilt prince as the spilling of blood. Nonetheless, combat is a staple of many games and tales. While many people understand the way the ebb and flow of AP can operate in, say, a debate, there are those who find it harder to accept in combat. Surely, for example, if you lose several rounds, then you are battered and bruised, and can hardly spring back to full health just because you make some lucky rolls thereafter?

The answer is that losing and gaining AP may well have nothing to do with taking and landing blows. Combat in **Mythic Russia** is modelled on popular fictional sources as well as Russian folktales. You rarely see or read about fighters delivering a succession of permanent wounds to each other until one of them finally keels over. Instead, they jockey for a favourable position, ducking, dodging, knocking each other over, tossing each other around, and smashing up the furniture. Up until the final blow, they generally deal out only minor bruises and cuts. Advantage points thus reflect much more than the contestants' physical condition:

Advantage points measure a fighter's position: Is he upright, or has he been thrown to the ground? Does he have his balance? Does he have the advantage of high ground, or is he fighting from below? Is he on even, uncluttered ground and therefore able to move easily, or is he encumbered by hazards such as clinging vegetation, broken flooring, sucking mud, or cliff edges? Does he have his weapon in hand? If not, is he close to objects that make for impressive and entertaining impromptu weapons or shields?

Advantage points also measure a character's emotional state. Is he ready and willing to fight, or has the instinctive fear response that impels us to run from danger taken over? Is he clear-headed enough to make split-second decisions, or is he dominated by anger, a thirst for violence, or concern for his reputation?

Advantage points eventually determine if the hero is wounded, but they are not 'hit points.' Until a character drops to 0 or fewer advantage points, any wounds will be superficial. They may well cause considerable pain, ruining his concentration and slowing him down, and even heroes that are never hit will begin to tire as they fight through their third or fourth round. But in the end, if a hero finishes the fight with a positive AP total, he is not wounded.

GROUP EXTENDED CONTESTS

When an extended contest involves three or more contestants, it is a group extended contest. The conflict is often between two groups; each side wants to knock



the other out of the contest by reducing all of its opponents to 0 or fewer advantage points. Sometimes a contest will be a free-for-all involving three or more groups.

Rounds in a group extended contest differ in that the order of resolution is more complicated. At the start of the round, each contestant states his action and AP bid (or his level of daring, see **Sample Bids** above) and singles out one or more opponents. The narrator then determines the order in which the contestants act. Taking surprise, withdrawals, and similar situations into effect, she has three options:

- ❑ Contestants can go in order from most daring to least daring bid: a reckless bid goes before a daring bid, as defined in **Bidding Advantage Points**. Thus, the most heroic actions take precedence, acting in order of decreasing boldness. (In case of a tie, the contestant whose actual bid is higher goes first.)
- ❑ Contestants can go in order from highest bid to lowest: a bid of 20 AP goes before a bid of 5 AP. (In case of a tie, the contestant whose bid is the most daring goes first.)
- ❑ Contestants can go in order from highest to lowest AP total. (In case of a tie, the highest or most daring bid goes first.)

In the first round of the contest, the order in which contestants act has a big impact on AP totals. The contestant who acts first bases his starting AP total on the ability he acts with, and his target bases his AP on the ability he uses to resist that action. As each contestant acts or resists for the first time in the contest, the ability he uses determines his starting AP total.

During a standard extended contest an opponent immediately responds to your action with his own, but in a group extended contest this is not true—he cannot act (against you or anyone else) until his turn comes. You may want to change your declared action if another character attacks you first, and your narrator will normally allow you to do so, usually to return an attack in kind.

The order in which contestants act is also important because a character (whether hero, opponent, or a follower of either) can be knocked out of the contest before his turn comes. If your chosen opponent is knocked out before your hero acts, the narrator decides if you can change your declared action.

A contestant always has the option of delaying and allowing other contestants to act before him. He can jump back into the action at any time during the round, although again the narrator determines if he can change his stated action.

When all characters still in the contest have completed their action, the round ends and a new one begins.

EXTENDED CONTEST OPTIONS

Parting Shot

When you defeat an opponent in an extended contest, you can act again *immediately* to try to make the consequences of his defeat more severe. This is called a parting shot. You once again bid AP and use an appropriate ability against your opponent. If you succeed, his AP will decrease; his level of defeat may or may not change, but he cannot finish the round by taking an action against you.

Parting shots are risky; if you fail, an AP transfer might bring your opponent back into the contest. Your stumble can give him an opening that he can exploit in an effort to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

The consequences of defeat can remain after a parting shot, if the narrator chooses. Thus, an opponent might keep a –10% penalty from a defeat even if he is handed another chance by his opponent's failed parting shot.

Example: **Vytautas and Raisa**

Vytautas finally gets to the hut, only to find it is already occupied not by some peasant family who would happily offer him food and shelter for a couple of coins, but the Princess Raisa. St. Neilos the Myrrh-Gusher of Mt. Athos had visited her in a dream and warned her that unless she was able to get the man she would meet there to join her cause, she would perish under the claw of a wolverine. The heroes' respective players, Tony and Carrie, decide to resolve the situation through an extended contest.

Vytautas wants to persuade Raisa to let him have food and a night's sleep without having to agree to anything. Raisa wants to recruit him to her cause. Vytautas is using his *Boyish Charm* 7M, Raisa her *Impassioned Persuasion* 6M. In the contest that follows, Raisa is brought down to –5AP, so she receives a marginal defeat. Vytautas has managed to convince her that it is unworthy to try and browbeat him when he is clearly tired, wet and hungry, and should at least let him rest. However, Tony wants to make Raisa feel as if she has an obligation to Vytautas now and perhaps even some attraction, so he decides on parting shot. He initiates another action against Raisa, bidding 6AP. If successful, this will bring her to –11AP, a Minor defeat.

However, this time Tony loses the contest. Raisa rolls a 1, a critical, and transfers the 6 AP, adding them back to her total, bringing her up to 1AP and back into the contest, however barely.

Desperation Stake

Heroes can stake more advantage points than they currently have, to a maximum of their **starting AP total**. This allows a hero to attempt a desperate retaliation even when he is within a single AP of defeat. Abstract forces can never stake more advantage points than they have, nor can followers or most narrator characters; it is one more mark of the importance of the





hero. The narrator can allow a major narrator character to use a desperation stake.

Unrelated Action

You can forfeit your action to do something unrelated to the object of the contest. You might want to try to open a door, haul an important piece of equipment out of your saddlebags, heal yourself with magic, or augment an ability. Depending on the circumstances, you may have to engage in a simple contest to find out if you succeed at the unrelated action.

Positioning and Movement

If you want to move during an extended contest, you can take an unrelated action and sprint up to 50 yards, perhaps more if you have an ability such as *Fast* or *Fleet of Foot*. Terrain (such as a steep hill, a slippery deck, or cluttered rooms) and heavy burdens may reduce the distance moved. Moving distances of up to about 10 yards can often be combined with another action.

Positioning and movement are often less relevant in magical and other long-distance contests than they are in a melee.

Switching Abilities

You can usually switch freely from one ability to another in the middle of an extended contest. It makes sense to do so if you think a different ability will yield a better result. You may need to do an unrelated action to switch abilities—for example, when changing weapons or equipment.

Your AP total stays the same when you change your ability, so it makes sense to start the contest with your best ability (appropriate to your goal, of course). If this seems odd, remember that advantage points measure advantage — how well the character is doing in the contest at the current moment. They do not measure proficiency; that is what the target number is for.

When you switch abilities, your goal does not necessarily change (although it might), just the means by which you pursue it. When you switch your goal itself, of course, the ability you use to pursue the new goal will probably change as well.

Example: Vytautas has 5AP, Raisa 1AP. Carrie knows that the odds are that the longer the contest goes, the more likely Raisa is to lose, so she decides on an all-or-nothing tactic, switching abilities and making a desperation stake.

“She will try to shame Vytautas into pledging his service. She hands over the Crown of Night, and her golden necklace, and then starts stripping off every item of value on her body, finally presenting her bone knife, hilt first. She cries out ‘the saints have spoken; without your aid, I am just carrion and my city is lost to the Mongols evermore. If you say no, then you might as well kill me now and take all I have.’” She bids 20AP: the worst-case scenario is that she fumbles and Vytautas criticals, meaning a transfer of three times the bid. She cannot transfer more than the 1AP she has to Vytautas, but she

would still lose 60AP, bringing her to -59AP. This would be a complete defeat, equivalent to a mortal wound in a combat. The narrator — who has enjoyed being able to sit back and let the players drive the drama — warns Carrie that a defeat like that would probably mean that Vytautas treats Raisa with such sensitive respect that she becomes besotted with him, and will acquire a suitable ability at a rating equal to the number of AP she is below zero...

WITHDRAWING FROM AN EXTENDED CONTEST

If you want to withdraw from an extended contest before being defeated, the narrator may simply determine that your opponent lets you. But if your opponent wants to prevent you from withdrawing, the contest continues with the same AP totals but possibly with new objectives: you try to withdraw, he pursues. If you are the only hero on your side of a contest and you successfully withdraw, the contest ends. In this case, you do not ‘hurt’ your opponent, because that is no longer your objective. But if you fail, he still inflicts consequences (such as injury to your body or reputation) on you.

If you withdraw from a group contest and later decide to rejoin it (or are forced to), you rejoin with the advantage point total you had when you left. If you can show how your leaving and returning substantially changes the situation, the narrator may restore some of your AP — for example, if you leave a street fight to get your followers from a nearby tavern. Leaving a contest just to pick up a weapon or catch your breath is an unrelated action, and does not change your advantage points.

Contest: Lend Advantage Points

Abilities: Any ability that could help the target character in the story.

Resistance: The number of advantage points you are attempting to lend.

Outcome:

Complete Victory: Target gains the attempted AP; lender does not lose AP.

Major or Minor Victory: Target gains the attempted AP; lender loses the AP.

Marginal Victory: Target gains 1/2 the attempted AP; lender loses 1/2 the attempted AP.

Tie: No effect.

Marginal Defeat: Target gains nothing; lender loses 1/2 the attempted AP.

Minor or Major Defeat: Target gains nothing; lender loses the attempted AP.

Complete Defeat: Target and lender each deduct the attempted AP from their totals.





AP LENDING

AP lending is a common and important option in extended contests. Heroes or narrator characters can transfer some or all of their advantage points to another hero engaged in a group contest on their side. With more advantage points, he can stay in the contest for longer, or make larger bids without driving himself to failure.

A contestant cannot lend advantage points to himself. If a follower's AP are already included in your AP total, the follower cannot lend them to you.

Use an unrelated action and describe what your character is trying to do to improve the position of the target. For example, your hero might heckle the rival entertainer, toss the disarmed warrior a new weapon, or simply shout words of encouragement. Then, state the number of AP you are trying to lend. (The narrator may suggest a higher or lower bid based on the action you describe.) This determines the resistance you face in a simple contest, with results as determined below. Beware: heroes trying to aid their comrades in this way risk worsening their friend's position.

CONTEST CONSEQUENCES

When a character is defeated, the narrator may impose a penalty to any or all of his abilities, depending on the nature of the contest. The penalty is usually a measure of how badly the hero is 'wounded,' whether it is a physical ailment such as a cut or broken bone, a blow to his self-esteem or social standing, or a failure of his magic. This penalty should be applied in situations related to the hero's defeat.

The **Contest Consequences** table gives suggested penalties for defeat. States of Health' below, provides more details, but remember that a defeated character is just that: defeated. The **Pyrrhic Victory** option in the **NARRATING** chapter also raises the possibility of the victor also being hurt in a contest.

Followers and Defeat

In a contest, a hero's followers suffer one more level of defeat than he does. For example, if a hero is hurt in combat (marginal defeat), his followers are impaired (minor defeat).

FINAL ACTION

If your hero falls to 0 or fewer AP in a standard extended contest, he is defeated. In a group extended contest, however, he can still try a final action to stay in the

actions). A final action represents the knack to come back when your opponent turns away to gloat or deal with the other heroes. Your hero may only attempt one final action in any contest. (Be warned: important narrator characters might also have this option.)

To attempt a final action, your hero must be free from attention by the opposition. You can use a relevant ability in a simple contest against the number of advantage points your hero is below 0. Even if you succeed, the consequences of the original defeat still apply: a hurt character who succeeds at a final action still takes a -1 to appropriate abilities until healed.

You cannot try a final action if your opponent is attempting a parting shot, since you are not free of his attention.

STATES OF HEALTH

Despite care, talent, armour, and the like, sooner or later your hero will be wounded, whether a physical injury or damage to his wealth, self-esteem or reputation. In **Mythic Russia** these wounds are quantified and affect your hero's chances of success. In all activities with physical risk (such as fighting or climbing), a hero is wounded in any contest in which he fails. For simple contests, this is after the dice are rolled and the results

Contest Consequences

| <i>Simple Contest Defeat Level</i> | <i>Extended Contest Final AP Total</i> | <i>Result</i> | <i>Penalty</i> |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------|---|
| Marginal | 0 to -10 AP | Hurt | -1 penalty to appropriate ability ratings |
| Minor | -11 to -20 AP | Impaired | -10% to appropriate ability ratings |
| Major | -21 to -30 AP | Injured | -50% penalty to appropriate ability ratings |
| Complete | -31 or fewer AP | Dying | No actions allowed |

contest as long as he is not dying (which allows for no





Contest: Final Action

Abilities: Any ability relevant to the current contest and/or planned final action: *Strong Willed* or *Last Word* to avoid being crushed in a debate, *Tough* or *Ignore Pain* in combat, and so forth. **Augments:** as appropriate.

Resistance: Equal to the negative AP total. **Modifiers:** improvisational and circumstance modifiers are common.

Outcome:

Any Level of Victory: Regain AP equal to the target number of the ability used (counting each mastery as 20 AP).

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: No effect; the contest is over for your hero (and all his followers, etc.).

Complete Defeat: Level of defeat increases by one (so, for example, a marginal defeat becomes a minor defeat), with corresponding increase in contest consequences.

figured. In extended contests, this is at the end of the contest, when the defeated character has 0 or fewer AP.

Mythic Russia uses six 'states of health': **healthy, hurt, impaired, injured, dying, and dead.** Contests without physical risk have similar consequences; for simplicity, **Mythic Russia** uses these terms to describe the results of any contest, regardless of its nature.

Healthy

This is the state of health to aspire to. Nothing is wrong with the character, for now, and he neither gains a bonus nor takes a penalty to any action.

Hurt

On a marginal defeat, the character has been hurt, although not too badly. His body, pride, or spirit is bruised, bashed, and cut; maybe he has just lost the will to continue. A little time or treatment and he will be as good as new.

A hero can suffer from multiple hurts. Each hurt imposes a -1 penalty to some or all ability ratings, depending on the nature of the contest. A hero hurt in combat might have all of his faculties intact, and so take the penalty only to physical abilities. A person who takes a hurt in a debate will likely suffer the penalty only to his debating ability and perhaps some relationships.

Impaired

On a minor defeat, a character is impaired, and suffers from one or more picturesque symptoms of trauma, illness, or ridicule. In combat, these might include a bloody nose, cuts and bruises, or that perennial favourite: ostentatiously-displayed blood-soaked bandages. Outside of combat, this might be a painful cough, loss of social standing, or an embarrassing rebuke. Nevertheless, when called on to exert himself the character struggles valiantly against this impediment, letting it affect him hardly at all.

An impaired hero suffers a -10% penalty to all appropriate ability ratings, as described above. If the hero also suffers from one or more hurts, those penalties are applied after the impairment penalty is calculated.

Injured

On a major defeat, the character is injured: badly maimed, publicly humiliated, or debilitated by disease. When it comes to taking action again, he is mostly helpless. He can do little except lie prone and suffer, walk away in shame, or drown his sorrows.

An injured hero suffers a -50% penalty to all appropriate abilities, again depending on the nature of the contest. At the narrator's discretion, a physically injured hero may be conscious and clear-headed, but still suffer the -50% penalty to his ability ratings. If the hero also suffers from one or more hurts, those penalties are applied after the injured penalty is calculated. The non-combat effects are similar, with all appropriate abilities halved until something done to restore them. For example, a badly failed attempt to raise your warriors' morale leaves them depressed and uncertain.

Dying

Characters begin dying when they suffer a complete defeat. In contests that carry the risk of physical harm, 'dying' accurately describes their state of health. In other types of contests, complete defeat indicates different results, but always a complete failure with terrible long-term implications: in danger of exile, loss of a fortune on a bad business deal, or watching your love prepare to marry another man. Perhaps you have not only failed to inspire the farmers with your stirring speech, they now plan to tar and feather you and hand you over to your enemies! Once a hero is dying, generally only magic can bring him back from the brink of doom, though this is up to the narrator. Dying characters are usually unconscious, imprisoned, inconsolable, or otherwise unable to act, but the narrator can always allow the dying hero one chance to gasp out his last words.

Dying characters (even heroes) rarely get better on their own; usually they succumb to their wounds. They can hang on to life or hope for as long as seems practical, allowing the heroes time to race to the rescue, find a magician with major magical healing, or stop the wedding. This is not to say that all dying characters will linger on. Sometimes a quick death, bankruptcy, or elopement furthers the plot more than rescuing the hero would. Ultimately, the final decision lies with the narrator.

Dead

A dead character is, well, dead, and under most circumstances is out of the game. We say 'most' because resurrection is possible, although extremely rare, usually the secret of a magical organisation. Resurrection should be the goal of an entire adventure. In the meantime, you will want to create a new hero to replace your dead one. If the dead hero beats the odds and is resurrected, you can set the new hero aside as a backup.

A non-violent contest will not result in death, but a complete defeat in such contests has equally drastic and permanent effects.

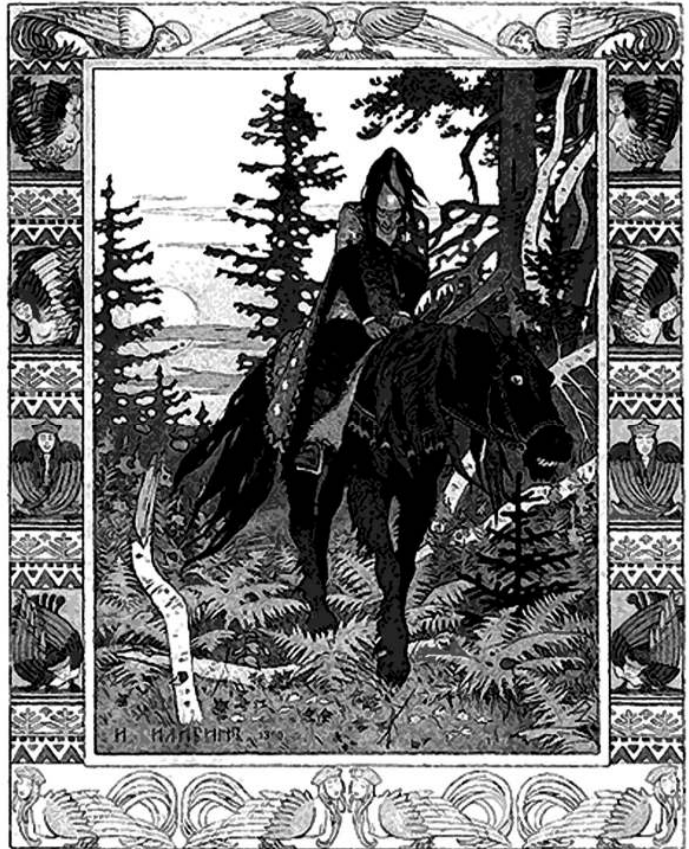
Poison and Disease

Defeat in a contest involving poison, disease, or similar attacks is rarely different from the effects of combat. If a hero is defeated, he suffers a penalty based on his level of defeat. This might be delayed, so that the effects of a poison not take effect for several hours or the symptoms of a disease develop over several days, but the contest is no different than any other. Many times, poison and disease will simply give a bonus to a mundane attack, so that a giant spider's venom simply makes its bite more effective, resulting in a worse defeat for the victim.

Nonlethal and Unexpectedly-Lethal Combat

In adventure fiction, especially in films and TV programmes, characters who want to subdue their opponents by knocking them unconscious almost never kill them accidentally. Real life is rarely so neat, but again **Mythic Russia** simulates not reality but a certain kind of heroic fantasy.

To announce your hero's intent to engage in nonlethal combat, describe an appropriate means of attack, such as an assault with fists, the flat of a blade, or the traditional blunt instrument. If you reduce your opponent to 0 or fewer advantage points in this way, he is unconscious. The worst he can suffer is to be *hurt*; any more grievous consequence is disregarded. At the narrator's discretion, this rule can be applied to non-combat abilities and contests as well. The narrator may rule that certain attacks cannot deal non-lethal damage. Conversely, some weapons or abilities can only deal nonlethal damage: you cannot knock someone out with a crossbow bolt or blast of flame!



On the other hand, it may be possible to kill people with attacks which do not seem lethal on the face of it: the half-bird bandit Nightingale could kill with a whistle, for example, while the gaze of the Black Horseman could stop a heart in mid-beat. It is for the narrator to rule in such cases: typically, attacks made with an especially high target number could perhaps be considered lethal, but the target should be allowed generous opportunities to find ways of resisting it.

Dazed or Unconscious

Sometimes defeated characters become dazed or unconscious, rather than wounded. Heroes may want to capture opponents, or a Sleep spell might knock your hero out. The hero regains consciousness when the narrator deems it interesting, or perhaps as the result of a new contest. If knocked out in a fight that he and his companions lost, he will likely find himself a prisoner of his enemies.

MODIFIERS & AUGMENTATION

Modifiers add to or subtract from your hero's ability rating (not the resistance faced). Used in all types of contests, modifiers are applied to the ability rating to give the target number. A **bonus** adds to the rating, while a **penalty** subtracts from it. A modifier is written as a plus or minus sign followed by the modifier

number: +3 represents a bonus of 3; -2 indicates a penalty of 2.

The narrator gives modifiers when anything alters the effectiveness of your hero's ability. If something significantly helps the ability (such as fighting from



higher ground) then the hero receives a bonus, while hindrances (such as trying to use an inappropriate skill for a task) mean a penalty is applied. The guidelines below will help the narrator assign modifiers.

Players can also gain a bonus by using one ability to aid another. This method of creating modifiers from your hero's abilities is called **augmentation**. Players should use the story to gain as many bonuses as possible.

MODIFIERS

Target Number Reduced to 0

If an ability rating is reduced to zero or below by modifiers, your hero should use another ability or he will automatically fail.

Gaining or Losing Masteries

Modifiers may raise an ability rating above or drop it below a mastery level. This may allow a player to use a mastery bump he could not before, or could take away the mastery advantage he normally receives. Thus, if a character with an ability of 18 gets a +3 bonus, in this particular contest his ability is considered **111**.

Improvisation

Improvisational modifiers are very common. When your hero attempts to use an ability that is not exactly right for the task, it takes a penalty of from -1 to -20, with -5 as the default. The narrator may suggest a more suitable ability, and should disallow the use of an entirely inappropriate one (such as when the improvisational modifier would be more than -20).

Here is a selection of abilities with possible actions and their improvisation modifiers. If your hero has an ability specifically matching one of the actions, he can use its full rating—which is a big incentive to have precisely defined abilities.

Circumstances

Conditions are not always perfect. Your hero's situation and environment can increase or decrease his chances of success.

Fighting

- Surprise attack from behind: +20.
- From a higher level: +10.
- Know foe's hidden weakness: +5 to +15.
- Standing on a sharply angled ramp: -5.
- Standing on a pitching ship deck: -10.
- Fighting in partial darkness: -10.
- Fighting in total darkness: -30.

Debating in front of onlookers

- You had time to prepare yourself on the subject: +5 to +10.
- Speaking with a foreign accent: -10.
- You aren't from around here: -10.
- While hung over: -10.
- With judge biased against you: -20.

Attracting a lover

- You have great clothes: +5 to +15.
- There is a good chance that you will marry them: -5 to +20.
- You are filthy and stinking from the hunt: -10.
- Member of an enemy family, clan, or tribe: -20.
- A relative of someone you killed: -40.

Exertion

- You have not slept in a day: -5.
- You have not eaten in two days: -10.
- You have been fighting for an hour straight: -10.
- You have been using magic constantly for an hour: -10.
- You have fought several battles already today: -20.
- You have fought several magical duels already today: -20.
- You have not had any water in two days: -20.
- You have not slept in a week: -30.

Story

Previous events in the adventure (and results of past contests) may give a modifier to the current contest.

Sample Improvisational Penalties

| <i>Level of Difference</i> | <i>Example: using Convince Buyer...</i> | <i>Example: using Sword & Shield Fighting...</i> | <i>Modifier</i> |
|----------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| Small | to win a debate | with a large knife and shield | -3 |
| Medium | to pacify an angry drunk or tell a tall story | without a shield, or with a club and shield | -5 |
| Large | to seduce a fair maiden or win a court case | to identify the kind of magic in a sword, or for Sword Dancing | -10 |
| Totally Alien | to compose a poem | to wield a completely different kind of weapon, such as a lance | -20 |



Example: **Braving the Tower**

Fire is raging across Tver! The lady Anna Vladimirovna, perhaps unhinged by the sight of the city's kremlin in flames, fled not out of the door but up to the top of one of the fort's turrets. Her daughter, Sofia, begs Laughing Daniil to save her and, ever the sucker for a pretty – and rich – girl, Daniil agrees. The narrator decides to resolve this as three sequential contests: battling up through the blazing tower, persuading or forcing the lady Anna to come to safety, and then actually getting her out alive.

For the first, Daniil will rely on his *Unexpectedly Strong*, augmented by his *Don't Think About the Risks*. The narrator decides that the conditions inside the tower will create a resistance of **8mf**. However, Daniil has had the foresight to take an axe to break through doors and walls (+3) and has in his mouth the Stone of St Seraphim **18mf**, which allows him to survive underwater without breathing, so he can avoid breathing in the smoke (+4).

However, when he gets to the top he finds that Anna has been possessed by evil magic – she actually set the fire, under the influence of this demonic intruder, and is more set on cackling madly than leaving safely. Daniil decides he will try to appeal to Anna's shackled soul and get it to drive out the alien force and restore her to reason. He decides to rely on his *Talk to Women*, augmented by his *Natural Charm* and *Twinkling Eyes*. He could have tried magically to force out the demon or physically to overpower her, but he instead is trying to attract and appeal to the woman inside. That is a perfectly viable option, but in this case the narrator decides that Daniil, smoke-blackened and lightly singed that he is, must take a -10 situational penalty...

Tools, Weapons and Armour

The world of **Mythic Russia** is shaped by the heroism, good luck, skill and dedication of its protagonists. Even so, it makes a difference if you have the right tools for the job, whether shoeing a horse, bribing a chamberlain or killing your foe. The equipment a hero carries relating to each task simply provides a bonus (or in some cases penalty) to his overall ability rating.

Basic or Light Equipment: +1

Nothing special, just the essentials, such as light or short ropes for climbing, a cheap gift when trying to curry favour, a crowbar, light or makeshift armour (such as hardened leather, tough skin or fur) and weapons (a cudgel, knife, dart, rock or short bow).

Average Equipment: +3

A proper professional's outfit, whatever the job, such as fine robes to impress at court, a standard one-handed weapon (sword, mace, spear, axe, etc) or military ranged weapon (crossbow, javelin, longbow), medium armour



(chainmail, lamellar, scale armour), a fully-equipped smithy to forge a weapon.

Heavy or Excellent Equipment: +5

This could be an especially extensive or top-quality outfit or equipment, such as an extraordinary gift, metal cable, a locksmith's kit imported from Italy, or heavy armour (European knightly plate, or chainmail made by a true master armourer) and weapons (greatsword or greataxe, lance, berdysh, metal crossbow).

A single modifier will generally apply for a hero's complete outfit, but in some cases they may add. The classic example is a shield, which adds a +1 in appropriate contests.

Higher and lower quality weapons and tools can alter the bonus, so that a poorly forged sword might only give a +2 bonus.

Special or named items will have a numerical rating (such as My Mother's Wedding Dress **13mf** or the Axe of St Nikita **1mf**). Their rating can, of course, be used as an active ability, but otherwise they add the usual bonus, as above, and an additional one based on the auto-augment value of the rating, as discussed below (that is, the rating divided by 10, rounding 0.5 up), so that in combat, the



Axe of St Nikita would be worth the standard +3 and an extra +2 from its own rating for a total +5, while in the right situation, the dress would get +3 over and above the appropriate rating from the dress. Especially important items could have several abilities. For example, the extraordinary Icon of St. Athanasius, painted by the equally extraordinary Andrei Rublev, has Do Not Lie 2 \mathbf{m} , Evil Begone 10 \mathbf{m} and Dare to Chastise Princes 15 \mathbf{m} .

However, what can provide a bonus in some circumstances might incur penalties in others. Thus, a man in heavy armour is harder to hurt in battle... but will sink and drown all the more quickly when he falls through the ice (just ask the Teutonic Knights). Likewise, the fine robes and exotic imported scent the hero donned to further his chances wooing the princess might make him rather less imposing when he tried to intimidate his way past the drunken vagabonds who

waylay him on the street outside. In such cases, the hero suffers a penalty equal to the usual bonus, or even a multiple of the modifier. (This penalty usually does *not* take into account any extra bonuses an item may have for being magical or otherwise have a rating of its own.)

Multiple Opponents

Sometimes, your hero may engage more than one opponent. In any contest, it is harder to attack and defend against multiple opponents than it is to focus energy and attention on one. Narrators should use common sense to determine how many individuals can attack a single target; the “rule of six” says that about six people can effectively act against one person. In combat, only about six attackers can reasonably surround and attack a defender of about the same size; in a contest of words, too many attackers will completely drown each other out; etc.

Optional Rule 1: Weapons with Detail

Some narrators and groups prefer their combat to be a little more detailed. Although one of the strengths of **Mythic Russia** is that combat is no different that any other contest, which would mean that there should be an equivalent list for, say, different kinds of trade goods for sale in the market or, indeed, different conversational gambits, this option is here for those who want a greater sense of differentiation between weapons.

All weapons and armours have a basic rating, as above, but also one or more specific abilities, which may be used where appropriate in their own right or to augment. Note that in some cases, abilities may provide penalties (for example, a spear's Long 20 actually counts as a -2 fighting in a confined space) and some are intended as penalties outside combat (Heavy, for example, can penalise a hero's ability to run long distances or jump wide chasms).

- Dagger +1 (Quick 13)
- Improvised Club +1 (Knock Out 13)
- Mace +3 (Knock Out 14, Bash 10)
- Sword/Sabre +3 (Cutting Slash 13)
- Hatchet +1 (Chop Wood 15)
- Axe +3 (Chop Wood 20)
- Spear +3 (Long 20)
- Great Sword +5 (Chop Through 15, Long 15, Mighty Swing 17)
- Berdysh +5 (Chop Through 20, Long 20, Mighty Swing 20)
- Self Bow +2 (Quick Reload 15)
- Longbow +4 (Quick Reload 15)
- Crossbow +5 (Armour Piercing 17, Slow to Load 5 \mathbf{m})
- Leather Jack +1
- Medium Armour such as chainmail or scale-and-chain +3 (Heavy 10)
- Full Plate Armour +5 (Heavy 20)
- Shield +1 (Block Missiles 20)

If narrators want, they are welcome to use the same approach for other pieces of equipment. It is, however, recommended that it be confined to special or unusual items. It may make sense to have Ornate Imported Venetian Robes +5 (Look Cosmopolitan 20, Look Rich 20), but Ordinary Tunic +1 (Nothing Special 5) is hardly worth detailing!

Optional Rule 2: It's the Man, not the Tools

Conversely, narrators and groups may wish to ignore the equipment bonuses in most situations, both to streamline play and also to emphasise the primacy of the heroes rather than their kit. This is fine, but the narrator in this case should then feel free to introduce occasional bonuses and penalties for especially appropriate or effective tools. It is also recommended that the separate bonuses for named and special items still apply: My Mother's Wedding Dress ought always to make a difference!

Multiple Defence Modifiers: A hero can defend against any number of opponents, but he suffers an accumulating -3 modifier for each defence after the first. Thus, he resists the first opponent using his full ability rating, he resists the second at -3, the third at -6, etc.

Multiple Attack Modifiers: In an extended contest (only), a hero can attack multiple opponents in a round. He must use one ability, rolls the die only once, and suffers a cumulative penalty of -3 for each extra opponent. Each opponent gets a die roll, and the narrator uses their best roll to oppose the hero. If the hero wins, he divides his AP bid against the defenders in any way he likes.

Example: Oleg and the Babushkas

There are many fearful challenges in **Mythic Russia**, but few as daunting as a *babushka*, a Russian grandmother, in full fettle. In a hurry to catch up with Sasha, Oleg has incautiously tried to order out of his way four of these formidable elders, who are dawdling through one of Suzdal's narrow streets. They respond with their *Berate Youngster* ability. Oleg is relying on his *Lead Troops* for authority, which already is suffering a -5 improvisational penalty and is thus at 15.

Against the first *babushka*, Oleg defends with 15.

The second loudly bemoans the *nekulturny* ('uncultured') ways of youth; Oleg defends with 12.

The third *babushka* cries out that her sainted husband would have known how to deal with him, had he not been dead these so many years, dead, dead, leaving her all alone...; Oleg defends with 9.

The fourth prods him in the chest and asks if he isn't ashamed to be bullying defenceless old ladies; Oleg defends with a mere 6.

At this rate, rather than clearing his path, Oleg has probably managed to make a spectacle of himself and is shamefacedly helping carry the old ladies' huge and heavy baskets of produce home, while passers-by shake their heads and whisper about the bad-mannered foreigner. He will be lucky to get on Sasha's trail for an hour or two...

Followers and Multiple Opponents

Followers allow your hero to negate multiple opponent modifiers on a one-to-one basis. Thus, a hero with two followers can face three opponents with no penalty, but the fourth opponent gives him a -3 penalty.





AUGMENTATION

Your hero can use an ability to increase the rating of another. You could use *Strong* to augment *Sword Fighting* or *Convince Buyer* to augment *Trade*. The two abilities have to be relevant to each other. Thus, a magical *Fight Undead* ability could augment *Sword Fighting* if the fight was against undead foes, but would not help against the living.

You can augment with any number of mundane or magical abilities, if they are appropriate and the narrator agrees. You may only use a particular ability to augment another once during a single round. For example, you cannot use *Strong* twice to augment *Sword Fighting*, and magical abilities often have limitations on stacking. The narrator may also decide that it takes a certain amount of time to apply multiple augments, even with mundane abilities.

An augment lasts for the duration of the current contest. In most cases this will be for a short time, but it could be days or weeks for an extended contest involving a political struggle with a rival or a romance. The narrator may limit augmentation during such lengthy contests to a single round, which usually represents a distinct set of interactions.

Automatic Augment

This is the default way to use an ability as a modifier. You simply state what ability you are going to apply, and gain a bonus to your target number. You can only gain an automatic augment from an ability or keyword written on your character sheet (so you cannot gain an augmentation from an ability with the default rating of 6).

The value of the automatic augment is equal to the **target number of the augmenting ability divided by 10** (round up fractions of 0.5 or more). Thus, *Silent Stalker* 18 could give an automatic augment of +2 to *Hunt* ability when foraging, and a magical *Jumping* 14 gives a +1 to *Leap* ability. No die rolls are made, and there is no chance of failure.

Not all abilities are inherent, and using an active ability to augment always takes time. The narrator will decide if an automatic augment takes an unrelated action to use. However, abilities which represent inherent characteristics, such as *Strong*, *Clever*, or *Large*. It usually takes no time to augment with them, so even augmenting with multiple abilities does not take an unrelated action in an extended contest. Thus, when bashing in a fort's gates a mammoth gets +4 for its *Large* 2 \mathfrak{m} 2 and another +4 for its *Strong* 18 \mathfrak{m} .

Automatic Penalties

Keep in mind that some abilities may cause an automatic penalty. A *Huge* hero will have difficulty hiding or squeezing through gaps. As with weapons and armor, the penalty might be equal to the opposite of the automatic augment, or might be a multiple of it. Thus, if that mammoth tried to sneak away, it would take a -4 to

its *Move Quietly*; if it tried to hide from the vengeful wolf pack summoned to drive it off, it might take a -8 to its *Hide* (not that a mammoth normally has either *Move Quietly* or *Hide* abilities, of course). Flaws often work this way.

Variable Augment

You can try for a higher modifier by rolling for a variable augment as an unrelated action. Any bonus can be attempted, but your hero may overreach himself and suffer a penalty instead. This is determined by comparing the augmenting ability's rating against the resistance of the bonus in a simple contest. Unless you use a hero point to bump, do not get too ambitious, because the chance of failure increases as you roll for larger bonuses. This should be used sparingly, as it can bog down the flow of play. It is, however, useful in cases where heroes need to take serious risks in an extreme situation, or to represent situations where the augment could very easily also prove counter-productive.

Contest: Variable Augment

Abilities: Any appropriate to the contest or story. (Remember to state the augment's target ability as well.)

Resistance: Desired bonus x5 (5 for +1, 10 for +2, 15 for +3, 20 for +4, 5 \mathfrak{m} for +5, etc.).

Outcome:

Complete, Major or Minor Victory: Target ability gains the attempted bonus.

Marginal Victory: Target ability gains 1/2 the attempted bonus.

Tie: No effect.

Marginal Defeat: Target ability incurs a penalty equal to 1/2 the attempted augment.

Minor, Major or Complete Defeat: Target ability incurs a penalty equal to the attempted augment.

Augmenting Others

Your hero can provide support to someone else, perhaps a hero who is more active or is the expert in that particular field. You may say, 'I'll fetch and carry for him while he builds the fire' or 'I'm going to hang back and throw javelins.' You can then augment another character with an appropriate ability.

You can use either an automatic augment or a variable augment on another person, but in either case you *must* use an unrelated action. If the person you augmented finishes on the losing side, you suffer the normal consequences of defeat in a group contest, even if your only involvement was to augment him. Depending on your statement of what your hero is doing to provide the augment, the narrator may make you roll for it.





Healing Resistance Table

| Contest Consequence | Resistance | |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Mundane Healing | Magical Healing |
| Hurt(s) | 14* | 14 |
| Impaired | 17 | 14 |
| Injured | 5 \mathbb{M} | 14 |
| Dying | 20 \mathbb{M} | 14 |

* At the narrator's option, healing 4 or more hurts at once can face a resistance of 6 +3 per additional hurt after the first: 15 for 4 hurts, 18 for 5 hurts, etc.

HEALING AND RECOVERY

If your hero is wounded, he has four possible ways to recover. **Mundane healing** and **minor healing magic** are common, and can cure or reduce the severity of most wounds. **Major healing magic** is rare, but can heal a character completely, even bringing him back from near-death to full health. Lastly, **time** slowly heals almost all wounds, except dying.

'Healing' refers not just to physical injuries but the consequences of *any* contest. A companion or friend can use *Boost Confidence* to encourage someone who has failed to stay on his horse, for example. An influential friend can use his *Relationship to Prince* to keep the hero from being punished. A *Play to an Audience* secret in the right circumstances could count as major healing magic, and return even a hero on the verge of exile (in other words, **dying** in the context of a social contest) into the good graces of his community. And, of course, time heals all wounds, even those of pride or the heart. As always, the narrator will determine if a particular ability can 'heal' the consequences of a contest.

Healing Resistance

The resistance to any mundane healing is derived from the **Healing Resistance Table** (simple contest) or uses the patient's negative final AP total (extended contest). Thus, dying at -40 (resistance 20 \mathbb{M}) is harder to heal than dying at -31 (resistance 11 \mathbb{M}). Like all magic, magical healing abilities usually face a resistance of 14 (see **Magic**), but magic used in a way that does not exactly match the magical ability's description takes the resistance faced by mundane healing. It may take an improvisational modifier as well. To heal poison, disease, or malign influences, the resistance is usually the strength of the opposing force. Special magic is required to cure these consequences, since magic intended to heal wounds will not affect them.

Mundane Healing

First Aid and similar abilities like *Treat Wounds* can remove the penalties from hurts or impairments, but can only stabilise injured or dying patients. Such minor healing is usually resolved as a simple contest. Only one

attempt at mundane healing (successful or not) can be made for each wound.

Example: **Salving Demetrea's Pride**

Demetrea was trying to negotiate safe-passage through Sibiryak hunting lands, but failed so disastrously that not only have the tribesmen threatened to scalp her or her friends should they ever be seen anywhere near their territories but the Narrator has ruled that she is in effect 'injured' – she has suffered such a disastrous blow to her confidence and reputation that her attempts to use most abilities involving interaction with others or personal force of character are only 50% their usual rating. In an attempt to repair the damage, Laughing Daniil uses *Spin A Yarn* 8 \mathbb{M} to construct a face-saving version of events to tell everyone. The Narrator applies a -5 improvisational penalty, leaving him at 3 \mathbb{M} against the usual 'injured' resistance of 20. He succeeds, and Demetrea is now only 'hurt' – soon enough, her natural confidence will be fully restored, but at least at the moment she only suffers a -1 penalty.

Minor Magical Healing

Minor magical healing is available from some Powers, even ones not dedicated to healing. Minor magical healing can remove or reduce any wound's severity. Such minor healing is usually resolved as a simple contest. Each wound may be affected by only one attempt; after that, only major magical healing or time can accomplish additional healing.

Major Magical Healing

Major magical healing is rare and special and is usually as the secret of a healing Power. Major magical healing removes all damage due to injury, illness, or malign influences (as appropriate to the particular ability) with any level of victory. Such major healing often involves an extended contest, since such secrets often specify an active resistance. Additionally, many major magical healing abilities require a ritual (see **Ritual Magic** in the **Magic** chapter), and so may take hours or even days to work.

Time

Without medical aid, hurt characters heal at the rate of one hurt per day if they have a chance to rest, eat, and drink normally and do not perform stressful actions.





Contest: Use Mundane Healing

Abilities: Any mundane healing ability. *Augments:* Patient's supportive abilities, such as *Tough* for physical healing, *Optimistic* if restoring morale, etc.

Resistance: See **Healing Resistance Table** above. *Modifiers:* improvisational and circumstance modifiers may apply, such as if trying to restore morale while cold, hungry and miles from home.

Outcome:

Complete Victory: All hurts and impairments are removed within a few minutes. Dying patients improve to injured, injured patients improve to impaired.

Any Other Victory: Impaired characters improve to hurt, hurt characters improve to healthy (even if they have multiple hurts), all within an hour or so. Dying and injured patients are stabilised.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: The wound is not healed. Only magical healing or time can heal it.

Complete Defeat: The patient's condition worsens, from hurt to impaired, impaired to injured, and injured to dying. Only magical healing or time can heal the wound.

Contest: Use Minor Magical Healing

Abilities: Any active minor magical healing ability. *Augments:* Patient's supportive abilities, such as *Tough* for physical healing, *Optimistic* if restoring morale, etc.

Resistance: 14 (if there is no active resistance). *Modifiers:* improvisational and circumstance modifiers may apply.

Outcome:

Complete Victory: All wounds are removed instantly, leaving the character healthy.

Any Other Victory: Dying patients improve to injured, injured patients improve to impaired, impaired characters improve to hurt, and hurt characters improve to healthy, instantly.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: The wound is not healed. Only major magical healing or time can heal it.

Complete Defeat: The patient's condition worsens, from hurt to impaired, impaired to injured, and injured to dying. Only major magical healing or time can heal the wound.

Contest: Use Major Magical Healing

Abilities: Any major magical healing ability. *Augments:* Patient's supportive abilities, such as *Tough* for physical healing, *Optimistic* if restoring morale, etc.

Resistance: 14 (if there is no active resistance). *Modifiers:* improvisational and circumstance modifiers may apply.

Outcome:

Any Victory: All wounds are removed instantly; patient becomes healthy.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: The wound is not healed; only time can heal it.

Complete Defeat: The patient's condition worsens, from hurt to impaired, impaired to injured, and injured to dying. Only time can heal the wound.

The narrator may alter this to account for the character's actions (hiking on a wounded leg instead of resting in bed), environment (if cold and wet rather than warm and dry), or other factors. Impaired characters heal more slowly, over an adventure or a week or so, but recover completely once healed.

Injured heroes recuperate more slowly still, over at least one adventure. All mundane abilities should be reduced by half while the character heals. He will need to eat well, practice his skills, and generally spend his time getting better. Some healing abilities can speed the process. Even when he is fully healed, he might suffer a permanent reminder such as a physical or mental scar that acts as a flaw. Only appropriate major magical healing can prevent this or remove the affliction later.

Healing During Extended Contests

If your hero has a healing ability he can try to heal or strengthen himself or another character during any extended contest. To heal himself, he either uses the above rules (if he has taken a wound of some kind) or uses the healing ability to provide an augment. (Remember that a hero can never lend AP to himself.)

To heal others, he can do either of the above or use the rules for **AP Lending**. Even heroes with 0 or fewer AP can be revived. If the subject rises above 0 AP as a result of the healing, he can rejoin the contest. Even if he remains negative, his final condition at the end of the contest may improve. Thus, if you bring a hero from -35 AP to -15 AP before the contest ends, he will only be impaired, not dying.



8. MAGIC

“The most powerful sorcerer makes the most troublesome friend.”

Magic is nothing less than the raw essence of the Otherworlds, ultimately flowing from great deities and such fonts as the sun and the springs which flow down the sides of the Lithuanian god-mountain.

It can create, destroy, and transform. It has changed history, such as when the Mongols summoned the terrible One Year Freeze in 1236-37, their horses galloping across the snowy plains of Russia while the defenders were left too hungry, cold and miserable to pose any serious resistance. But magic is no monopoly, and Dmitri Donskoi has just manifested perhaps the most convincing and powerful demonstration of *duoeverie*, drawing on the powers of both pagan gods and Russian Orthodox saints at Kulikovo, blinding Mamai’s infamous Unborn Ancestor with their radiance and stripping the Gold Eagle Riders of their spirit wings with their wrath.

Nor is magic just the preserve of princes and conquerors. Everyone has a little, even the fearful peasant, whose mumbled prayers might help keep evil sendings at bay. However, only a minority may use it actively, whether these are priests able to call down the wrath of their gods or warriors whose swords crackle with lightning, witch-blessed children who can heal a sick animal with a song or wise women whispering charms over herbal concoctions.

This chapter explains how magic is used in terms of the rules; the actual form and context of the kinds of magic found in **Mythic Russia** are detailed in subsequent chapters. After all, there are many different forms of belief and magical traditions in this setting, from the Christian churches of Russia, Byzantium and Rome to the Mongol and Sibiryak animists, who follow shamans and placate spirits. Each is wielded by different kinds of people, teaches different kinds of wisdom and embodies different cultural identities. However, they all operate to the same basic rules, as paid down in this chapter.

MAGIC IN THE WORLD

Magic is everywhere. After all, what keeps the Devil in check if not the constant vigilance of the saints and angels of heaven? Who moves the sun across the sky if





not Dazhbog in his shining chariot? Would not the earth be a barren and sterile desert without the loving ministrations of Moist Mother Earth?

However, the kind of magic directly employed by priests, heroes and magicians is more focused and directed that this kind of vital but also everyday magic. This kind of magic is 'sensible' — it can be seen, heard, felt, or otherwise sensed when it is used. People glow, sparks shoot from their hands, choirs of angels sing or maybe the air becomes chilly or thick with the smell of incense or ozone. Attack magic is usually bright and makes a loud noise, detection magic may make the perceptive organs or the studied object glow, and healing send gentle waves of energy flowing between healer and patient, as if the closing of the wound in a few seconds anyway would not make it obvious that magic is at work. Even magic which has a covert effect such as invisibility or the power to lie convincingly has some kind of peripheral discharge. This may just be when the magic fails — perhaps the hero shimmers and wavers, but ultimately stays visible — or it could be that the target is unable fully to understand it. Maybe the liar's eyes widen hypnotically or his voice acquires a strange resonance, but so long as the victim fails to resist, none of this registers.

Magic seems 'more real' — it appears clearer, brighter, or the like compared with 'normal reality.' It is not just a matter of flashy special effects. Enchanted items might appear larger, like a huge spear or sword. Something protected might shimmer or appear out of focus. The more powerful the magic, the greater its perceptibility to normal people.

Different faiths and kinds of magic have their own forms of manifestation. This is discussed in the relevant chapters, and ranges from the halo glowing around a pious Christian's head while invoking the powers of his saint, accompanied by a distant sound of angelic choirs or perhaps the whiff of incense, through to the flickering lightning crackling down the weapon of a pagan devotee of Perun, the dark storm clouds roiling around him, and the menacing rumble of thunder.

Once a magic effect ends, the object reverts to its normal appearance. Magical senses let characters discern active magic, and some may even see the residue of magic that has long been spent. Normal senses cannot tell that a person is a devotee or sense that a rock has a spirit residing in it unless the magic is especially great: those most richly steeped in magic, the greatest heroes, saints and masters of spirits, are beings as much of the otherworlds as our own, and this cannot be hidden. The

Magical Manifestation Table

| <i>Active magic</i> | <i>Magic potential</i> | <i>Sample manifestations</i> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 13 | | The magic is clearly perceptible, but generally only through a single sense. A blade may glitter, or the air seem momentarily sweeter. |
| | Below 1M2 | None: the hero's magic is only evident when actively used or else through magical forms of detection |
| 1M2 | | This is powerful magic, evident through a variety of senses. |
| | 1M2 | The hero is faintly, almost subliminally marked by his most powerful magic, visible under magical or especially careful and conscious scrutiny. |
| 1M4 | | This level of magic is beyond most people's experiences; there is generally no hiding its nature, caster and scale. All or most senses may be engaged. Thus, a mighty act of healing through the powers of Moist Mother Earth might be accompanied by a wordless singing from the very ground, a warm glow in the air and a comforting smell of spring and new beginnings and the taste that is indescribable yet at once exquisite and reassuringly familiar. |
| | 1M4 | Unless actively seeking to mask it, the hero is obviously magically potent, and the general form of their magic (or at least their Faith) will be evident. |
| | 1M8 | The hero is extraordinarily magical, and there will usually be some kind of ambient effects; a Christian hero may have a faint aura around his head, for example, while a pagan devotee of a storm god might be constantly faintly wind-blown, so that his hair and cloak flutter in an aesthetically-pleasing manner, even on a calm day. |
| 1M7+ | 1M10 | This is magic of the kind which tears through the many worlds. Active magic will be possibly literally earth-shattering, the stuff of legend and chronicle for years to come. Those who have this level of potential magic are saints and demigods walking the earth, and unmistakable as such (unless they are bending their magic to hide their power): the earth blossoms where their feet fall, auras or haloes burn around their heads, spirits bow as they pass... |



Magical Manifestation Table provides guidance as to the form and magnitude of such effects, linked both to *active magic* (which is being cast) and also a hero's

magic potential (his general level of power, equal to his single greatest magical ability or relationship).

NATURAL MAGIC

One of the characteristics which often marks heroes from the common folk is their possession of some unique ability, unrelated to their worship. It may be a blessing from a saint, spirit or fairy godmother, it may be the legacy of heroic or divine ancestry or it may be just an unexpected boon. The folklore of **Mythic Russia** is full of such heroic individuals, such as Mikula Selyaninovich, beloved of Moist Mother Earth, who was thus superhumanly strong and able to ride across the land faster than anyone else, or the shapechanging princess, Vasilsa the Wise.

Natural magic abilities are 'natural' in that they are innate to the individual, as normal to him or her as his ability to *Climb* or his knowledge of *Mongol Customs*. They operate as normal abilities, allowing the hero to *Fly*, *Spit Acid*, *See in Complete Darkness*, or whatever. Like skills, they can be used either to augment another ability or as an active ability, and they can be augmented by other appropriate abilities. Their effects can be dispelled in a specific situation, but not taken away. For example, a magician with a *Run Up Cliffs* spell can use it to counter a hero's natural magic ability to *Run Up Cliffs*, but not to take it from him permanently.

Natural magic abilities are 'magical' in the sense that most people can only mimic these abilities using feats. They follow the general guidelines for magic presented in this chapter – they use the **Natural Resistance**

rules and their effects are generally 'sensible' (in other words, they can be sensed in one fashion or another).

These abilities are personal, with effects limited to the individual who possesses them. Thus, a hero with the power to *Fly* cannot make anyone else fly, but he could try and lift someone and fly off with them (although this would incur a penalty, especially if the intended passenger was reluctant). Furthermore, because they are natural to the individual, they do not count as **Inherently Difficult Magic** (see below), although the narrator should be very cautious about allowing abilities that would normally take such a modifier (such as *Invisibility*).

Most heroes with a natural magic ability will have specified it during character creation. The narrator should not simply allow a player to purchase a new natural magic ability in the midst of play with hero points. If she does allow a new natural magic ability during play, she should include its acquisition in the story. Play balance is important here – if she allows one player to add a natural magic ability, other players will probably want to do so as well.

Any new natural magic ability allowed by the narrator costs 3 hero points to gain at an initial rating of 13, and can then be improved like any skill or feat.

GODS, SAINTS, SPIRITS AND OTHER POWERS

Mythic Russia is a melting pot of faiths, beliefs and magics. The Rus' themselves revere pagan gods, Christian saints or even both at once. They are also not averse to placating the local spirits of their land. The Orthodox Church, dominant within Russia, worships God and recognises his saints and angels, yet is also divided by questions of religious dogma and political expediency from the Eastern Orthodox Church which holds sway in Constantinople and the Roman Catholic Faith. The Mongols themselves traditionally communed with spirits, but many have now taken to Islam. To this could be added the Jews of Khazaria, the distinctive pantheons found amongst the people living in and beyond the mighty Caucasus mountain ranges, and even small Romany communities fleeing slavery in southeastern Europe.

Each religious tradition looks and feels different, has its own tenets and moral codes and its magic if of different kinds and manifests itself in different ways. The good news is that in terms of the rules, they all work in essentially the same way. Each such tradition is called a Faith for the purposes of these rules.

The collective term for the various gods, saints, great spirits and the like worshipped in **Mythic Russia** is 'Powers.' They range from petty local heroes to the mightiest pagan gods and the most widely revered saints. It is worth noting that these are *fantasy* renditions of real religions, not meant accurately to represent them in reality. **Mythic Russia** is a game for people who can tell the difference between reality and fantasy.





MAGICAL KEYWORDS

Membership of a religious tradition is a keyword, and it is not unusual for heroes to have several. There are two kinds:

'Faith Keywords' are broad ones denoting a general commitment to an overall belief system (such as the Orthodox Church). This cannot be taken at either of the two higher levels of commitment described below (Initiate or Devotee), just simple Worshipper.

'Power Keywords' represent following a particular deity or religious order within it (such as a saint within the Orthodox faith). These cannot be taken at the generic Worshipper level, only Initiate or Devotee.

Many ordinary people will simply take a single Faith Keyword and be satisfied with that, but one of the marks of a hero is often a more specific commitment to some element of their faith, and the magic which can flow from that commitment.

Generally speaking, if a hero takes a Power Keyword in character creation, he will be assumed also to have the appropriate Faith Keyword, too. It is very rare for anyone to be able to take a Power Keyword without the Faith Keyword, with the exception of Russians who practice *dvoeverie*, which is explained more fully in *PAGAN WAYS*.

ASPECTS

In some cases, several keywords are provided for one Power. These are known as aspects. After all, there are some Powers which are just so great or so many-faceted, that mere mortals cannot encompass their all, such as the Blessed Virgin Mary or Perun the Thunderer. Instead, they concentrate their worship on a particular side of that Power, such as Perun's role as the Warrior or the Chieftain. It is relatively easy for a hero to switch from one aspect to another of a Power.

SPECIAL ADVANTAGE

Each Faith has a single special ability or power, something which makes it unique. These are detailed in the relevant chapters.

COMMITMENT

Broadly speaking, there are three levels of commitment to a religious tradition: communal worship, initiation and devotion. Each offers greater powers and imposes greater demands upon the hero, and is detailed in the following sections.

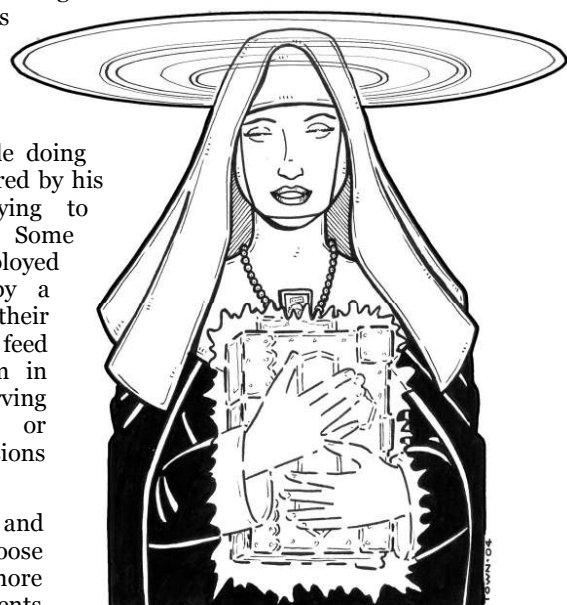
COMMITTED TIME AND HERO POINTS

Worship involves a genuine and meaningful acceptance of duties from tithing a share of income to attending ceremonies and rites, so each such commitment will also take up a proportion of the hero's time and also hero points. This is an abstract commitment: a hero who has accumulated 100% obligations still has time to eat, to sleep and perhaps to carry out some minor work. However, he must spend the relevant proportion of his hero points on skills, virtues, relationships, and magical abilities of his religion — perhaps including abilities from suitable occupation keywords. Regularly allocating these hero points means the worshipper is paying due attention to his sacred tasks. Hero points spent on bumps do not count towards this total.

A hero's occupation often overlaps his religious duties. Everyone spends 10% of their time in worship and ceremonies, but part of the rest of your hero's religious commitment may be met by his occupation. For example, purely religious or magical jobs (such as priest or shaman) include the 10% requirement of community worship, while the devotee of a merchant god can meet much of his religious time requirement by carrying out his own business, since buying, selling and the like coincide with the duties his Power expects of him. Likewise, a farmer initiate is worshipping his deity simply by farming, using the right ways and no doubt intoning appropriate prayers or singing the prescribed songs. Of course, religious duties often involve an element of sacrifice and communal activity: that farmer would also be expected to show the young men of the village the right ways to plough and sow, and ought to be at the fore when the community turns out together to raise a barn or dig an irrigation ditch.

Those whose occupation and religion do not match may have difficulty meeting the time demands of both. A merchant who worships a healing deity may have trouble doing everything required by his deity while trying to make a living. Some heroes are employed or supported by a patron or their community, who feed and house them in exchange for serving the community or performing missions for their patron.

Narrators and groups may choose largely to ignore these requirements





in terms of the specific allocation of hero points. However, the overall time requirements also offer a useful check on heroes acquiring too many religious affiliations. Powers grant their worshippers magic in return for service and reverence; a worshipper whose loyalties are spread too thinly is little use.

LEVELS OF COMMITMENT

Communal worshippers, the most common, simply follow a Faith, a particular religion, cult, spirit tradition or the like. They cannot use magic in an active way, although they may pray for divine assistance (which is very rare) or use their faith to resist enemy magics. Thus, a congregation of peasant worshippers huddled in their Church are unlikely to be able to call upon God to deliver them from evil, but their combined piety would certainly help avert magical attack. To have a Faith Keyword at this level requires a relatively low level of commitment of effort, and will generally occupy up to 10% of a hero's time and resources.

Initiation represents a formal commitment to a particular Power within a Faith, whether Christian saint or a pagan god. It conveys certain responsibilities and also limited magical powers, which will in most cases simply assist existing abilities. For example, an Initiate of St Gleb, patron of blacksmiths, can call on the powers of his saint to empower him while hammering out metal using his existing skills at smithing or resisting the heat of a fire. An initiate has made a serious commitment to his beliefs, and this will generally occupy 25% of his time and resources; initiation to further Power Keywords covered by the same Faith only take up an additional 15% each. This reduced 'cost' also applies if the hero has devoted to another Power Keyword in the same Faith.

Devotion denotes real commitment to a Power and brings correspondingly greater powers. Thus, a devotee of St Gleb can freely demonstrate such miraculous powers as the ability to shape red-hot metal with his hands unharmed. Devotion takes up 50% of the hero's time and effort, although devotion to further Power Keywords covered by the same Faith only take up an additional 25% each, while additional aspects of the same Power only take up 10%.

Example: Laughing Daniil and his Saints

Laughing Daniil is a devil-may-care sailor from Ladoga. He has been baptised into the Orthodox Church (has the Faith Keyword *Worshipper of the Orthodox Church*) but is particularly committed to St Nicholas the Wet, a mariner's aspect of St Nicholas (Power Keyword: *Initiate of St Nicholas the Wet*). Together, they take up 10% + 25%, or 35% of his 'religious time'. Were he to become *Devotee of St Nicholas the Wet*, then that would rise to 60%. However, if Daniil instead were to initiate to another saint within the Orthodox Faith, such as St Pantaleimon the Healer, then that would just bring his commitment to 10% + 25% + 15%, or 50%. If he became a devotee of both St Nicholas and St Pantaleimon, then the total commitment would be 10% + 50% + 25%, or 85%.

COMMITMENT VERSUS OFFICE

Members of a religion benefit from the support of their leaders and fellow worshippers. Members enjoy community ties, magical protection, and the ability to experience the divine. Nonetheless, the level of commitment to a keyword does not necessarily have anything to do with religious rank.

Each Faith has its own particular religious leaders, and additional Occupation Keywords for each may be found in the appropriate chapters. Heroes must have a mundane relationship to interact with the worldly organisation of their religion, such as *Member of [Temple]*, *Follower of [Holy Figure]*, or *Member of [Congregation/Order/Cult]*. Some people are closer to the magical community than others, and this is reflected in a higher rating in this mundane relationship.

Piety and profession do not have to go hand in hand. Thus, a priest who is more interested in the day-to-day work of his church or else how he can use it to his own advantage may simply be an initiate and yet have a high *Member of [Church]* ability. Conversely, a devotee might be a loner, interested in his personal relationship with his god, with great piety and magical strength, but a minimal relationship with any community.

DIVINE COMPANIONS

If your hero pleases his spiritual patron through acts and sacrifices, he might be granted a magical or divine helper that provides advice and magic. This is a recurring theme within Russian folklore, whereby a hero acquires animal and spirit companions.

A divine companion is typically a sidekick, although the narrator might allow one as an ally or patron. The player must dedicate a portion of his time and resources to the divine companion as if it were a cult, usually 10%. Most divine companions serve devotees, but an exceptional initiate may be granted one by his deity.

Divine companions must inhabit a material body. This is usually a supernatural item or animal significant to the Power. The divine companion's body ties it to the Mundane World — if it is killed or destroyed, it returns to its divine source.

Work out a divine companion's abilities like any sidekick (see **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS**). In addition to its sidekick abilities, a divine companion can always speak to its hero with either true speech or telepathy. Many divine companions are initiates in their own right and so might have a magical keyword or an affinity as one of their three significant abilities.



WORSHIPPERS

Communal worshippers are the ordinary followers of a Faith. They participate in the public festivals and sacrifices throughout the year, and in return know that there will be a day after night and a spring after the winter.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A hero who wishes to join a Faith during play is questioned by a relevant religious leader on his knowledge of its teachings, his relationship with the community, and his cultural or religious virtue. This can be resolved as a contest, or else simply negotiated through play. If successful, he is inducted into the Faith by appropriate rites. He is now a communal worshipper and can participate in religious rites that renew the world, keep evil at bay and ensure his spiritual salvation.

Contest: **Become a Communal Worshipper**

Appropriate Ability: [Cultural or Faith Virtue], Know [Faith] Myths, Member of [Religious Community].

Typical Modifiers and Augments: The other two abilities may augment the ability used by your hero.

Resistance: 14.

Any Victory: Pay 3 hero points for your hero to join the religion and gain the ability *Worship [Faith]* 13.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: Your hero is not yet ready, but may reapply later. He should spend more time learning the teachings of the Faith or forming a relationship with the community.

Complete Defeat: Your hero offends the secular and spiritual authorities in question so greatly that he can never attempt to join the religion again.

BENEFITS AND OBLIGATIONS

A communal worshipper can call for divine aid. He must attend the religion's seasonal rites, obey its rules of magic and religion, and make obligatory contributions. He thus spends about 10% of his time and resources (including hero points) in worship.



Great healing is often difficult and dangerous: here Larisa Stepanovna calls upon the powers of Moist Mother Earth to banish the spirit of decay infecting the sword wound of her favourite nephew, Valentin.

Worshipper Abilities

Magic: Divine Aid.

Mundane Relationship: *Member of [Religious Community]* shows how much attention the hero spends on his local temple to the pantheon's great deity. It is about social interaction, cooperation with other worshippers, and being subordinate to leaders.

Myths and Rituals: An ability such as *Know [Faith] Myths* or *Know [Faith] Scripture* represents how much the worshipper knows about the Powers, rites and values of the religion in question.

Piety: *Worship [Faith/God]* is a magical ability that measures the contact and harmony a worshipper has with his religion, how easily he can contact and use that power. This can also be used to resist magic.

Virtues: Your hero may take any, all, or none of the virtues in the Faith keyword as abilities.



DIVINE AID

Requests for divine aid usually address the great deity or spirit of the Faith, so an Orthodox Christian might simply cry out, "Help me, God!" If the plea succeeds, magical help is provided by a fitting entity, generally in a way which reflects the myths of the Faith. Usually, some relatively petty divine agent manifests a local power: a dove flies into an assailant's face, a horse rears to throw its rider, a sudden breeze sends a jar tumbling from a window ledge to crash on a thief's head, an empty hamper turns out to be full of food after all, or a fire somehow manages to stay alight through the winter night without extra firewood.

Initiatives and devotees can call on their own Power for aid: they face a lower resistance but the aid is limited to a form appropriate to the Power. Most requests for divine aid (those that are answered, at least) come from entire communities rather than individuals, with a priest or devotee invoking divine aid with community support. After all, this is an extremely rare occurrence.

Contest: **Pray for Divine Aid**

Appropriate Ability: Worship [Faith] (communal worshipper); Initiate of [Power] (initiate); Devotee of [Power] (devotee).

Typical Modifiers and Augments: Community support, ritual magic modifiers; very pious acts (bonus), vile and antisocial behaviour (penalty), nature of requested aid (penalty).

Resistance: 10¹¹6 (worshipper calling on Faith) or 10¹¹4 (initiate/devotee calling on own Power).

Any Victory: Divine intervention, in a form chosen by the narrator and with a magnitude based on the level of victory.

Tie or Any Defeat: Nothing happens. The divinity does not hear the request, ignores it, or is testing the faith of his followers.

INITIATE

Initiation means 'starting.' It is a life-changing ritual that opens the way for spiritual development – whether further progress towards becoming a devotee or inner purification and growth. Initiation is sometimes part of a child's journey to adulthood, but it more usually occurs later in life. Some cultures have a path of successive initiation through the stages of life, others regard it purely as a statement of personal faith and choice.

An initiate commits his time and attention to a single Power, rather than the entire pantheon of a Faith.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A hero who wishes to initiate during play must be at least a worshipper of the appropriate Faith. Religious leaders conduct rites to determine his suitability and commitment and test his dedication and knowledge of the Power and its teachings. Again, this can be resolved as a contest or resolved through play.

If the hero is accepted, he participates in a special ceremony that links him to the Power. The new initiate may be marked, gifted with special powers, or have strictures imposed on his behaviour.

Contest: **Become an Initiate**

Appropriate Ability: [Power Virtue], Member of [Religious Community], Mythology of [Power] (or appropriate equivalent ability).

Typical Modifiers and Augments: The other two abilities may augment the ability used by your hero.

Resistance: 1¹¹.

Any Victory: Pay 3 hero points for your hero to become an initiate and gain the ability Initiate of [Power] at his current Worship [Faith] rating. He receives one affinity at 13 for free.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: Your hero is not ready. He should spend more time forming relationships with the hierarchy or learning about the Power. He may reapply later.

Complete Defeat: Your hero offends the priests or deity so greatly that he can never become an initiate of this Power, and might even be expelled from the religion.

BENEFITS AND OBLIGATIONS

An initiate has all the benefits of a worshipper of the appropriate Faith. He can call on his patron Power for divine aid with a greater chance of success (see **Divine Aid** above). He can spend hero points to learn the affinity or affinities in his Power's keyword. He can join his Power's hero cults, or simply spend hero points to learn their magic.

In ceremonies, the initiate may be called upon to stand in for his Power, to bring its presence and power to the rituals as no communal worshipper can. He must continue to attend the communal religious rites as well as the more private rites relating to his Power. He spends roughly 35% of his available time and resources (including hero points) in worship, the 10% relating to his Faith plus an additional 25% for his Power.

MULTIPLE INITIATION

Your hero may be initiated to more than one Power, but he must follow the restrictions and observances of all of them. Naturally, no conflicting obligations or virtues can exist, but the narrator will decide when the situation is





less clear-cut. For example, while the pagan deities of the Rus' do not mind 'sharing' a worshipper with a Russian Orthodox Saint, some Saints are less broad-minded, and the Roman Catholics certainly do not accept such divided loyalties.

INITIATE ABILITIES

Magic: Affinities; Soul Vision.

Mundane Relationship: Member of [Religious Community] specifically rates the hero's relationship with a temple, shrine, or other group of worshippers of his Power. Alternately, the hero might have Follower of [Priest] to indicate his relationship to a religious leader or devotee of his deity.

Myths and Rituals: Mythology of [Power] or an equivalent ability rates knowledge of the Power's myths, rituals and sacrifices, and conflicts with others. It provides more detailed knowledge of the particular entity worshipped than the catch-all Know [Faith] Myths or the like.

Piety: Initiate of [Power] is a magical relationship that rates the worshipper's connection to his Power and tells how easily he can invoke its magic.

Virtues: Your hero may take any, all, or none of the virtues in the Power's keyword as abilities.

AFFINITIES

An affinity is a broad magical ability. Worshippers draw upon one of their Power's core capabilities and gain magical aid. A hero cannot use an affinity as an active ability. Instead, he uses it to augment any appropriate ability. For example, an initiate's *Heal Wounds* affinity could augment his *First Aid* skill.

However, initiates can improvise any named feat in the affinity as an active ability. They always take a -10 penalty in such cases. They cannot learn these feats as regular abilities unless they become devotees.

SOUL VISION

Soul Vision is the ability to sense and identify magic or Otherworld entities nearby when they are not naturally sensible. For example, this would allow the hero to realise that that rock over there is actually an embodiment of a local spirit or else to pick up the magical energies of an enchanted blade when it is still in an enemy's scabbard.

The hero will perceive the magic in whatever forms he understands best, so that otherwise-unremarkable magical sword might to a Christian appear shining with divine radiance, while a shamanic spirit-worshipper might instead see the spirit of death lurking within its blade.

This is not a specific ability – although some Power keywords might include specific magical perception skills – but something which can be done using the initiate's (or devotee's) Piety. It faces the default resistance to magic of 14 unless there is active resistance (such as concealment magic or an Otherworld entity trying to remain undetected). The better a victory level, the more information gleaned on the nature of the magic or entity.

DEVOTEE

A worshipper devotes himself to one Power, isolating it for intense personal worship. This level of personal commitment is not unusual in heroes, but relative uncommon in the world as a whole. Those who become so dedicated to one Power may indeed be regarded by those around them as at best unduly narrow, at worst dangerous zealots.

The devotee spends the majority of his time in activities meant to please or emulate his object of devotion. He performs special rites, adopts certain attitudes, and participates only in set ways during the ceremonies of his Faith. Some will devote to more than one Power within the same Faith (although *dvoeverie* provides an exception to this), but this is the mark of an extraordinary character.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A hero who wishes to be a devotee must usually abandon all magic that does not come from a single Faith (again, the exception is *dvoeverie*). He must pass difficult tests given not just by the religious hierarchy, but by the Power itself. Although devotees are normally initiates first, at the narrator's discretion a worshipper can undertake the initiation tests and devote himself at the same time. In this case, your hero must meet all requirements and hero point costs of both initiation and devotion, and must pass both sets of entry tests.

Contest: **Become a Devotee**

Appropriate Ability: [Power Virtue], Initiate of [Power], Mythology of [Power].

Typical Modifiers and Augments: The other two abilities may augment the ability used by your hero.

Resistance: 20ff.

Any Victory: If currently an initiate of this Power, you pay 3 hero points to become a devotee. Change Initiate of [Power] to Devotee of [Power] at the same rating. For each of the deity's affinities he knows, he gains three feats for free. If currently a communal worshipper, pay 6 hero points to become a devotee. He gains Devotee of [Power] at his current Worship [Faith] rating, and gains one affinity at 13 and three of its feats for free.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: Your hero is not yet ready. He should spend more time learning about the Power or strengthening his virtues. He may reapply later.

Complete Defeat: Your hero offends the Power so greatly that he can never become a devotee, and might even be expelled from the cult.

BENEFITS AND OBLIGATIONS

A devotee has all the benefits of an initiate. He can pay hero points to learn his deity's affinities and feats (he gains 3 of that affinity's feats for free on devotion).

The devotee spends 50% of his time and resources (including hero points) serving his Power, in addition to the 10% required of a Faith worshipper. He must follow the Power's virtues and ethics: they expect their devotees to follow a stricter code of behaviour than initiates, and so are liable to punish a devotee for minor infractions.

DEVOTEE ABILITIES

Magic: Affinities, Feats, Soul Vision, Secret.

Mundane Relationship: A devotee may have a Member of [Religious Community] ability (see Initiate Abilities above). Some devotees do not regularly attend a temple, and instead lead a band of initiates, with whom they might have a Leader of [Initiates] relationship.

Myths and Rituals: Mythology of [Power] (see Initiate Abilities).

Piety: Devotee of [Power] is a magical relationship that rates the worshipper's connection to his Power and tells how easily he can invoke its magic.

Virtues: A devotee usually has all of the virtues in the Power's magic keyword as abilities.

Followers: Depends on the circumstances, but a devotee often leads a group of initiates and/or communal worshippers.

FEATS

Devotees can actively use feats. Feats are magical abilities that enable your hero to perform a specific effect, repeating an act that the Power performed in its myths. Feats can be used either actively or to augment. However, because feats learned as part of an affinity are not distinct abilities, a hero can only augment another ability with one of an affinity's feats at a time. Devotees can spend hero points to improve the rating in a feat, with the improvement an addition to the affinity's rating. Devotees can also improve their rating in the affinity itself, which thus improves the affinity's feats as well. Write a feat on your character sheet

under the affinity (with any addition), and add them together whenever the feat is used; for example:

Moist Fertility 17 – Call Rain +2

In this case, the hero has a rating of 19 in *Call Rain*.

A devotee can improvise a feat from an affinity, with a penalty determined by the narrator based on how close the feat is to the affinity and the myths of the Power. (Although improvised feats cannot be cemented, the narrator may allow the hero to learn the feat permanently by travelling to a specific temple to the Power or carrying some similar pilgrimage or exploit and paying the normal hero point cost.) You cannot improvise from a feat, only an affinity. For example, a devotee of Stribog Wind Lord might improvise *Blow Away Cloud* for a -4 penalty or *Still Wind* for -6 (as Stribog is more about raising winds, not calming them), but not *Lightning Blast* (because Stribog is a god of wind, not storm).

Feats given in magic keywords are common for the Power. Other feats exist, often the exclusive province of a particular temple, community, or secret shrine. Be



Ruta Kutraitė is a devotee of Gabijia, Lithuanian goddess of the hearthfire, and so lighting kindling with a wave of her hand is no secret to her, nor does the flame do more than caress her.



creative and work with your narrator to determine exactly what feats your hero knows.

SECRET

Most Powers also have a Secret, a special magical power available only to their most dedicated worshippers. An entity's Secret is the core of its magic. This is not always useful in everyday life or helpful to player heroes. Powerful entities tend to have powerful Secrets (such as major magical healing), while hero cults have petty Secrets (if any). A hero can use a Secret just like any other ability. Additionally, most Secrets have a special effect that lets the hero do something that is normally impossible, makes difficult magic easier, or allows the use of one ability at the same time as another. With most Secrets, the magic takes full effect on any victory level in a contest.

Secrets are a magical feature of a divine power, not a game rule. The special game mechanics do not mean that the Secret is that type of magic — a Secret that acts like an affinity, for example, is not actually an affinity.

A hero can only learn a Secret by becoming a devotee and having at least three abilities (from the Power's affinities, virtues, mythology and Worship) at 20M each. He may then spend 3 hero points to learn the Secret at 13. He can improve the Secret's rating by spending hero points, but can never raise its rating above that of his lowest rated affinity gained from the deity.

A Secret permanently marks the worshipper who knows it. Soul Vision can reveal that a hero has acquired a Secret and at the very least to which Faith he belongs.

CHANGING RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Most Faiths accept that their members may change their primary religious relationships within the Faith over time — the farmer who becomes a soldier and thus wants to initiate to a more appropriate saint, for example, or the animist who once was initiated to a young man's spirit cult and later turns to a different one more suited to an adult.

When a hero turns his back on a Power, he loses his Piety relationship and all magic gained from that keyword. If he later recants and returns, he starts over as if he were a new initiate. In some cases, the hero may return with his relationship and magic intact, but this is rare and subject to the Power's (and narrator's) whim.

If an initiate moves from one Power to another within a pantheon, and both have a similar affinity, the hero may keep his current rating if the narrator allows. Any specific feats known by devotees are lost, however.

Changing devotion is more difficult; it usually requires permission from the deity, and always the narrator. Losing faith in a Power to which he has devoted his life is a massive and life-changing event for a hero, and ought not to be done lightly and be rooted in the story (for example, the devotee of a warrior spirit who is finally sickened by killing).

On the other hand, transferring between aspects of the same Power is relatively straightforward. The hero will generally simply transfer his rating in the affinity to the new one, although he will generally lose any feats (unless they are also listed under the new affinity), unless the narrator decides otherwise. His Piety transfers to the new aspect, although he will have to build up his relationship with his new religious community afresh in most cases and learn the feats of his new affinity.

LEAVING THE FAITH

Normal people do not change their Faith except under duress. Nonetheless it happens, especially among unusual and experimental individuals like player heroes. Deities look poorly upon losing worshippers, and they usually send an agent of reprisal (a petty deity of revenge or punishment) to haunt the apostate. The particular agent depends on the former worshipper's level of commitment and which Power (if any) he followed at the time he abandoned the Faith. These agents seek to exact revenge through various means of assault upon the soul or body of the apostate worshipper. They rarely try to destroy the person but typically curse him at times on the narrator's whim, with a rating equal to half the apostate's old Piety. In many ways, though, the more dangerous reprisals will be from humans, who tend to have fewer qualms about visiting lethal vengeance on the apostate.

APOSTASY AND DIVINE RETRIBUTION

If your hero neglects his worship or abuses his religion, he may face divine retribution. The narrator judges if penalties come, what abilities they affect, and how severe they are. The following punishments are normal:

- ❑ Religious officials visit the hero to tell him he is straying. Eventually, the religion will censure him.
- ❑ An agent of retribution warns the hero, plagues him until he reforms, or attacks to remove his magic.
- ❑ The worshipped entity makes magic harder to perform (–20 to magical abilities) or withholds its aid entirely.



- The religion expels the hero or the entity abandons him.

Most Faiths accept the notion of penance: for minor infractions, the penalties may only last for a specific time, but in any case, an apostate will have the chance to redeem himself. Typically this will entail some act of sacrifice and contrition, just as a long journey to a shrine at which to pray for forgiveness or some dangerous quest in the name of the wronged Power. This is an obvious hook for the narrator to drive adventures!

PROTECTION

A worshipper changing Faiths is not just losing one spiritual community, he is gaining another. Many Faiths will provide protection to such 'spiritual immigrants',

USING MAGIC

All magic follows certain basic precepts. Subsequent chapters provide specific rules about how each system of magic works beyond these basics.

MAGICAL ABILITIES

Magic is used to perform an action or augment an ability. It works 'here, now, and against that' without any penalty. If you want your magic to affect a target further than about 50 yards or metres away, last longer than the current contest, or affect multiple targets, you may suffer a penalty (see **Modifiers to Magic** below).

The description of magic is intentionally open-ended. Most magical abilities, of whatever kind, are not defined. When your hero uses magic you should explain what is happening. Say how you interpret the situation at hand. If the narrator agrees that your interpretation fits the name of the ability, the use of magic, and the dramatic logic of her game, you can go ahead and use the ability in that way. This is often one of the harder things for newcomers to the game to get used to, but means that you can and must be imaginative and creative in how you use your magic. Your *Scouring Wind* feat could just as easily be used in a fight ('just before I attack, an unexpected wind blasts dust into his eyes') or quickly to clean armour ('instead of spending all afternoon rubbing it clean, I blast it with wind-blown grit, then take a nap').

Magic uses the same rules as other contests, but there are additional factors that the players and narrator should bear in mind.

Magical Augmentation

When a magical ability is used to augment another ability, this does not make a mundane ability magical. Thus, a hero using a magical *Jump Over Tree* ability to augment a non-magical *Jumping* ability still faces the mundane resistance based on the height of the tree.

the scale of which depends on their strength and their eagerness to take in converts. The Catholic Church in Lithuania, for example, is keen to encourage people to abandon Romuva. On the other hand, only the more zealous and intolerant clerics of Russian Orthodoxy are that bothered about whether someone abandons *duoeverie* to commit entirely to Christianity (unless the individual is a prince or similarly important.)

At the very least, those remaining within or close to the holy sites and buildings of their new Faith can expect a degree of protection, something also provided by religious communities.

Pompous Magic

The name of a magical ability does not in itself mean that it succeeds or takes full effect every time it is used. For example, it would be appropriate to rule that *Decapitate Foe* only actually beheads an opponent on a complete victory; on any lesser victory, it might have no effect at all. *Death Glance*, *Wither Enemy*, and *Kill Everything in My Path* are grandiose names, but their effectiveness is proportional to the level of victory, just like any other ability.

In other words, **the detail of the magical ability is often less important than its general function and its rating**. A minor victory with a Devastating Blast of Infernal Flame will do no more harm than a minor victory with a Hurt Foe spell. Of course, there are situations where the detail does matter (if, say, you want to set something alight) – and the former does sound rather more exciting!

Magic Casting Requirements

To perform any magic, your hero must be free to make gestures and sounds. He must be clear-headed and able to concentrate his mental energy. Of course, this is something others may well know: captives may be bound and gagged to prevent their use of magic, maybe even drugged or beaten to cloud their minds.

If your hero cannot see his target, he generally cannot use magic against it. However, there are ways around this restriction. Stationary things like cities and forests can be targeted if the caster has been there, knows exactly where it is, and can visualise the place in his mind. Some magical abilities allow the magician to send his senses out to search for the target. Some magic can be targeted using part of the target, such as some blood or a lock of hair. Finally, detection magic does not need a specific target, since its whole purpose is to find something.





Some magic requires physical contact between the magician and the target. Such things as crafting an item or healing wounds usually cannot be done at a distance, although the narrator is the final arbiter.

RESISTANCE TO MAGIC

Unless providing an automatic augment, every use of a magical ability encounters a resisting force. Your hero must overcome that magical resistance, even if he is casting magic on himself or a willing target.

Natural Resistance

Magical abilities have an advantage over similar mundane abilities. When your hero uses magic appropriately against a passive resistance, he faces the **default 14 resistance** instead of a normal mundane resistance. This is the resistance to cast magic upon one's self, and the passive resistance of the Mortal World to magical change. Significant improvisation with the magical ability might not gain this special advantage, facing a personal resistance (see below).

For example, Vytautas has the natural magical ability of *Shatter Tree*...

- ❑ If he simply had a normal ability such as *Break Tree* or *Strong*, in using it against a tree he would pit his ability rating against a resistance based on the size and strength of the tree.
- ❑ However, when using a magical power for its intended purpose against a normal tree, the resistance is 14, no matter how tall or deep-rooted the tree.
- ❑ If Vytautas tries to use *Shatter Tree* to break the column holding up a longhouse roof, carved from a single tree trunk, he can still use his ability but must take a penalty for improvising the magic's use and faces a mundane resistance based on the strength of the trunk: it is similar enough to what the feat is actually meant to do to work, but not that well.
- ❑ Using it to break a wall would not work at all.
- ❑ Using *Shatter Tree* to break a stone statue of a tree might be allowed at the narrator's discretion, albeit with a penalty. If Vytautas came across the Russian bandit Kolya Beryoza, whose name means 'Kolya Birch Tree' then the narrator almost certainly wouldn't allow it (unless it was late or especially entertaining) as while **Mythic Russia** encourages imaginative use of magic, it is not first a foremost a game of puns!
- ❑ Attempting to shatter the magical Morning Tree of Volokolamsk would face the supernatural resistance of the tree's own guardian angel.

If in doubt as to whether a use of magic is improvisational (and thus takes a penalty), think about how the hero has used the ability in the past. If the current attempt uses the ability in the same way, but for a different effect, apply a modifier, typically **-6**. If the use is completely different, but still consistent with the ability description and the entity that provides the magic, your narrator might reward you for your ingenuity by not assessing the penalty. Be creative!

Personal Resistance

Beings resist enemy magic with their best relevant ability or keyword, whether mundane or magical. Thus, a magical *Resist Disease* ability and a mundane *Healthy* ability can be used equally to resist a disease spirit. If you don't think your hero has an appropriate magical defence, be creative and try to come up with a way your hero can use an ability to resist the magic.

Depending on the circumstances, your hero might call on cult knowledge, a magical ability, or even a relationship. If all else fails, any character can always use his *Piety* to resist a magical attack.

Supernatural Resistance

Anything of supernatural origin or power provides its own resistance, the personal resistance of the being that lives there. Thus, most trees offer a passive resistance of



Vytautas expects that you'll be impressed by his *Shatter Tree* magic.





Modifiers to Magic

| Distance | Duration* | Number of Targets | Modifier to Magic |
|---------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 100 metres | 30 minutes | 2 | -3 |
| 150 metres | 1 hour | 3 | -6 |
| 200 metres | 4 hours | 4 | -9 |
| 300 metres | 6 hours | 5 | -12 |
| 500 metres | 10 hours | 6 | -15 |
| 1 kilometre | A day | 10 | -20 |
| 10 kilometres | A week | 100 | -40 |
| 50 kilometre | A season | 300 | -60 |
| 100 kilometre | A year | 1000 | -80 |

* It is possible to create permanently enchanted items, but that is a special and arcane form of magic and outside the scope of the basic rules.

14, but a tree with a resident nymph uses her magical power to resist. A spirit embodied in a rock is not an ordinary rock with a resistance of 14, and resists with its own power.

DISPELLING MAGIC

Ongoing magic can be dispelled before its duration expires. Your hero can usually dispel his own magic without making a die roll. He can dispel someone else's magic with an appropriate magical ability in a contest against the rating of the magic being dispelled:

- ❑ Magic that specifically includes the capacity to dispel magic: a *Shatter Illusions* spell can dispel a *Fair Features* affinity that is augmenting another's *Seduction* skill.
- ❑ Magic similar to that being dispelled: a *Sword of the Lord* feat can dispel the effect of a *Sword* spirit.
- ❑ Magic opposed to that being dispelled: a *Darkness* spirit can dispel a *Light* spell.

On any victory, the ongoing magic immediately ends, although any effects it has caused (such as damage) remain. If your hero knows that someone is trying to dispel his magic, he can resist using an appropriate ability (thus replacing the resistance of the magic with that of another ability) or can augment his own magic first.

MODIFIERS TO MAGIC

As indicated before, magic works 'here, now, and against that' – in other words, on a visible target within about 50 metres (or yards), for as long as the current (or immediately following) contest, and on just a single individual. If your hero tries to extend his magic beyond these limits he suffers a penalty to his target number; guidelines are shown on the **Modifiers to Magic** table. Variations in the landscape, the vagaries of time, and inconsistent unity of opposition mean that these modifiers are never this fixed.

Some magic is instantaneous, with no duration – a spell to freeze water makes an instant change and then dissipates, leaving behind no active magical energy. Such magic can often be given a duration, for example to ensure that the ice does not melt even on a hot day. Similarly, a spell that requires touch might be given a range.

The narrator is free to assign a greater or lesser modifier depending on circumstances. Thus, in contests lasting days or weeks (such as a hero wooing a maiden), magic used might last for only one round, or it might benefit the hero for the entire duration of the contest without taking a duration modifier. Other types of modifiers (see **Modifiers and Augmentation**) apply normally, so that a magician who is exhausted and facing a foe who has defeated him badly in the past may take further penalties.

Stacking Magic

Your hero can use multiple magical abilities to augment a single ability, but only if he has time. If he has warning of a contest, he can augment with **up to three magical abilities** before the contest begins. Any single magical ability can only be stacked once, as normal. Stacking these abilities takes at least one to five minutes each, as the narrator judges. The narrator may also apply a penalty of -3 for each additional ability stacked beyond the first.

Augmenting with more than three magical abilities takes longer, and often requires practice. Special bonuses from outside sources like communities, friends, or allies take longer still, and usually involve a ritual (see **Ritual Magic**).

Remember, too, that magic is visible or otherwise sensible, and preparing magic before an ambush (for example) will be self-defeating if the enemy sees your 'hidden' hero's magic. If you see an enemy coming who has unearthly, glowing, translucent forms darting around him and an impossibly gigantic weapon in hand, you will know that he is mightily enhanced. Act accordingly.





Inherently Difficult Magic

Tasks listed in the **Inherently Difficult Magic** table are very radical and contrary to the nature of the world. Just as important, they are potential game-busters. Narrators should feel free to add to the list if they find other abilities that consistently render story lines boring or unbelievable.

Such magic is generally harder to perform. “D+X” in the table indicates the increased resistance for difficult magic. The number after the “D” is added to whatever is resisting the magic, whether it is the default 14 or a character’s more potent defences.

Using a vague magical ability may take an improvisational modifier in addition to being inherently difficult. For example, while someone with the feat *Shapechange to a Raven* suffers a D+10 penalty, a generic *Shapechange Self* spell which allows the user to take any form not only faces a +20 resistance, it also takes an improvisational modifier depending on how different or difficult the form taken was. Transforming yourself into a donkey might only take a -5 penalty, but trying to change yourself into a dragon or a *specific* person should take a -20, and might not even be possible without a more specific ability.

As with everything, of course, exceptions exist, not least those who can shapechange using natural magic talents, without suffering any penalty. Likewise, unless specifically stated, the magical Secrets available to devotees do not take such penalties.

RITUAL MAGIC

The most powerful magics require sacred items or are affected by holy times and places. Such rituals include regular worship, preparing for battle, propitiatory worship, and so on. Many rituals require a community to provide support to the leader and other participants. A Christian burial mass is in its own way such a ritual, ensuring the worshipper’s soul is speeded into the case of the Almighty, just as is a Cossack sword-dance before battle.

A ritual is a set of instructions to invoke power from the Otherworlds. Distinct elements (a place, time, ritual item, ritual role, or action) must be performed or included for the magic to work. (Substitutions are possible, but cause a penalty; see the **Ritual Modifiers** table.) Specific items or ingredients may be used up or sacrificed during the ritual. The more powerful the ritual, the more exact the elements must be; if certain ones are missing or wrong, the ritual might automatically fail.

Some magical abilities are defined as ritual abilities. They require that a ritual be performed before the hero can use the ability in any way. As such, ritual abilities take time to perform, and cannot be used on the spur of a moment or during a contest.

Inherently Difficult Magic

| Task | Resistance |
|--|------------|
| Read the thoughts of an intelligent being | D+10 |
| Change own form to a familiar, generic one | D+10 |
| Change own form to an unfamiliar one | D+20 |
| Teleport by sight (instantly travel to a visible place) | D+20 |
| Directed teleport (instantly travel to a predetermined spot) | D+40 |
| Change another being’s form (willing or not) | D+40 |
| Force an intelligent being to follow a command | D+40 |
| Become invisible | D+60 |
| Teleport another (instantly summon ally or follower) | D+60 |
| Become insubstantial | D+60 |

Most of the time, the leader simply gathers his ritual items and followers at the right place and time and conducts the ritual. Rituals are generally reliable forms of magic, and the leader simply pits his appropriate ability (ideally *Lead Ritual* or the like) against the usual resistance of 14. However, some rites are harder to accomplish, and there may be other factors. Trying to enact a ritual under difficult circumstances will increase the resistance. Likewise if there is active opposition – such as an enemy making a counter-ceremony – then its rating is the appropriate resistance to use.

If the ritual succeeds, the leader gains a ritual bonus based on adding together the individual modifiers for each element (as shown in the table). The total is a bonus applied to one ability rating for a specific contest. Thus, if the leader wants to use a ritual to augment his Combat affinity for an upcoming battle, he applies the appropriate bonuses to that ability’s rating. Some rituals allow several participants filling ritual roles to benefit, in which case the bonus is split among them.

If the ritual fails, the standard result of the defeat is applied to the chosen ability: if the leader receives a minor defeat ritual, the ability’s rating is reduced by 10%. (This penalty may also apply to the ability used to conduct the ritual.) Complete defeat causes the leader to



Ritual Modifiers

| Location | Occasion | Ritual Item | Modifier |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| Enemy holy place | Inauspicious day | Inappropriate or missing item | -10 to -20 |
| Auspicious place | Holy or auspicious day | Expensive item | +1 to +10 |
| Power spot | High holy day | Rare item | +10 to +15 |
| Place where the magic was created, myth actually happened, etc | Unique day | Unique item | +20 |
| There is theoretically no maximum to the bonus you can receive from a given category of ritual modifier, so if you have ten unique items you could receive a +200 bonus. The narrator is free to declare several elements as a 'collective' that provides a single bonus, or rule that such unique items do not work well together. | | | |

take a -100% penalty, so the magic cannot be performed as originally intended. It also indicates that something goes badly wrong. An important participant may be abducted or killed; a piece of ritual equipment might be lost, broken, or stolen; or any number of other disasters could occur.

Holy Days, Sacred Places, and Ritual Items

The day, location, and items used in a ritual determine its potency (see the **Ritual Modifiers** table).

Ritual Roles and Community Support

Besides the leader, most participants in a ritual are supporters. Their presence provides a bonus to the ritual from community support (see **Community Support** in the **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS** chapter). Many rituals designate one or more ritual roles: roles taken by companions of the myth's main character. These special participants provide a direct modifier by their presence and proper actions. (Participants filling ritual roles do

not count towards determining the community support bonus.)

An individual filling a ritual role must use an appropriate relationship or other ability. Usually, a worshipper of the specific Power will use his Piety relationship to augment the ritual. Other abilities can be used with an improvisational modifier. The individual provides an automatic augment; he can try for a variable augment, but if he fails in the attempt then his presence hinders the ritual with a penalty. In either case, how well the individual fits the role gives a modifier to his final augmentation, as shown below.

Ritual Role Augmentation Modifiers

Devoted member (devotee, shaman) using proper Piety relationship for the role: +5.

Using proper Piety relationship for the role: No modifier.

Using a Piety relationship of a similar Power or other directly related entity: -5.

Using an appropriate magical ability of the worshipped Power: -5.

Using a Piety relationship of the proper Faith: -10.

Using an appropriate mundane ability of the worshipped Power: -20.

Using an inappropriate magical ability of the worshipped Power: -20 (but could also cause the ritual to automatically fail).

Using an appropriate magical ability of a different Power: -20 (but could also cause the ritual to automatically fail).

Preparation

The more complex the ritual, the longer it takes to gather the participants, prepare the site, and bless the equipment. A ritual takes a minimum of 1 hour per +3 bonus received from all sources, including community support, ritual modifiers, and ritual roles. (Individual rituals might specify different times.) This includes the



time it takes for each element of the ritual to be waved, touched, killed, spoken, danced, sung, or otherwise used. Any penalty received is counted as a bonus for the length of time needed for preparations.

Many rituals require that certain elements be done at specific times. This means that days, seasons, years, or centuries can separate the elements of a ritual. If you do not spend the time, you do not receive the ritual bonus.

COMMANDING OR SUMMONING OTHERWORLD ENTITIES

Some magicians have magical abilities to control Otherworld entities. If the magical ability specifies the type of entity (*Command Air Spirit*, etc), the ability uses its full rating, although the entity (or its summoner) can always resist if it has an appropriate ability. If the ability is general (such as *Command Spirit*), the hero takes an improvisational penalty, typically -10.

Summoning an entity from the Otherworld involves crossing the Otherworld barrier; the magic requires a ritual and faces a resistance of at least 10M3. Once the entity is summoned, the summoner can usually give it a single command without facing an additional contest. The entity will perform the command to the best of its ability, then return to the Otherworld when the magic ends. If the summoner wants the entity to perform additional commands, he must use other magic to compel it. A *Summon [Entity]* ability usually cannot command an entity that the magician did not summon.



HEROFORMING

Some secrets allow heroforming — the incarnation of a hero or ancestor into the body of a worshipper. If the hero is successful, the heroform's abilities provide a bonus to the hero if he possesses those abilities (or very similar ones) as well. If he does not possess a heroform's ability, he can instead use it as a feat with a rating equal to the bonus it would have given.

Contest: **Heroform**

Appropriate Abilities: Heroforming secret (only).

Typical Modifiers and Augments: Appropriate virtues.

Resistance: 1M1.

Complete Victory: Full incarnation; hero gains +100% bonus to abilities he and heroform both possess.*

Major Victory: Incarnation; hero gains +50% bonus to abilities he and heroform both possess.*

Minor Victory: Identification; hero gains +10% bonus to abilities he and heroform both possess.*

Marginal Victory: Inspiration; hero gains +1 bonus to abilities he and heroform both possess.*

Tie or Any Defeat: No effect, although complete or repeated failure might cause a reduction in the rating of the secret, at the narrator's option.

* The hero may never have a higher rating than the heroform itself possesses because of this bonus.



9. SONS OF RYURIK

“Our land is great and rich, but it has no order. Come and rule it”

This chapter provides a wealth of background information on the Rus’ – a necessarily brief outline of their history, the lives and customs of peasants, townsfolk and aristocrats, the ways of the

Cossacks and basic information for Russian heroes. The following chapters cover in more depth the Russian lands, religious practices, Orthodox saints and pagan deities.

BORN OF CONQUEST

The history of Russia is one of war, hunger, misery and hope. Nothing much changes, it seems.

THE RYURIKIDS

It says much about the Russian culture that their histories start not only with foreign conquest but one carried out at their request. The land later known as Russia was inhabited by scattered Slavic tribes living marginal semi-nomadic existences. As ever, they faced a threat from the steppes of the east: Sarmatians, Scythians and Khazars driving them deeper into their forests and demanding ruinous tribute. In response, the legend goes, the slavs turned to the Varangians, Vikings from Scandinavia, who were already passing through on their raiding and trading missions down to Constantinople. A delegation travelled to the Vikings with a simple request: “Our land is great and rich, but it has no order. Come and rule it.”

Three brothers accepted the challenge in 862, travelling first to Novgorod. The eldest, Rurik, became the first prince of Russia, and his Rurikid descendants, heavily married into the native slavs, still form the ruling bloodlines of the Rus’ in the age of **Mythic Russia**.

THE KIEVAN AGE



Under Rurik’s son, Oleg, the centre of gravity within Russia shifted to Kiev, thanks to its more favourable climate and soils and its proximity to Constantinople: Oleg’s son Igor even tried raiding Tsargrad. Over the years, the Russians fought off invasions by other nomadic peoples, built new cities and expanded into the lands of the Bulgars.

In 988, the energetic, ambitious and far-sighted Prince Vladimir of Kiev brought Christianity to his city. The

Appanage

One of the curses of Russian society has been the appanage system. In Western Europe, the dominant principal is one of primogeniture – when a landowner dies, his estate devolves complete to his eldest son. That way, the family’s holdings can be passed intact from generation to generation. In Russia, though, the estate is parcelled out equally between sons. Thus, unless a landowner only has a single son or is very effective at expanding his holdings, the size of each landowning unit will shrink from generation to generation. This has the effect of fragmenting noble holdings – and one of the strengths of the princes of Moscow is precisely that they are moving away from appanage and increasingly adopting a form of primogeniture.

story is that he gathered representatives of all the main faiths: Judaism he discounted because he could not respect a people who had lost their land; Islam appealed until he learned that it eschewed alcohol, and he knew the Russians could not be parted from their drink; the Latin Church was excluded because he would not pay homage to the Pope – but the Orthodox Faith offered the kind of power and grandeur for which he was looking. Regardless of the truth of the story, in this way Vladimir changed Russia.

Vladimir’s death brought chaos, but from it came a golden age, with the emergence of Yaroslav the Wise. However, each prince and principality was still essentially a separate unit and on Yaroslav’s death a new succession crisis exploded as his sons vied for the title of Grand Prince of Kiev, while the appanage system of inheritance prevented any Grand Prince from being able to pass a powerful legacy to any one son. This became a depressingly familiar pattern: a short period of wise rulership, followed by a succession crisis in which most of the gains made are then squandered as city fights city, brother kills brother. Although no Russian would admit it, if anything, the Mongols saved them from themselves.

The Mongol Yoke

The first Mongol expeditionary force reached Russia in 1223. It should have been warning enough that in one stroke they destroyed the Polovtsian nomad people, who until then had been the Russians' most formidable threat from the east. However, the Russians did not realise that they faced an entirely new order of threat. At Kalka River, a combined Russian army was decimated by the Mongols, but when the Mongols then withdrew, purely because of internal political crises and the need to concentrate on operations elsewhere, the Rus' convinced themselves they had somehow overawed these new invaders.

They were wrong.

Conquest

In 1236, the Mongols returned, in force and determined this time to assert what they considered their divine mandate to conquer the Earth. They unleashed the terrible One Year Freeze the following year, and as the Russians shivered around their fires, believing that no one could fight in such conditions, the Mongols crossed the Volga and began their conquest. By 1240, Kiev had been razed and the Russias as far north almost as Novgorod had been conquered. And the 'Mongol Yoke' descended upon Russian necks.

Ironically, this was not such a burden. So long as they did not resist their conqueror, the Russians found the Mongols disinterested in the details of rule, much less concerned with imposing their ways upon a people they felt below them. Instead, they ruled through Russian princes, awarding their yarlyk, or patent of rule, to those who showed suitable deference and efficiency. Indeed, as the Mongols dealt harshly with domestic conflicts, after the initial trauma of their brutal and merciless conquest had been overcome, the Russians entered an era of sustained economic growth.

A new kind of prince emerged, one able to further his interests and those of his city within the Mongol system of rule. The finest example was Alexander Nevsky, first recipient of a yarlyk (to rule Novgorod), a great Russian patriot to some, a quisling to others. In 1242, Prince Alexander of Novgorod gained the title Nevsky, 'of the Neva', for his

extraordinary victory over an invading army of Teutonic Knights. However, he was practical enough to realise a lost cause when he saw one and submitted to the Mongols. In this way, Novgorod was spared destruction, and Nevsky would found a new dynasty, to be known as the Daniiloviches after his youngest son Daniil

The Gathering of the Russian Lands

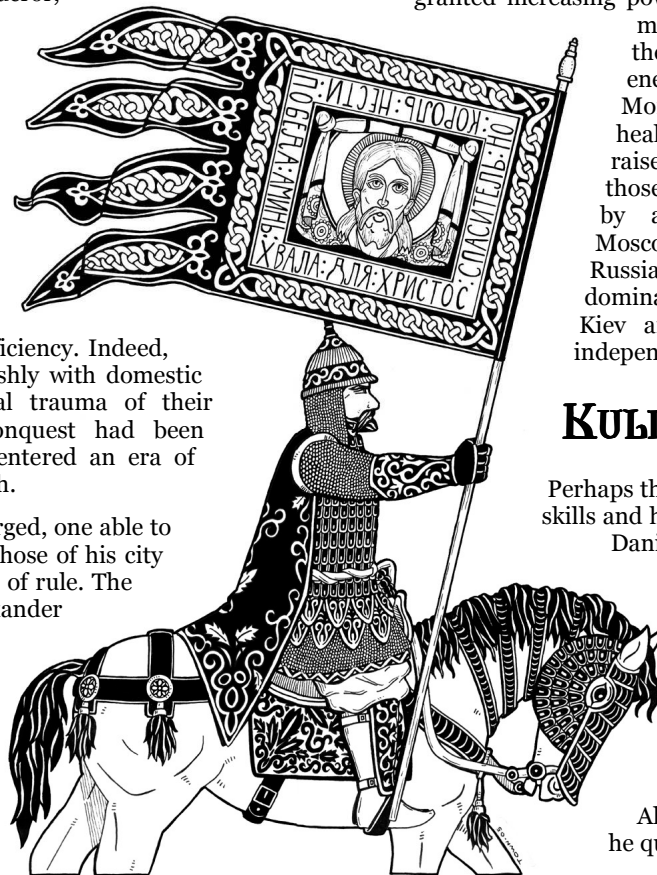
Nevsky granted Daniil rule over what was then an insignificant little town called Moscow. This town and Daniil's descendants would, however, become the dominant force in Russia thanks to the way they used Mongol rule to their own ends.

On the one hand, they pursued an aggressive policy of expansion, by conquest, purchase and marriage, gobbling up the little principalities created by the appanage system (a system which they increasingly abandoned, to keep their own dynastic legacy undivided). Some expanded Muscovy by war, but others concentrated on more cunning means. Ivan I, who was Grand Prince of Moscow 1325-40, gained the nickname Kalita, 'Moneybags', because of his wealth and his willingness to use that economic muscle to pressurise and induce lesser princes to come under Moscow's rule.

On the other, the Daniiloviches made themselves indispensable to the Mongols. They were the most ruthless, efficient and reliable agents the Golden Horde had, collecting taxes, suppressing uprisings and generally doing their dirty work. For this, they were granted increasing powers and latitude. Of course, meanwhile they used this to their advantage, accusing their enemies of plotting against the Mongols or simply skimming a healthy proportion of the tax raised – how else could Kalita fill those moneybags? Thus, appanage by appanage, town by town, Moscow began gathering the Russian lands to itself, until it dominated central Russia, with only Kiev and Novgorod remaining as independent centres of power.

KULIKOVO

Perhaps the greatest sign of the political skills and hard-nosed pragmatism of the Daniiloviches has just been demonstrated at Kulikovo ('Snipes Field'). Prince Dmitri became Grand Prince of Moscow on the death of his father Ivan II 'the Fair' in 1359. He was only 9 at the time, but under the canny regency of Metropolitan Alexei of the Russian Church, he quickly came to understand the





realities of the world in which he lived. He could see not only that Moscow was stronger than it had ever been, but also that the Golden Horde was weakening, torn by internal divisions and losing its old vigour. This descendant of a dynasty of quislings realised that there was an opportunity at once to throw off the Mongol Yoke and, in the process, make Moscow the dominant force in a new, independent Russia.

In 1375, as the culmination of a campaign to subjugate Tver, Dmitri had the city declare Dmitri their Grand Prince, without waiting for the formal granting of a *yarlyk* by the Great Khan, Mamai. This was a direct challenge, and forced Mamai either to act or look weak. A first expeditionary force was sent in 1378, but was defeated. So Mamai gathered his armies, made an alliance with the Lithuanians, and marched on Moscow.

Meanwhile, Dmitri had been gathering an army of his own, bringing together contingents from as many Russian cities as he could. Some came because they were his vassals, others his allies. Some came because of patriotism, some because they feared Moscow's wrath. Eventually a Muscovite army met Mamai's larger one at Kulikovo field. Dmitri proved to have his ancestor

Alexander Nevsky's two great blessings: he was lucky and he was clever. He was lucky in that he was able to engage before Mamai's Lithuanian allies were able to join their forces with him, and clever in his use of ambush and misdirection to offset the Mongols' greater numbers. Even so, it was a hard-fought battle, as cavalry charged cavalry, infantry mauled infantry, and respective magical protectors and summonings locked in otherworldly conflict. The Russians took heavy losses, but their victory has been a huge symbolic triumph.

Dmitri is now Dmitri Donskoi, Dmitri 'of the Don' (after the river close to which the battle was fought. Mamai is no more, deposed and killed. His successor, Tokhtamysh, has vowed to return and sack Moscow. He is gathering an army, while Donskoi tries desperately to capitalise on his victory and create an even grander coalition to resist him. Some princes fear that Donskoi may have unleashed a whirlwind of Mongol savagery on them; others suspect he will still try to cut some eleventh-hour deal with Tokhtamysh and in any case mistrust him more than the Mongols. All in all, Russia is not yet independent and the princes of Moscow are not yet the tsars, emperors, of a new Russia – but the first steps in that direction seem to have been taken.

THE PEASANTS

Life is hard for the Russian peasant, but even amidst the back-breaking work, the uncertainties of life and the certainties of death, there is still time for love and laughter, drunken festivals and simple but sincere worship.

“Nekulturny”
 The Russian word *nekulturny* (nye-COOL-tour-ni) is typically translated as ‘uncultured’ or ‘rude’ but it has a much stronger impact in the original. It can be applied to someone who is boorish, an ungrateful guest, an inhospitable host, or someone who abuses their position. It essentially means someone who breaks the basic rules of decency.

THE VILLAGE

Many peasants, **muzhiks**, live lives of extreme isolation, in small villages scattered through the deep woods of Russia, maybe 4-5 households of just 60 adults. It is no coincidence that the same word – **mir** – means not just ‘peace’ and ‘world’ in Russian but also the peasant commune. For them, the village is their world, and the community maintains its own form of order and peace which has little to do with the laws of the nearest city or even the will of their notional landlord. The nearest village might be several days' walk away, and visits by outsiders both welcome – wandering storytellers, fur-traders and peddlers – and unwelcome – tax collectors, agents of the landlord – might be no

more than a monthly occurrence in summer and almost unknown in winter.

Most villages, though, are not quite so small, or so isolated. They cluster near settlements, monasteries and navigable rivers, where they may even be only a couple of miles apart, their fields and pastures close enough together to need demarcation by boundary stones. Whereas the smaller, more isolated villages must be self-contained, these are more likely to have a particular role to play, whether in feeding a monastery (the Church owns about a fifth of all cultivated land) or town or felling trees and turning it into usable timber, because wood is still the main building material for city and village alike.

The village is a scatter of wooden huts and the occasional two-room building, perhaps arranged around a central cleared area, at once market square, festival ground, gathering place and drill ground. If the village has a church, then it will probably be here, although pagan holy men and women are more likely to live on the outskirts of the village, perhaps even in a hut in the woods. The soil becomes stickily muddy during the rains and the thaw, then hardens in awkward ridges and ruts when it bakes dry or freezes, so if the village can spare the time, effort and wood, a few central paths will be laid with a corduroy of split logs. Over time, they sink into the mud and a new path needs to be laid over the old, but in the mean time this does make life easier (and cleaner). Most homes have small orchards, planted allotments or grazing plots next to them, perhaps a hen house, tethered goat or even a beehive. They enclose





STORY SEED: SAMOSUD

In theory, the local landlords are responsible for maintaining law and order in the village, but in practice they only deal with crimes affecting them or which the community chooses to bring before them. The main form of justice in the village is *samosud*, 'self-judging' by the community, led by the elders. This is peasant law, and reflects what they see as right or wrong. Someone from the village poaching wood from the landlord's forests technically has broken the law, but will not be punished by the village: they reckon the lord has enough wood to be able to spare some. Theft within the community will generally be dealt with by restitution and humiliation. The thief must hand back what he stole or the equivalent, and then be paraded around the village while everyone jeers and laughs. He then provides vodka for the elders and the victim, and all is forgiven. After all, the village wants to teach the thief a lesson, but not lose a productive member of the community. However, outsiders caught thieving can expect little mercy, and the most terrible punishments are visited on horse thieves. Horses are not just means of transport, they pull the simple Russian plough and even when dead provide food, bones and sinew. The theft of a horse might doom an entire community, and so any thieves caught can expect a brutal and painful death, their battered bodies being hung – typically with horsehair – at the nearest crossroads as a warning to others.

A pair of wandering entertainers arrived last night and were greeted with merriment. This morning, both had disappeared from the fireside – and so has one of the village's horses! One of the entertainers, the storyteller Domash, is found unconscious and half-drowned in the village midden, obviously where he fell while trying to flee after the theft. The incensed villagers prepare to lynch him.

► **Guilty.** It is exactly as it seems. Domash and his partner Vasya have a routine of stealing horses on their travels. There is no honour among thieves, though, so when Domash fell, the weaselly Vasya just left him. Where is he – and the horse – now?

► **Hero.** When Domash realised that Vasya was returning to his horse-stealing ways, he tried to stop him. His partner hit him on the head and dumped him in the midden. If lynched, his ghost will return to reproach the village.

► **Accidental Victim.** The horse was actually a prince from the Thrice Ninth Land, ensorcelled to take this humble form for a year, a month and a day. His time finally over, he set off home, but Vasya grabbed the hem of his robe and Domash grabbed him. Domash's hold slipped, so he fell into the midden, but Vasya managed to make it half way there before he too lost his grip. Now he is stranded somewhere deep in the Representational World. If Domash is killed, his ghost will demand that the villagers find and rescue his friend; if spared, he will reveal that Vasya is actually the estranged son of the prince of Ryazan.

► **Witness.** No one notices at first, but Foma and his wife Marusiya are also missing. Digging deeper into the midden will reveal Vasya's and Marusiya's bodies, both knifed. Vasya, the rogue, caught Marusiya's eye and arranged a midnight tryst. Jealous Foma found them and in his rage killed them and dumped their bodies. When Domash wandered out looking for his partner (who is usually the one to get them into trouble), Foma knocked him unconscious before stealing a horse and fleeing.

these assets behind a plank fence if possible, but otherwise a simple row of wooden stakes.

THE FAMILY

The family is the building block of peasant life. Children work as soon as they are able, even if just picking mushrooms and tending to their younger siblings; men hunt, trap for fur, tend horses, keep bees and do the harder work in the fields, while women are responsible for home and harvest. Older men may assume a leadership role within the community: elders are respected sources of wisdom (few peasants are literate so they are the repositories of the experience and oral histories which may help the community survive the unexpected) and obeyed when they hand out judgements on disputes over land. They also take the lead in negotiating with tax collectors and gathering the village's dues. Old women – the formidable Russian *babushkas* ('grandmothers') – tend and teach the young with their characteristic mix of indulgence and discipline.

Most families live in a single **izba**, a wooden hut with just one room, dominated by the vital stove and the

'beautiful corner' where the family keeps its religious images and tokens. You step down into the typical *izba*, which is set into the ground in order to preserve warmth. In winter, the family may even sleep on the stove. Even amongst the peasantry, richer families may have a two-roomed hut or even a proper house, often with two floors and a wooden veranda. This is, after a time of opportunity, at least for a few, who may find themselves owning land, slaves (*kholops*) and even being able to rise as soldiers or clergy or aspire to the lowest ranks of the nobility.

PEASANT LIFE

The day and year alike are dominated by the cycles of survival. Everyone rises at dawn and begins the day with a simple religious observance (a prayer to God, a libation to some pagan deity or else both, just to play safe!), a hunk of rye bread washed down with water or the weak rye-beer known as *kvass* and then to work. Most villagers are free peasants, although often the land they work is either owned by a landlord (who demands a share of the crop) or common to the village as a whole. Villages within the deep forest practise slash-and-burn agriculture, burning out a clearing and then sowing





seeds direct into the ash that will bear a crop for a few years, before they must instead start a new clearing. In more prosperous regions, though, this is giving way to a three-field system, with each field rotating through rye, oats and being left fallow to recover. All peasants also turn to the forests for game, berries and mushrooms as well as being a source of wood for tools, building and the fire and furs to use and to trade.

The staples of the peasant diet are shchi (cabbage soup), rye bread, turnips, onions, pickled cucumbers, berries and mushrooms. Fish features in their diets quite frequently, meat relatively rarely. Water, whether from a spring or melted snow, is supplemented by kvass or mead. Vodka is not yet such a staple, it is a drink for festivals and special occasions, and sold in buckets or pottery jars.

If they manage to earn and save money – perhaps by sending younger sons to work in the towns – muzhiks may be able to become petty landowners themselves. Alternatively, a landlord who demands too great a share of the crops, who exploits his farmers and who fails to look after them, may find that his workers abandon him and move elsewhere, either to a different lord or else to set up their own steads in the forest. Some will even take the step of selling themselves into slavery when life is too hard: slaves work hard, but so does any peasant, and at least a kholop is generally guaranteed food and shelter.

However, Russia's short summers and long, cold winters mean that while the warmer months are frantic with the need to gather food and firewood, there are long periods of near-hibernation. There is still work to be done in winter, including repairs to houses and protecting the livestock, but the pace slows dramatically. This is a time for storytelling and festivals, although year-round, the muzhiks are always happy to seize on some holy day as an excuse for drinking, dancing and finding something to eat beyond the usual staples of rye bread, cabbage soup, pickled vegetables, mushrooms and fish. After all, even if life is hard, the muzhik knows that there is always time for a drink and a song. Though he will be brutal when he must, he will also greet strangers with generosity and hospitality, offering the traditional bread and salt, and eagerly listen to news of the world beyond the mir.

Men and Women

There are very definite differences to the roles played by men and women. On the other hand, Russians are neither prudish nor impractical. When it comes to bringing in the harvest, a strong woman is more use than a weak man, and if a man proves to have a gift for healing or some other traditionally female role, then that will not stop people from taking their children to him if they are sick.

The traditional roles for men are as farmers, hunters and, if necessary, fighters. They wear simple cloth tunics and treads, the best boots they can afford, coats of hide or cloth, and fur hats. Women raise the family, manage the household and carry out other chores such as

Baths

The banya, bathhouse, is an established part of Russian life – even many of the more prosperous peasant villages may have a wooden bannya close to the river. The banya is a steam bath, where you sit and sweat, before either plunging into the river or rolling in the snow, for invigorating contrast! Being beaten gently with birch twigs is also part of the fun. Some banyas are inhabited by spirits, banniks, famed for their prophetic abilities, and sharp claws – see **BEASTS, HEROES & SPIRITS**.

keeping the chickens. They wear long dresses, and once married keep their hair respectably covered by a hat or headscarf.

Girls who marry bring a dowry with them, so a family with many girls is generally pitied for the cost of marrying them off. Having too many boys can also be a problem, for while it is good to have so many hands around the house, if there is not the land for them all to be set up as farmers in their own right, the youngest will lose out. Perhaps they may become monks or, more often, go to the towns in the hope of making enough money through temporary labour that they can buy a little land of their own. In the most extreme cases, they may even be encouraged to sell themselves into slavery for the good of the family.

Slaves

A Russian slave is not the same as is generally understood as by the term. The slave – a male is a **kholop**, a woman roba, but the male term used for both – has been forced or has chosen to become the dependant of another. The kholop may be a foreign captive or a criminal, but more usually has been sold to pay off debts or else has actually sold him or herself. After all, while your master has the right to work, sell, beat or even kill you, he also legally takes on certain obligations, not least to feed and house you. Furthermore, the master becomes responsible for your misdeeds, just as he would be if his dog bit a man or his horse ate its way through a neighbour's apples.

Especially when times are hard (and around Moscow), many peasants working the land are actually slaves of the master, even though in practice their lives are much the same as those of their neighbours. They may work longer hours, perhaps pass more of their produce on to the master's steward, but otherwise the difference is irrelevant. Likewise, the majority of servants working in monasteries and most richer houses in town and country alike are slaves. Slaves are allowed to accumulate property and money and may buy themselves out of servitude or be freed by their master. On the other hand, the children of kholops themselves become slaves unless their parents have freed themselves by the time they are 14. Kholops are property – killing one is not murder, but the killer then owes the master a suitable price.



TOWN LIFE

While the overwhelming majority of Russians live in the countryside, the towns are the centres of political power and economic activity.

CITY HALL

Authority in the city lies with the local **prince**, although in practice he tends to delegate most of the work of day-to-day governance to his **posadnik**, the city mayor. Once, the posadnik was chosen by the cityfolk in a great gathering called a *veche*, and this is still the case in Novgorod (see **LANDS OF THE RUS'**). However, this practice has become little more than a formality, as the people of the city are gathered to greet their new mayor. Another key figure is the **tysiatsky** ('thousand-man'), the city's Captain. He is an appointed figure in charge of the city's defence. In times of peace, he commands its regular forces, while in time of war he will also engage mercenaries and muster and train the town's irregular militia. A captain may often be hired from another city or even be a foreigner.

Law and Order

The traditional Russian legal code is known as the *Russkaya pravda* ('Russian Law') and dates back to Great Prince Yaroslav's days, although individual cities and princes have their own twist on it. Law and order is in the hands of the prince, who typically delegates most work to the mayor who, in turn, relies on appointed representatives to handle all but especially difficult or high-profile cases. While most cases are decided by debate and then judgement, there is still scope for more traditional methods, such as trial by combat or ordeal (whereby both parties swear while clutching a hot rock or the like: whoever shows more endurance clearly has the right of the matter).

For most offences, the punishment is a fine, fixed in silver but often paid in goods or even services. However, for more serious crimes – or in cases where the judge felt especially poorly-disposed towards the culprit – then death or corporal punishment is the norm. An execution or a whipping is a popular public display, generally carried out in the main square before a jeering crowd. The most lenient punishment is a beating with the *batog*, a wooden stick, but more common is the dreaded *knout*, a heavy Mongol whip which tapers to a razor-sharp tip. The criminal is tied to a triangle of wooden logs or suspended from a beam, and then whipped across his back: 20 strokes can flay half the skin from his back and cause permanent injury, while a sentence of 100 is in effect a death sentence. Execution is typically by hanging or beheading, but this is considered a mercy compared with death by the *knout*.

Life

Life in the city is much more active and dynamic than the countryside, for these are places of trade and politics, in which people from near and far congregate to meet, buy, sell, tell stories and spend their silver. Dispossessed peasants or younger sons for whom there is no land at home come to find work for a month or a season, hoping to earn a little money to start a new life, but more often finding heartbreak, voluntary slavery or the solace of the vodka jar. Established traders have their stalls in the marketplace or even their own shops, but for every one of these there are several petty peddlers and artisans who drag little sleds behind them, crying out their wares and services. Here a *skoromokh* strums his *gusli* and sings a song, there a couple of the prince's soldiers drag a convicted criminal towards the square for a whipping.

Literacy within the town is more common than in the countryside, but still rare among commoners – perhaps one in ten has some smattering of letters, but only half those are genuinely literate and they would typically be priests, scribes and merchants. Birchbark scrolls are the main medium, sheets of scraped and bleached bark.

Sex and the City

Although no Russian *babushka* can be considered truly downtrodden, there is no doubt that in their own ways both peasant and aristocratic society are deeply chauvinist. Urban life and trade offer the best opportunities for women to make their own lives, and many take full advantage of this – indeed, the city of Novgorod even has a female mayor, and she is not the first.

The poor wear the same as the peasants, but those with more wealth aspire to the dress of a successful burgher: long caftans, embroidered cloaks and coats and tall hats for men, richer dresses and hats or veils and headshaws for women.

THE TYPICAL CITY

Russian cities and towns are essentially wooden constructs. Stone is rare, the preserve of great churches, a few princes' kremlins and a very rare city gatehouse or wall. Russian woodworking craftsmanship is impressive, ranging from the ways that planks and logs are fitted together to build strong structures without wooden nails, to the fine carving of many of the houses. As such, fire is a constant fear – most cities experience major fires every couple of decades on average.



The heart of almost every Russian city is its **kremlin**, the prince's fortress, often built on a hill or promontory. This is typically not a single structure so much as a fortified compound containing the prince's palace, perhaps those of the bishop or leading boyars, a church and maybe either storehouses or barracks. Outside the kremlin will be a **square**, in which markets are held and the population may gather for proclamations, executions and other official events. Around this square will be more churches, the homes of the wealthy and other official buildings – broadly speaking, the closer to the centre, the most prestigious.

The main square will be floored in hardened earth or wooden planks, and likewise the main **roads** which radiate from the square and the kremlin may be planked. Side streets, on the other hand, will generally just be beaten tracks. Along the roads will be clusters of **houses and compounds**. There is typically much

open space in Russian cities, not least the allotments and gardens around peasant houses. Artisans may live in three-room houses whose gardens are surrounded by a fence, and which also include a small shop or workshop. Typically, professions cluster together, creating 'blacksmiths' quarters' and the like. The wealthy and the aristocratic might have larger houses or sprawling urban estates, with stables, servants' quarters, even ornamental gardens.

As Russian cities grow, they will often acquire new, concentric rings of outside **walls**. These walls will range from wooden palisades and fences to earthen ramparts faced and topped with wood. The typically circular plan will be modified by the local relief, but also by **rivers**: most Russian cities are built on them, as they provide not only water but are also key transport routes. The city will probably also have a range of wooden piers and landings, and slipways up which river boats can be

STORY SEED: FIRE, FIRE!

Fire is a perennial terror in the teeming, wooden towns of Russia. Your town has suffered three serious and unexplained fires in as many weeks, each of which has left homes destroyed, people dead and tongues wagging. After the first one, everyone decided it was an act of fate. People helped those left homeless and destitute. The authorities pledged to ensure that next time the hide fire-buckets would be in good supply and the city guards would be quicker to react. After the second one, everyone decided it was an act of spite. Several vagrants, foreigners, madmen and adventurers were ostracised, thrown out of the city, or lynched on the spot. The *posadnik* appealed for calm, while turning a blind eye. After the third one, everyone decided it was an act of God – or the gods. Prayer vigils were held all night and even Christians snuck off to the holy grove outside the town where a whole bull was sacrificed to Perun. The prince imposed martial law.

Now it is the fourth week. Everyone has a bucket of water next to the cook-fire, and if the city guards find anyone leaving a flame unattended then that's worth a beating. The boyars have discretely sent their families to their country estates. The poor rely on charms and superstitions. Opportunists selling lucky talismans rub shoulders with street-corner prophets and rabble-rousers. Penitents, seeing this as a curse for the town's debauched ways, march through the streets tearing at their arms and faces with bundles of briars. Others instead find sanctuary in drink, reckless fornication and other dubious pleasures. In just four weeks, the thin skin of civilisation appears to be tearing from within. The heroes took part in fighting at least one of the fires (or were not quick enough to get away from it!) and not only did they note how the fire seemed to have some strange magical component, but one of them was burned. The burn is taking a long time to heal, even by magical means. If the hero is then in the proximity of one of the subsequent fires, he notices that it hurts, almost in sympathy. Then, during this fourth week, the hero is passing the compound of some evacuated local boyar, Daniil Feodorovich, when the burn starts to hurt...

► **War.** A small but cunning cell of saboteurs from a rival city or nation are seeking to bring the city to its knees. After one more serious fire, they reckon that their masters will not need to invade but can simply march in, promising an end to the fires and making a great show of 'appeasing angry spirits'. The mansion is their hideout (Daniil Feodorovich is in their pay and is being lined up as their quisling prince under the new order). In its basement they have a dozen barrels of frighteningly combustible Greek Fire, imbued with hungry wildfire spirits. As a last resort, the chief arsonist could threaten to detonate this wine-cellar of mass destruction.

► **Greed.** Within the mansion lurks Daniil Feodorovich, who has become notorious as a property developer. The fire-ravaged districts can be bought up from their now-ruined owners for a pittance, and he can then rebuild on them and make a huge profit. His wife found out and was incensed, so he had his henchmen take her and the rest of his household to their country estate. Now, he and his loyal but frankly unstable son Dima await the night. Then, Dima Daniilovich will head out to the house they have already bought for this purpose and filled with hay, oil and naphtha to set off the next blaze.

► **Foolishness.** The mansion is closed and silent not because its owner has fled, but because he is dead. Inside, everything is charcoal and ash. In an inner room, heavily warded, is a cage of living ice, and confined within it is a small wildfire spirit, a child (10M). It was stolen from the Sibiryak otherworlds by Daniil Feodorovich, a magician whose power was second only to his ego. His crisped body, the victim of the spirit, is in the house. Each week, on a suitably auspicious day, the spirit's mother (20M3) is able to force her way through the veils, into the Mortal World, looking for her child (the wardings prevent her from being able to detect precisely where it is). Can the child be released? The wardings and the ice cage are very powerful (20M3), and the person who knew how to bypass them is a cinder. If the child is released, will it return to the spirit world or first wreak havoc on the town? Can the mother be led here to free the child itself, and if so can it be persuaded to bear the town no ill will?



dragged, to be unloaded, repaired to kept safe when the river freezes.

TRADE

Russia is a trading nation, and many Russians seem born hagglers. Its crossroads location between Greece and the Middle East, Western Europe, and Asia, means that goods from across the known world can be found here – for a price. In some of the major cities, certain professions have established guilds, but this is relatively rare; on the whole, the largest commercial entries are either trading houses (typically but not always owned by a single family) or artels, small collectives of artisans sharing a common trade.

Transport

Carts are sometimes used in the south, but the muddy nature of Russian soils make them generally more trouble than they are worth. Instead, sleds are the main vehicle, from small ones dragged by peasants to the characteristic troika, pulled by three horses. The rivers

are plied by a wide range of boats, from the flat, open boats used in Siberia, which can be punted along, flow with the current or be pulled by horses or slaves on the bank, to larger mercantile and even troop-carrying boats propelled by the winds in their distinctive red sails.

Currency

The main currency is silver, although most Russians will never see a single coin, relying instead on the barter of goods and services. There is also a bewildering array of coins in use in the cosmopolitan markets of Russia, from battered European pennies to adulterated Greek nomismas, such that often the coins are simply weighed and treated as specie. That said, the most widely-found unit of currency is the *grivna*, a half-ounce silver ingot or coin, which is worth approximately 20 silver *dengas*, which in turn is worth 20 copper *puls*. A *ruble* is a silver ingot worth ten grivnas. Most major cities mint their own *dengas* and *puls*. The only domestic gold coin is the *dukak* struck in Moscow under Ivan I, but foreign gold is more common, not least the Greek *solidus*, Italian *soldo* and Arab *dinar*.

BOYARS AND PRINCES

The Russian nobility stretches from the pettiest of country landowners, whose land scarcely supports the nobleman and his immediate family, through the mighty boyars and the princes who rule cities and whole regions. They share their origins in a warrior class, being descendent by blood or at least in spirit from the Viking adventurers who carved themselves principalities from the Slavic tribes 500 years ago.

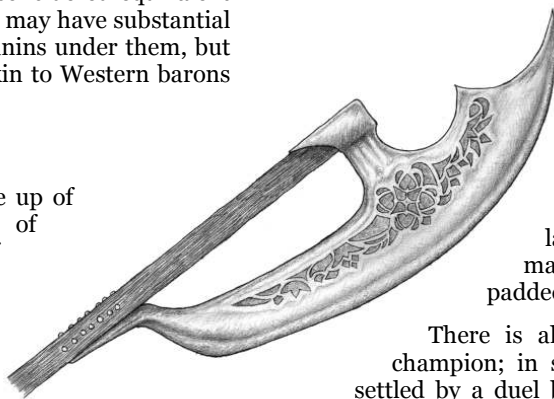
They are rulers, collectors of taxes and defenders of the land. They owe loyalty to a prince or a city, and when called upon are expected to muster out for battle, brining with them warriors proportionate to their rank and wealth. Although there are numerous differentiations between them, very broadly the lesser gentry, the *dvorianstvo*, could be considered equivalent to knights, while the boyars – who may have substantial country holdings and many *dvorianins* under them, but probably live in the cities – are akin to Western barons and dukes.

Warfare and Defence

Russian armies are typically made up of several components. The heart of them are the cavalry, made up of the nobility and their personal retainers, their *druzhina* (the term literally means ‘companions’). They are typically relatively heavily armoured in long coats of mail or lamellar armour of metal plates, with conical helmets and shields. They use a spear in the charge, a sword or mace for a personal weapon and, for

good measure, may also have a bow on their saddle. Muscovite forces are more heavily influenced by the Mongol example, and make more use of sabres instead of straight swords, horse archers and drummers instead of trumpeters to signal their forces in battle.

The bulk of the army will be infantry. Most of these are volunteer or conscripted militiamen, largely from the cities. Militiamen are likely armed in a ragtag collection of spears and axes, wearing padded coats (sometimes several layers of coats, for maximum padding). However, every city also has its own force of professional soldiers, sometimes mercenaries, sometimes locals. The sword is fairly rare among them, with the typical weapon being the spear, the axe or the



traditional Russian polearm called a *berdys*, a broad axe-like blade on a spear shaft. Many are missile troops, with bows or crossbows, but many other foot soldiers also carry javelins. Some wear long or short shirts of mail or lamellar armour, but many make do just with a thickly-padded coat.

There is also a strong tradition of the champion; in some rare cases, conflicts are settled by a duel between champions, but more often it was the case that battles started with a fight between opposing champions, with the morale of each side heavily affected by their representative’s showing. Before Kulikovo, for example, a Russian warrior-monk,



Alexander Peresvet, fought the Mongol Chelubei. Both killed each other in the first clash of spears, but Chelubei's corpse fell from his horse, while Peresvet's stayed in the saddle, so the Russians counted this as a moral victory.

THE COUNTRY DVORYANIN

The country gentry, the dvorianins, range from rich magnates who preside over dozens of villages and perhaps a small market or two, down to petty gentry who live lives hardly different from their peasant neighbours', earning just enough from tribute or fees for judging a dispute to maintain the horse and cavalryman's accoutrements they need to retain their rank. Indeed, they may have been peasants, elevated to the lowest ranks of the elite for some outstanding service.

A dvoryanin of at least middling rank will have a large wooden house, with its own stables and slave-tilled farms, and perhaps a couple of armed retainers who guard his property in times of peace and ride at his side in war. Their daily dress is much like that of the peasantry, albeit typically with richer outerwear and some silver or gold jewellery to denote rank. During festivals or when entertaining visitors of note, though, their probably only set of ceremonial robes will be brought out, carefully preserved and mended, if probably decades out of date by urban standards. For men, this will generally be a caftan, richly-coloured and brightly-embroidered, while for women a similar dress and veiled tiara or coronet.

The Wise Batyushka

The local landowner will generally be referred to respectfully (to his face, at least) as *batyushka*, 'little father.' Apart from his duties collecting taxes and living a good life, the boyar will also be called upon to judge those cases on which the village elders cannot decide and perhaps also provide some assistance to the community in time of need. A wise dvorianin is at least moderately conscientious in carrying out these duties and also does not over-indulge in such traditional pastimes as forcing himself upon pretty young peasant girls or taking the very last seed-corn from the stocks when times are hard. After all, there is an implicit balance of power here. He may have a dozen or more Cossacks or other retainers at his command, to be sure. But he's probably a day's ride away from help, and the local village or villages can muster hundreds of able-bodied adults, some of whom are hunters, all of whom can lay their hands on burning torches and sharp agricultural implements. There is always the threat of *bunt*, an explosion of spontaneous rural violence, if the local *batyushka* goes too far.

Where the dvoryanin (or boyar) ruling a village does not live close by, he will often appoint a representative to look after his interests. Again, much hinges on how well this **starosta** defends his master's interests and can work with the community. One who is too demanding or

boorish may be found dead of a morning, having 'slipped' on the way to the privy. One who is too accommodating may end up siding with the village, telling his master that the harvest was worse than it was, so that they have to pay less tax than they ought.

THE COURT BOYAR

The cities are home to both dvoryanins – who often derive their position not from their lands but some role at court, or else are rich enough country gentry that they can afford not to live in the countryside – and the higher aristocracy, the boyars.

To be a boyar is a wonderful and terrible thing. Wonderful because your family is rich, ruling over large tracts and land, numerous villages, taxable markets, lumber woods and mines. You might eat meat every day, be able to afford the finest imported clothes and goods, have servants to cater to your whims and live in a high society of feasts, dances and entertainments.

Terrible because you are in a political environment in which advancement and survival is all. Marriages are arranged, everything depends on retaining the favour of the head of the family, and each day could bring calamity. Thanks to the appanage system, most families are constantly looking for new opportunities to expand their lands at others' expense: any hint of weakness is enough to bring the predators flocking.





Bojars generally fill many of the key roles in a prince's court. Not only does this give them a chance to influence policy in their favour, it is also a duty expected of them. To appear not to support the prince can, after all, be a dangerous thing in such a wolf-eat-wolf political environment. They may be the captains of regiments in time of war (male bojars are expected to fight and also bring other armed warriors when the prince calls the muster), emissaries, city functionaries, tax collectors or even willing to hunt down bandits or gather peasants to rebuild a bridge when the need arises.

PRINCES

The princes of Russia trace their bloodlines to Rurik, and form a separate caste which has, in many ways, become a mobile elite. The Daniiloviches of Moscow are, as in so many other ways, the exception to the rule in their dynastic tie to a single city. On the whole, the princes of the Rus' are willing to move from city to see, hoping to 'trade up' to a more powerful or prestigious one, or being forced to 'trade down' when defeated in battle or outmanoeuvred in politics. This has its roots in the early years, when most cities still had powerful assemblies who would in effect hire princes who met the needs of the moment. Only Novgorod still retains this approach, but nonetheless while princes may pass the title to a particular city to their sons, there is no bar to their then moving on. Broadly speaking, the most prestigious title are Grand Prince of Kiev, Moscow or Vladimir, then Tver and Suzdal. As Moscow extends its grip, though, increasingly title to a principality depends on receiving Donskoi's approval, and it is only a matter of time before he also starts trying to appoint them – if he survives the vengeance of Tokhtamysh.

Princes are warlords and governors, the final court of appeal for their subjects and, in hard times, the people

COSSACKS!

As noted in **KEYWORDS**, the presence of Cossacks in **Mythic Russia** is a bit of dramatic license: the scattered communities of runaways, bandits and ne'er-do-wells who would form the Cossacks were beginning to form, but had nowhere near this consistency. No matter – the Cossacks always break the rules!

EAT, DRINK, DANCE, FIGHT

Cossacks left the comfort and stability of their home cultures precisely because they did not suit them. Most left to build new lives away from grasping lords and greedy monasteries; some were lawbreakers; others adventurers. Either way, having won themselves a new life, they are typically determined not to waste it. Cossacks often seem larger-than-life characters, devoted to enjoying the now rather than dwelling on the past or

who get blamed for incurring the wrath of God or the gods. Under Mongol rule, their main responsibilities were paying the taxes demanded by the Great Khan, keeping their cities quiet and contributing troops or labourers when this was required.

TEREM OR NOT TEREM?

The role of women within aristocratic society is a complex one. From their Varangian roots, the Russians inherited a notion that women, while the gentler sex, were also able and formidable and deserved their own voice, especially on matters relating to the family and the household. On the other hand, the influence of both Byzantium and Russia's Moslem neighbours has prompted a trend towards segregation, keeping women apart from the men and, in the process, excluding them from power and influence. In many princely and boyar households, especially in Kiev and Muscovy, the womenfolk spend their days in special female quarters, the terem. They do not socialise with men, except when chaperoned and at social events, and they only travel outside the terem with appropriate guardians and properly veiled, until married.

This is a divisive practice. To the north and the west, it is widely derided and women are encouraged to play a more substantive, if still secondary role in the affairs of their houses. Even in the south and east, though, it is seen as a matter of personal and familial choice: there is no great stigma attached to women who stay out of the terem (if anything, it is more likely that there will be ribald speculation about the weakness of husbands and families unable to control their women). Terem quarters are typically elegant, spacious and finely decorated, but however gilded, they are still cages. It is hardly surprising that many choose to stay outside them.

worrying about the future. If all else fails, after all, you can just move on again.

The Cossack temper is legendary and volatile, as is their friendship. A Cossack can be laughing at your joke one minute, then furiously drawing his sabre or his horse-whip the next. But if you show guts, he'll probably be giving you a bear hug and exchanging vows of eternal friendship the next. Of course, that may not stop him from selling you out to your enemies tomorrow for a fine horse and a dozen pots of vodka – Cossacks are also pragmatic.

They are also infamously chauvinistic, even by Russian standards. Women are often captured and married by force instead of being wooed, and female slaves may become virtual concubines. That said, there are also cases of true love matches among them. On the whole, though, a good Cossack takes more care of his horse than his wife!



Many Cossacks spend much of their time in service to others, although always on their own terms and by their

own choice. They may be encountered leading or guarding expeditions into Siberia, as mercenary cavalry or simply as the armed retainers and all-round bully-boys of wealthy Russians.

Perhaps in order to give them some kind of cohering identity, perhaps because they face Moslems in the south, animists in the east and perhaps because so many hail originally from the lands of Kiev, where Christianity is most deeply-rooted, the Cossacks tend to cleave very strongly to the Orthodox faith.

THE STANITSA

Some Cossacks move with their families, others set up family once away from the confines of their home society. Either way, a new Cossack society is beginning to emerge. The basic unit beyond the family is the stanitsa, the fortified village or small town. These look half-way between their Russian counterparts and a frontier fort, as by definition they are outposts in lands without central law or authority, and are half-empty for much of the year.

While individuals and families may own their own huts and other property within the stanitsa, most land is held communally and is assigned to families to farm (often by their slaves) by the rada, the stanitsa's assembly, made up of 30 elected representatives of its free menfolk. A larger stanitsa will have its own elected chief, an ataman. They serve for a year before having to stand for re-election before the rada. Atamans are also sometimes elected from collections of stanitsa, if they feel the need, or else to lead a military unit, whether fighting in defence of the Cossack lands or else in mercenary service. Any organised unit is called either a 'hundred' (*sotnia*), whether it comprises ten men or 200, or else, if unusually large, a 'host' (*voisko*).

PLAYING RUSSIANS

YOUR FIRST RUSSIAN HERO

The permitted occupations for the Russian keyword are:

- ❑ **Cavalry Soldier** (Regular, Skirmish; Courier for Muscovites): These are essentially noblemen and their personal retainers. Suitable deities are Dazhbog Bright-Sun, Perun, Rugyevit and Zvezda Vechernaya. Favoured saints include SS Alexander Nevsky, Dmitri, George, Mikhail and Moris.
- ❑ **Child**
- ❑ **Crafter:** Much Russian craftsmanship is very fine, from the delicate wooden carvings which decorate many simple items around the homes of the wealthy to the brightly painted wooden implements hanging in many peasant huts. Beyond the deities listed

under Peasants, Svarozhich is favoured by smiths. SS Alypius, Gleb and Varvara are also patrons.

- ❑ **Entertainer:** The Russians enjoy diversion, from singers, storytellers, puppeteers or musicians. Typical musical instruments include the balalaika and the gusli.
- ❑ **Farmer:** Most Russian peasants are farmers. Popular pagan deities are Veles, Mat-Syra-Zemlya or even Dazhbog Bright-Sun, Yarilo and Zorya Utrennaya. Christians tend to follow the Mother of God or SS Andrew, Boris, George, Tryfon, Vlasii or Nicholas the Wonderworker.
- ❑ **Foot Soldier** (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer): Many worship Dazhbog Bright-Sun, Perun and Rugyevit. Favoured saints include SS Alexander Nevsky, Dmitri, George, Mikhail and Moris.



Guns

The first, simple firearms are just beginning to appear in Russia. Moscow has just bought the first cannon for the city's defence. A few soldiers now carry very simple guns. Known as a *tyufyak*, this is a metal tube fixed to a clumsy stock, firing a ball perhaps 100m or else a cloud of pebbles or smaller balls 50m. This is not yet an effective weapon of war, especially compared with the bow or crossbow, but it is scarily noisy to those who have not yet encountered such leading-edge technology!

- ❑ **Healer:** Everybody hurts, sometime. So that's why healers are needed. Most follow Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Earth or St Pantaleimon.
- ❑ **Hunter:** Hunters may either be specialist members of a farming community or, more commonly, fur-hunters and -trappers. As they may wander in the winter, as well as the usual peasant deities some propitiate Morozko.
- ❑ **Merchant:** Russians are great traders, whether stall-holders buying and selling at the market, or entrepreneurs ranging through Siberia, buying up furs to bring to the dealers of Novgorod. Veles is popular with many, as are SS Ivan Chrystosom and Nicholas of All Good Things.
- ❑ **Noble:** The pettier dvorianins are probably best created using Cavalry Soldier or even Warrior, but otherwise this represents the gentry and the boyars. Following Dazhbog the Tsar or St Vladimir is a mark of ambition, pretension or true blue blood.
- ❑ **Priest** (Christian or Pagan): Priests do not practice dvoeverie, but many communities have both a pagan volkhv and a Christian priest. Whether they are enemies, rivals or friends is up to them.
- ❑ **Sailor** (Sea or River): Beyond Novgorod, Russia's sailors are essentially used to navigating rivers rather than the sea. Stribog, Perun the Thunderer, St Nicholas the Wet are all popular with them.
- ❑ **Scholar:** Most Russian scholars are monks, although this keyword also represents lay specialists such as the keepers of tax and census rolls. Myesyats, Perun Lawgiver and SS Cyril, Grigori and Ivan Chrystosom are favoured by scholars.
- ❑ **Thief:** The bustling cities offer opportunities to thieves – so long as they escape the lethal kiss of the knout. St Alexis is a particular patron.
- ❑ **Warrior:** While the military aristocracy of Kiev should be considered Nobles or Cavalry Soldiers, elsewhere in Russia there is still a tradition of the solo warrior, often an adventurer who does a little trading, some hunting, fights for silver and mucks in with the harvest in return for a place by the stove. Again, they favour Dazhbog Bright-Sun, Perun, Rugevit, or Zorya Polunochnaya. Favoured saints include SS Alexander Nevsky, Dmitri, George, Mikhail and Moris.

YOUR FIRST COSSACK HERO

Assume they tend towards the same Orthodox saints as noted under Russians.

- ❑ **Cavalry Soldier** (Courier, Regular, Skirmish): Most Cossack men can fight and ride, but these are the specialists, who spend most of their lives as bandits or mercenaries (the distinction between the two is often unclear and not especially useful). Cossacks tend to be relatively lightly-armoured, at most relying on a light shirt of plundered mail, a helmet and a shield. The typical weapons are a sabre, a light spear and a bow.
- ❑ **Child**
- ❑ **Crafter:** The Cossacks are pragmatic people who nonetheless love artefacts which can combine function and beauty. They crafters tend towards skills of immediate value: building houses and walls, making and mending tools, weapons and horses' tack, and so forth.
- ❑ **Entertainer:** Beyond the Russian staples, Cossacks also enjoy their exuberant dances and also the music of the kobzar, a lute-like instrument.
- ❑ **Farmer:** Many Cossacks farm when they must, but relatively few specialise in this field. Most will be women or those forced to give up a more adventurous life through age or disability.
- ❑ **Foot Soldier** (Archer, Regular, Skirmish): This is another relatively rare occupation as most Cossack units are cavalry. Again, they tend to be quite lightly armoured, wielding bows, sabres and spears. Many also use the berdysh.
- ❑ **Healer:** Cossacks may pride themselves on their hardiness, but even they need healing.
- ❑ **Hunter:** Most Cossacks hunt, but some are specialists – whether hunting animals or men. Some of these are scouts and outriders, others specialise in hunting escaped slaves.
- ❑ **Merchant:** Cossacks are traders as much as they are raiders – indeed, who arranges the deals which see Cossacks hired as mercenaries, whether as individuals, small groups or whole bands?
- ❑ **Priest** (Christian): The priests who minister to the souls of the Cossacks need to be stern in their beliefs and also able to live life Cossack-style, so they tend to be a redoubtable lot.
- ❑ **Nomad:** In many ways, this is the default for the Cossack male, a jack-of-many-trades, who can farm if he must, but is happiest on his horse.
- ❑ **Warrior:** Warriors are not mercenary soldiers but specialise in personal combat. As such, they may be lone highwaymen but are more likely to be bodyguards or what might be considered 'combat entertainers', fighting, wrestling or sword-dancing for display, but just as easily using those skills to lethal effect in a real fight.

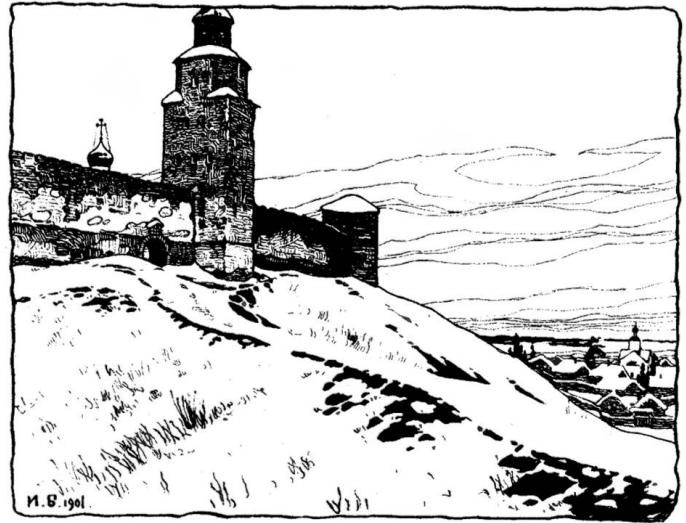
10. LANDS OF THE RUS'

“Visiting is good, but home is better.”

Broad and wide are the lands of the Rus', but in truth, most is deep forest, cut through by the rivers which are the main routes for trade and travel. The cleared, farmed land around the towns and cities is certainly growing, especially where settlements are expanding quickly like Moscow, but this is still a land where humanity is an intruder, scratching out a living in the shadow of mighty, primal forces.

Nonetheless, the Rus' are making this land theirs, and it is scattered with the signs of their civilisation. Villages of simple wooden huts, each built around a stove to keep its huddled occupants alive through the long, frozen winter. Palisaded towns, which often look like no more than larger villages, with fields and orchards between rows of houses, clustered around a core in which a simple but sturdy wooden fort is home to the local boyar. And the cities, some of whom even have stone kremlins, churches or even – Glory to God! – walls, otherwise are again wrought in finely-carved wood.

To the north is the taiga, flat and often swampy pine forest, an untamed wilderness in which most of the soil is too poor to farm and even unfriendly to most wildlife. To the south, is the rolling steppe, a grassy plain that is the natural home of horse-nomads. The majority of Russia, though, is forest. The further south, the more varied a mix of conifers and broadleaf trees and also the better soils, but even at its best, this is not rich farming land. Plough the Russians must, in exposed pasture land or those parts of the first they themselves have cleared, but it is a hard task for often little return, given the long,



hard winters. Hunting, trapping, beekeeping and trade must all supplement farming if the family and village is to survive.

Roads are few, poor and far-between. Instead, it is the waterways which provide the essential transportation routes across Russia, and along which most towns and cities are built. Most rivers are broad and slow-flowing, although many freeze partially or completely in winter, especially in the more northerly latitudes. The Volga, the Dneiper and the Don are the greatest, but there are many more, and the portage points (at which rivers are close and boats or cargoes can be carried between them) become important strategic locations.

THE SOUTH: LANDS OF KIEV

Once this was the heartland of Russia: here the original Rurikid dynasty built their halls, here princes competed for the title of Great Prince of Kiev. That was then, before the Mongols turned 'Kiev the Golden' into a smoking pyre of bones and cinders.

This is still a rich land thanks to its fertile black soils and the trade routes which criss-cross it, to and from Constantinople, Europe, Novgorod and Asia. But that wealth makes it instead a target – already, Lithuania has begun to exert its authority and even Kiev must pay it tribute. If Moscow survives its new struggle with the Mongols, there is no question but that it will expect its own cut from Kiev's dwindling treasury and perhaps even regard this is an issue worth challenging Lithuania

over. Weep for Kiev: once a capital, yesterday a pyre, and perhaps tomorrow a battlefield.

South and east of Kiev's lands are the regions dominated by the Cossacks, plains scattered the stanitsas, the Cossack villages. In summer, these are half-empty, as many Cossacks instead live by hunting, raiding and mercenary service, only to return as autumn falls. They are all sturdy and defensible settlements, though, behind wooden palisades, and even Cossack women, children, invalids and the old can put up a fight should bandits or nomads approach from the 'Wild Plains' beyond.



KIEV THE GOLDEN

Once, Kiev the Golden was the greatest and fairest city of the Rus'. It was founded a thousand years ago on a place prophesied by St Andrew: three hills by the Dneister river became the homes for three Slavic tribal heroes, of whom Kyi was the oldest and whose name the city eventually took. From a small trading post it grew to become a town, then a city, and by the eighth century it was the first city of the Rus', whose princes would raid as far as Tsargrad (Constantinople) and whose markets were full of goods from trade routes which crossed Asia and Europe and booty from a hundred raids and battlefields. In 988, Prince Vladimir turned to Christianity, toppling the golden-moustached idol of

Perun into the river and having his druzhina drive the people of Kiev after it for enforced baptism. Although Christianity was first brought by decree and at spear-point, it has set down deep roots, and paganism is weakest here.

Those were the glory days, though. By the twelfth century, Kiev's power was waning, and the city even fell to a rival prince, Andrei Bogolyubsky of Vladimir. Then came the Mongols. Kiev, proud and God-fearing, refused to submit, and the Mongols shattered its walls and swept through the city with fire and sword. Most of the population was killed or enslaved, and it has never recovered.

Now, it is a city living amidst the ruins of its past and in the dreams of ancient glories. To the east, the hungry



LOST ON THE ROAD

The Lithuanian emissary bringing Jogaila the latest tribute from Kiev has been waylaid. He and his well-armed guards are dead, their wagons burned, and the money, predictably enough, has gone. Prince Yuri is frantic as Kiev can hardly afford to pay again. Fortunately, a trusted guard captain came upon the scene and Yuri has a few days before the Lithuanians realise that something has happened to their party. To avoid tipping them off ahead of time, Yuri must turn to outsiders to try and find the tribute – or at least discover what happened.

- ▶ It was indeed bandits who raided the convoy, but not any bandits: the fearsome Cossack renegades of Ebjeg Ladykiller, a man who takes his nicknames literally. Half the silver has already been spent or spread around the gang.
- ▶ They may look like bandits, but the raiders are actually a picked team from Donskoi's druzhina: at the eleventh hour he plans to offer Yuri a loan to pay off the Lithuanians at usurious interest, to start bringing the city under his control. The silver is still in its chests, being taken to Moscow by a roundabout route.
- ▶ The silver has been stolen by partisans of Jogaila's rival Prince Vytautas. It is being taken south to Constantinople in the hope of hiring mercenaries: Vytautas likes the idea of toppling his rival with his own silver.
- ▶ Prince Yuri, in his uptight Christian rectitude, has angered the poleviks, field spirits of the land. They tore through the Lithuanians and swallowed the silver, because the chest bore his personal sigil. The silver is thus now scattered in the earth around the place of the killing, from one to five feet down. Digging this up would take a village of peasants a couple of days... but the presence of a host of enraged spirits might make that rather harder. Can Yuri be persuaded to propitiate the poleviks, or can Kiev's vain and lazy Archbishop Pavel banish or subdue them?
- ▶ The silver was seized by Mongol renegades. They are headed east, hoping to use the silver to buy their way back into the Golden Horde. Might they instead be persuaded to return the silver in return for the promise of honoured (and lucrative) employment in Kiev?

upstart Moscow usurps Kiev's rightful role as capital of the Russias. To the west, Catholic Poland is massing her armies, nibbling away at what is left of Kiev's lands. In 1321, Kiev's forces were defeated by the Lithuanians at Irpen River and Stanislav, last of the Rurikid dynasty, was toppled. The present prince, **Yuri Knot-Brow**, is a reluctant vassal of the Lithuanians. He not only pays a heavy price in silver for his crown but also had to contribute troops to Jogaila's army at Kulikovo, something which still rankles this mournful Kievan patriot. His daughter, the sternly energetic Svetlana, is a young woman of unfashionably extensive education, determined to give Kiev a future as well as a past, but is conservative Kiev ready for a princess?

Given that this was a wooden city, the ruins of the old Kiev have largely decayed or been plundered for kindling, leaving a broad oval of cleared land, now largely given over to fields and grazing. The city itself, ringed by a new wooden wall, still seeks to ape the glories of Tsargrad. The oldest part of the city, the **Podol** quarter by the river, is a thriving, chaotic district of poor houses, fish markets and craftsman's workshops. Andrew's Street is a steep and winding thoroughfare which more directly connects the heart of the Podol to the hilltop **Upper Town**, where the well-to-do and aristocratic make their homes, above the sounds and smells of the masses. Although the newer buildings are in the main unremarkable, clustered around winding streets within those walls, are still remains of the old Kiev. The new walls are anchored around the ancient but still mighty **Golden Gate**, for example, a stone bastion topped by a church. The stone **Church of the Tithe** is the oldest surviving building in the city and the

site of St Vladimir's tomb, although it is overshadowed by the **Cathedral of St Sofia**, built in Byzantine style, whose mosaics are said to show prophetic scenes in the presence of the truly holy.

Perhaps most striking is what is not here. The city's kremlin was destroyed by the Mongols, and no prince of Kiev has yet had the time, will or resources to build a new one. (Besides which, Kiev's relatively crowded street plan would mean that such a fortress would either have to be built outside the main city or by clearing other buildings.) Nonetheless, this is something which also preys on the minds – and egos – of many princes, including the present one, and is sometimes the subject of jocular derision by those from other cities. Nonetheless, the prince has a strong-walled palace, close by barracks both of his own druzhina and also a force of Cossack horsemen. But it's no kremlin...

Outside the city is the **Monastery of the Caves**, one of the holiest Christian sites in all Russia. Beneath its churches are the monastic catacombs where especially pious monks still seclude themselves, seeking holy visions in a strict regime of fasting. Some even bury themselves alive, all the better to commune with their God!

CHERNIGOV

One of the oldest cities in all Russia, the grand principality of Chernigov competed even with Kiev itself once, until it too was sacked in the Mongol invasion. Even then, its spirit was not broken, and Prince



Mikhailo became a saint of the Russian Church after his torture and death when he refused to pay homage to the Mongol spirits. Like Kiev, Chernigov now must pay tribute to Lithuania, although brutal and greedy Prince **Osip Osipovich** gleefully uses this as an excuse to extort ever higher taxes, relying on his Cossack mercenaries and the threat of Lithuanian invasion to keep his people quiet. The five-domed **Cathedral of the Saviour** is a magical building built in Byzantine fashion, while the **Eletsky Monastery** outside the city's walls is a more austere structure, with wings for both nuns and monks. On the other hand, the **Cathedral of SS Boris and Gleb**, is finely carved with images of the **Chernigov Beast**, with the body of a dragon, head of a dog, wings of a bird and a snake for a tail. Tamed by the Virgin Mary, it is no longer found on the Mortal World, but still roams the Representational one, as ready to devour the sinful as to dispense prophesy to the pure of heart.

SMOLENSK

The pine forests of Smolensk are famous both for their fine wood and sap and also for the prickly leshy who still survive in their depths, brooding over the incursion of humans into their realm. Smolensk is an important trading city, a stop on the river routes to and from Kiev and Tsargrad in the south and as far north as Riga. Connections with the latter mean that there is still a collection of Latvian pagan exiles in the city, muttering about their return to restore the old ways 'some day'. There are also numerous representatives of Novgorod trading houses, dealing in Sibiryak furs and Baltic silver. The city's wealth is visible in the number of stone buildings, including the great **Church of the Archangel Michael**. However, the walls and Prince **Viktor Maximovich's** kremlin are still pine-log constructions, albeit finely-wrought and black with protective tar.

THE MUSCOVITE HEARTLAND

In the twelfth century, Moscow was just a small village clustered around a hunting lodge and frontier post established by Yuri Dolgoruky (Long-Armed Yuri), then prince of Suzdal. By the thirteenth century it had grown modestly but was still a small, backwater township. Moscow's fortunes would, however, be made by the same cataclysm which broke Kiev: the Mongol conquest. The Muscovites knew when to bend the knee: as the Mongol invasion broke, they submitted to the Great Khan with eager and flattering alacrity. The town and its surrounding fields were thus spared the destruction which was visited on so many other cities. Indeed, it became something of a haven for refugees from elsewhere. Even so, until the start of the fourteenth century it remained not even a second-class power, overshadowed by Vladimir, Novgorod and Tver. Its rise since then has been dramatic, driven largely by its princes' willingness to cooperate wholeheartedly with the Mongols. They proved able and rapacious tax collectors for the Khans, loyal and efficient spies, and dutiful and merciless enforcers of their will. The more indispensable they became, the greater the wealth they accumulated and the more powers they were granted. In 1310, the Russian Orthodox Church, sensing a rising power, moved its See to the city, also making Moscow the formal heart of the faith.

Now, of course, Prince Dmitri has judged the time right to throw the Mongol Yoke off Russia's neck – albeit to replace it with a Muscovite one. Only time will tell if his fine calculations will prove wise.

Muscovy – Moscow and the cities and regions it controls directly – therefore has a distinctive feel. It is the most strongly influenced by Mongol ways and culture, from

the curved sabres wielded by its warriors to the authoritarian ways of its rulers. It is also a city of crass new money, of ambition and fast living, a place of opportunity and intrigue: the princes of Muscovy prize ability and loyalty above birth and scruples and so it is a magnet for opportunists, adventurers, renegades and intriguers. Here they come, hoping to make a fortune and win a title, without losing their heads.

Moscow

Moscow has come a long way in a short time, and it shows. Little survives of the old, shabby Moscow of a century before. In keeping with its new power – and the desire to make that power and wealth visible to all other princes – the Daniiloviches have embarked upon ambitious and grandiose building projects through the last century. By day, the Moskva River is thick with trading boats, bringing tribute, goods and building materials to feed its ambitions. The roads leading into the city – really, just tracks – are busy with couriers, soldiers, peddlers, petitioners, emissaries, merchants and labourers, drawn in and sent forth by Moscow's new-found wealth and ambitious intent.

The city's kremlin is perhaps Russia's strongest, both impressive in its grandeur and ruthlessly practical in design. In 1339-1340, Ivan Kalita built a great new wooden kremlin on Borovitsy Hill. When this was largely burnt down during the terrible fire of 1365, his successor Dmitri Donskoi decided to replace it with a stone fortress. The result was the present **Moscow Kremlin**, a mighty white stone symbol of Daniilovich



pride and ambition, such that Moscow is sometimes called the 'white stone city.' It is almost a city within the city, full of palaces and churches and centred on **Sobornaya Square** which, at great expense, has been cobbled. Donskoi's palace inside the Kremlin's curtain wall is the **Embankment Chamber**, a long building with a gleaming gilt roof which glitters above the battlements so that all in Moscow can marvel at his wealth and glory. No potential rival or vacillating ally, though, can fail to notice that the nine decoratively-built towers have walls as thick as a man's arm-span, studded with murder-holes and arrow slits, while alongside the graceful churches and palaces inside are squat wooden barracks and bastions full of armed retainers, and stores and wells to withstand a season's siege. Donskoi, like his forefathers, wants all of Russia not just to marvel at Moscow's glory but also to fear its might.

Donskoi's Druzhina

The prince's personal armed retainers are a motley but murderously efficient collection of warriors. He is renowned as a generous patron and also for prizing ability over birth, and so he has attracted followers from across and beyond Russia. They include Red-Eyed Vadim, the bandit from Rostov who can start a fire with a glance; brooding German German, the cursed apostate Teutonic Knight; the Osipovsky Twins, cheery souls who can cut a throat as quickly as they woo a maiden; and Galich Azev, a most unusual Cossack whose mild and bookish ways conceal a murderous temper and extraordinary skill with knife and bow. Donskoi's druzhina is a separate force from the hosts of Moscow: the handful of full-time units the prince maintains and the larger force of levies raised at time of war. When called upon to fight in battle, they will, and with a savage skill born of bloodthirstiness, experience and a passion for plunder. More often, though, Donskoi uses them as agents and envoys, weapons against his enemies.

Of the several churches inside the Kremlin's walls, the **Cathedral of the Dormition** is now the spiritual heart of both the Muscovite realm and the Russian Orthodox faith. It stands on Sobornaya Square, facing the Embankment Chamber, and within its white walls and beneath its five gilt domes, princes are crowned and patriarchs and metropolitans buried. Its huge iconostasis houses many of the holiest icons in the city. This includes *Our Lady of the Don*, the icon Donskoi paraded before his hosts at Kulikovo, and which he credits with victory. Two of his druzhina guard it, day and night – and a hundred armed men are within earshot, too. The new **Chudov Monastery**, also within the Kremlin, illustrates the complexities of Moscow's relationship with the Mongols. The Khan of the Kipchak Horde himself still owns properties in the city and even tracts of land within the Kremlin: including the plot on which this monastery was built, gifted to Metropolitan Alexei in thanks for his healing ministrations to the Khan's ailing favourite wife. The builders who worked on the monastery did not have time to pack away their tools before they were engaged by the prince himself to build a new wooden church within the Kremlin, to be called the **Church of the Raising of Lazarus**, to

celebrate Kulikovo. The symbolism is obvious, drawing a parallel with the 'resurrection' of Russia. The spate of accidents which have bedevilled the project are, however, beginning to become a cause for concern, and some builders mutter that Mongol curses are at work.

Just outside the Kremlin's eastern, **Saviour's Tower**, is the **Lobno mesto**, an otherwise undistinguished cobbled mound no more than half the height of a man. Nonetheless, it is steeped in blood, magic and history and any Muscovite knows better than to cross or even approach it. From here a prince makes his most momentous proclamations, and to here traitors and enemies of Muscovy are dragged for their execution. It is still said that there are nights when the quiet dead gather here, to howl and curse the impassive kremlin walls. On such nights, a sensible Muscovite bars the doors and leaves some extra milk and vodka for the domovoy, hoping for his protection. Those of less sense or greater need have tried to parley with these hungry and angry ghosts, and their stiff white bodies, contorted and distorted, have been found the next morning. Still, it is rumoured that a year ago a young man from Novgorod bound some of the victims of the Daniiloviches with a terrible oath, but to say this aloud in the hearing of the prince's men is to invite the knout at best, a sabre's edge at worst. That night, all the bells in the nearby **Trinity Cathedral** cracked.

Beyond this is **Kitai Gorod**, the 'Middle Town.' It is the mercantile heart of the city. Along **Nicholas Street** are stalls from which traders from across Russia and beyond hawk their wares, the new wealth of the city meaning that even the most unusual and expensive goods are to be found. This is a teeming district in which a humble shopkeeper's wooden hut may share an alleyway with a newly-rich merchant's equally new mansion, although increasingly aristocratic families are moving into its more central parts, as a cheaper alternative to the prize streets of the Arbat district. The **Church of St Varvara the Martyr** gives its name to one of the oldest streets in the town, which also houses the **Gostiny Dvor**, or House of Merchants, where Viktor Kamilenko, the prince's Master of Silver, judges disputes, collects taxes, and watches his private fortune grow and grow thanks to judicious bribery and embezzlement. The monks of **Ilinsky Monastery**, true to the uncompromising ways of their patron, St Ilya, are famed as much for their skills as wrestlers as their piety. A further, wooden wall surrounds the outer edge of Kitai Gorod, beyond which is a sprawl of crude wooden shacks, warehouses and the pens of animals to be sold in the animal markets of Moscow. There are also taverns and brothels of the cheaper sort, frequented by the poor of taste or pocket.

History Lessons



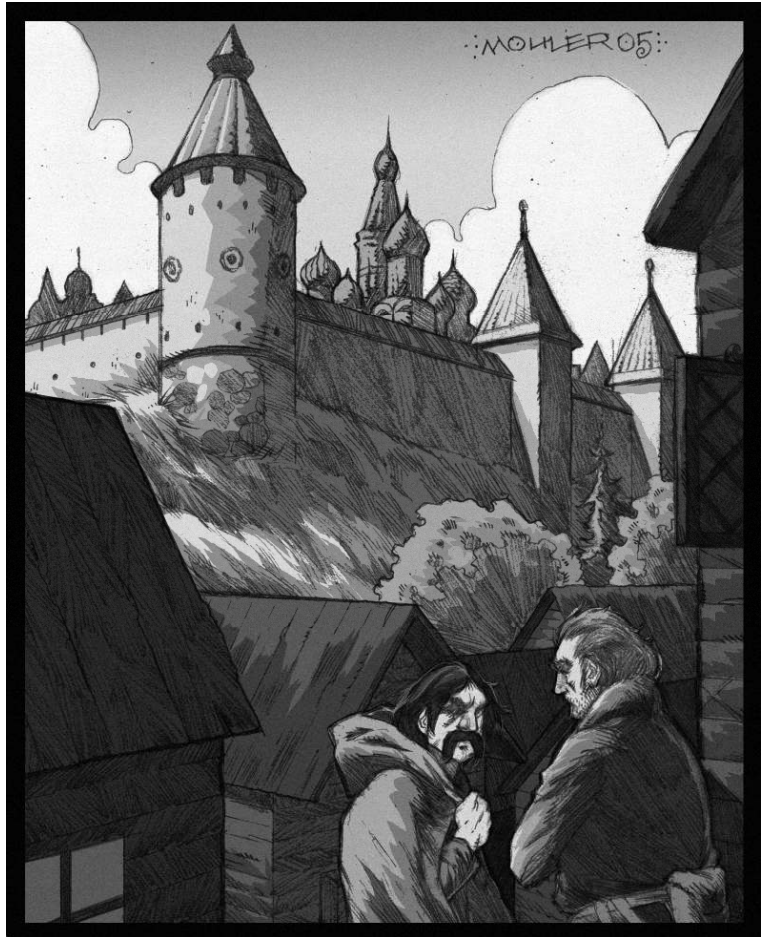
In modern Russian, Kitai Gorod means 'China Town,' which has given rise to fanciful speculation about Chinese mercantile routes and the like. However, the real roots of the district's name are either an ancient Russian word for 'middle' or else a term for

'wattle', the mats of woven sticks and weeds used to make the first wall around this district. That said, if you are looking for Chinese traders (or the kind of far-travelled merchants who might have visited that fabled land), this is the right part of Moscow to find them!

Directly north of the Kremlin is the **Kuznetsky Most**, the Blacksmith's Bridge over the Neglinnaya River, named for the small workshops and forges which cluster in the marshy hollow along the river's banks. The smoke from their charcoal fires plumes high into the air, generally blowing to the north-east, thanks to the magics employed by the boyars and grandees who live in the **Arbat** district to the west. There, in the shadow of the Kremlin are the houses and palaces of the Muscovite elite. Here a bandit chieftain turned prince's man may live alongside an exiled Mongol mercenary, a Lithuanian adventurer rub shoulders with a boyar blueblood. The atmosphere in the centre is thick with money and ambition, rumour and intrigue, and everyone understands that all depend upon the favour of the prince. This is even visible in the geography of the district, with grandees and families vying for properties closest to the Kremlin, with those relegated to the furthest reaches, just inside the **St Nicholas Gate** in the northern face of the city's outer wall, either the hungry new-bloods or former favourites just clinging to a shred of their old glory.

To the south is **Zamoskvorechie** district, literally 'South of the Moskva River.' This is the home of those merchants able to buy their way out of Kitai Gorod, foreigners and many Mongols – after all, its main road, **Bolshaya Ordynka**, leads all the way to the Mongol capital of Sarai. The largest single contingent here are the Novgorodians – merchants, emissaries and adventurers – who have settled immediately on the banks of the Moskva, around the **Church of St Sofia**, built with funds they raised themselves. Of the many wharfs on the river, those under their control are regarded as the most efficient, just as the warehouses crowded behind the church are relatively safe and honestly-run. By contrast with the teeming hovels and homes of Kitai Gorod, the city has not taken hold of this unwall'd district. Most buildings straggle along a handful of roads and paths, between which are fields, copses and hedges, although most of the oak and birch trees have been cut down for timber and firewood.

Around the city are a number of fortified monasteries and manor houses, which form a defensive ring in their own right. The **Upper Monastery of St Peter** to the north has its own wharf on the Neglinnaya, and a thriving river shipping business. Princess Mariya Serpukhovskiy, Dmitri Donskoi's aunt, is proposing to build a new monastery only a little to the east, on the other side of the river, and already it is hard to tell if the complaints this has brought from the *igumen*, or abbot, are driven more by doctrinal concerns or fears of a competitor. The **Danilovsky Monastery**, some way



south of the city, is the oldest of them all, and also one of the most heavily fortified, although the **Simonov Monastery** to its east is even more of a bastion, with three massive stone towers. On the eastern bank of the Yauza River, east of Moscow, the **Monastery of the Saviour** has only just been built, thanks to the patronage of Metropolitan Alexei, who founded it to give thanks for surviving a terrible storm when returning from Constantinople. The icon painter Andrei Rublev used to study here, and igumen Andronicus schemes day and night to find ways to woo this miracle-working artist back from his current labours in Zagorsk.

Further out to the south-west, beyond a loop of the Moskva, the forested **Sparrow Hills** still potent in pagan magics. The Old Woman of the Sparrow Hills may be a myth, may be (as some say) Baba Yaga in disguise, or may be (as others hope) an embodiment of Moist Mother Earth Herself. A couple of hours' walk further south is the village of **Black Mud**, an unappealing straggle of crude wooden huts around a marsh whose malodorous sludge is nonetheless reputed to have great healing properties.

BRYANSK

Once, this small city's location on a defensible hill deep within the forest, was protection enough. It resisted



Christianity for long (the bandit Nightingale whom Ilya Muromets fought came from here) and survived the Mongol invasion unscathed. However, with the death of Prince Roman 150 years ago, Bryansk has lost its way. Its forests have begun to die, its traditional woodcrafting appears no longer in demand and it has been taken by Chernigov, Smolensk, Chernigov again, Tatars and then Lithuanians, who assigned it to their client, the Russian prince **Dmitri**. Dmitri pays the Lithuanians silver, but he and his younger brother Gleb owe Donskoi friendship, and at Kulikovo joined with Moscow. What will Jogaila do now? And are Bryansk's woes really the result of it accepting Christianity, as the volkhvs claim?

NIZHNY NOVGOROD

Founded as a fortress to dominate the confluence of the Oka and Volga rivers, this became 'The Lower Newtown' (to distinguish it from Newtown, which is what Novgorod means) but was still relatively insignificant when the Mongols came, saving it from devastation. It thus grew steadily, and Prince **Dmitri Konstantinovich** of Suzdal moved his capital here 30 years ago, building a stone kremlin and even endowing a number of scholars, who work in the **Brick House**, to write vainglorious accounts of his and his family's deeds. Nonetheless, their collection of ancient documents and transcriptions of oral records of wars fought, journeys made and treaties signed is perhaps the finest in all Russia.

ROSTOV

An early Russian city, built on the shores of Lake Nero, Rostov is still one of the most traditional, with a strong pagan tradition and a famous shrine to Perun the Warrior. The mighty, slab-sided **Cathedral of the Dormition**, with its narrow windows and great, lion-handled doors, looks like a fortress for a reason, as does the **Monastery of St Gregory**, whose library and workshop of skilled icon-painters contrasts strangely with the crenelated outer walls, every bit as thick as the city's own. It reached its high point in the thirteenth century, under Prince Vsevolod Big-Nest, who ruled Rostov, Suzdal and Vladimir. The large family which gave him his nickname proved his dynasty's undoing, as thanks to the appannage system his lands were shared out too widely. Successive risings against the Mongols and their suppression and a shift in trade routes towards Moscow have hurt the city, but while falling broadly within Muscovy, it still clings to its independence. For how long, though?

RYAZAN

The city of Ryazan is in one of the most unenviable positions, directly between the Golden Horde's

heartlands and Moscow. Its rulers thus need acute political skills, and although Prince **Oleg** supported the Mongols at Kulikovo, adding his forces to the Lithuanians', Donskoi appreciated his position and ordered his troops to refrain from pillaging as they passed through Ryazan's lands.

SUZDAL

Suzdal is held in the tight, jealous grip of Prince **Dmitri Konstantinovich**, who also rules Nizhny Novgorod. However, he lost the city to Volga Bulgars in 1363 and to win it back he had to forge an alliance with Donskoi, sealed with the marriage of his daughter, Yevdokiya. However, it is an open secret that Tokhtamysh's agents have visited the erratic, cantankerous prince; whether he will support his son-in-law in the future is uncertain. The city itself was for a while Yuri Long-Arm's capital and is known for its fierce pride and resentment at the successes of its rivals. It has never really recovered from the impact of the Mongol invasion, and while now a strongly monastic city (it has a greater ratio of churches to people than any other Russian city), it is no longer the military and economic powerhouse of yore. The **Monastery of Our Saviour and St Euthymius** is a sprawling complex, one of the richest monasteries in Russia. It is no secret that Dmitri Konstantinovich covets its wealth, but he dares not take it.

TVER

On the southern bank of the Volga, Tver was founded by Novgorodians in the twelfth century as a trading stop. Prince Vsevolod Big-Nest subsequently seized and fortified it, precisely to try and control the river routes and bring pressure to bear on Novgorod. Sacked and burnt by the Mongols, Tver recovered quickly and its **Cathedral of the Transfiguration** was the first stone building built in Russia after the invasion. New wooden walls were built, as well as an especially picturesque kremlin, whose wooden walls were whitewashed to look like stone. Indeed, under Prince Dmitri of the Terrible Eyes, who even made an alliance with Lithuania, Tver seemed to pose a challenge to Moscow. Ivan Kalita thus arranged for Dmitri to be murdered by a Mongol in 1326, and when news of this reached the city, it rose in rebellion, just as he had hoped. Muscovite and Mongol armies conquered the city the next year, and Tver was again all but raised. Its people are resourceful and proud, though, as well as famed artisans and have once again begun to rebuild. Tragedy struck again in 1381, when fire raged through the Cathedral of the Purification and the attached kremlin, killing Prince Mikhail and almost all his family. The crown has now descended to the hot-headed teenage prince **Ivan**, albeit guided by his mysterious uncle Oleg.



Andrei Rublev

Of common stock, Andrei Rublev was from the first a pious young man. His dreamy manner and ardent commitment to peace to all seemed out of place in these violent and disorderly times. He took holy orders at an early age, falling under the influence of Sergius of Radonezh. Sergius may be a zealot and an uncompromising Russian patriot, but Rublev is a pacifist, naïve in many ways, but calmly unswerving in his devotion to truth and brotherhood. These values are expressed through his art, for Rublev is an artist and icon-painter of genius, who studied in Byzantium under the fabled Theophanes the Greek, but took the angular Greek style and made something more distinctively Russian from it, characterised by deep, pure colours, gentle and flowing lines and expressions and a focus on spirituality rather than political hierarchy. His works are more than just artistic marvels: all have magical power. None can lie in the presence of his icon of Athanasius, for example, and man and beast may converse freely while before his fresco of the Nativity in the Cathedral of the Dormition at Vladimir. Put an ear close to the charcoal sketch of Byzantium on one wall of his workshop at the Trinity Monastery and you can hear the faint peal of the city's semantra (hollow metal bars struck with a mallet like a bell), and some of Rublev's absences seem to coincide with reported sightings in that city, even though only a few hours seem to have passed before he is spotted there. Quite what powers are held within The Old Testament Trilogy are still unknown, but it has been noted that Sergius himself never gets too close to it. (Actually, Rublev was probably born in 1370, making him only about 10 at this time, but he is too interesting a character not to bring into **Mythic Russia!**)

Russian Monk 10m, Peaceful Soul 20m, Simple Faith in Sergius of Radonezh 1m3, Magical Icon Painter 1m5

PEREYASLAVL

This small town is dwarfed by the mighty fortress Yuri Dolgoruky had built here on the banks of Lake Pleshcheyevo to control the main trade route from Kiev to Rostov. Six times, the Golden Horde sacked and burnt it, six times it was rebuilt, even stronger than before. It is now a tall stone fortress behind broad earthworks topped with a wooden wall and studded with watch-towers. The blocky white stone cube of the **Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour** beside it is scarcely less of a fortress. As this town was the birthplace of Alexander Nevsky, his hero cult is strong here, and warriors and would-be princes pray for guidance and cunning before his icon in the cathedral. There are those who recount the icon coming to life before them and passing on advice on strategy and rulership. Those who prosper as a result are called divinely inspired, those who fail, liars and braggarts.

VLADIMIR

For a while, it was Vladimir which was the notional capital of the Rus' and still today, the title of Prince of Vladimir is regarded as a title whose prestige is out of proportion to the city's current size and wealth. The present prince, **Gavriil**, is a scholar as well as a ruler with – quite literally, it is said – a heart of iron. Despite the Mongol conquest, the city is still a glorious one, built of stone and wood by the greatest craftsmen during its heyday in the twelfth century. So many European and Greek craftsmen came here that their descendants still form an appreciable community, clustered along the **Gostinny Dvor**, the street of merchants. Here some of the finest architects and stonemasons of Russia can be found. Unusually, Vladimir has three rings of defences: an outer rampart of wood-faced earthworks, whose main entry is the towering **Golden Gate**; then an inner wall and finally an expansive kremlin at the heart of the city.

The golden dome of the white stone **Cathedral of the Dormition** towers over the city and is regarded by many as a miraculous site. Certainly, during holy ceremonies, the veil between the Mortal and Ideal Worlds within the cathedral become parchment-thin. The smaller and less monumental **Cathedral of St Demetrius**, built by Vsevolod Big-Nest, is still controversial, and brawls regularly break out between its lesser priests and those of the Dormition. Its fine carvings of animals and fantastical beasts gives the reason for this, as it was build to represent and uphold dvoeverie.

YAROSLAVL

Nestled in the confluence of the Kotorosl and Volga rivers, Yaroslav broke free of Rostov-Suzdal and has prospered since. The **Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour** is a famous place of learning and unusually also takes the place of the city's kremlin: Prince **Averiy** and his druzhina have their quarters within its strong walls.

ZAGORSK

This small town is famous as the site of the mighty **Trinity Monastery**. Founded in 1340 by the holy monk Sergius of Radonezh, it has grown dramatically since then, and Sergius has proven an energetic, charismatic *igumen*, or master, of the monastery. It has become a cradle of a new nationalist mood within the Russian Orthodox Church, which well suits Dmitri Donskoi. The prince of Moscow made a point of getting Sergius's blessing before setting out for Kulikovo. The monastery is also a magically potent site, especially now that the extraordinary artist Andrei Rublev has begun painting frescos within the main chapel to complement his sublime icon, *The Old Testament Trilogy*, which some regard as nothing less than a route directly into the Representational World.





THE NORTH: LORD NOVGOROD

“Who can stand against God and Lord Novgorod?” The Novgorodians are proud of their triumphs, eked out in the frigid northern forests of Russia. Theirs is a different kind of Russian state, no less aggressive or fractious than the others, but at the same time more egalitarian, cosmopolitan and adventurous. If Kiev is driven by honour, and Moscow by ambition, then the profit motive rules in Novgorod. After all, Novgorod is first and foremost a trading city, the gateway to the Baltic Sea, to Scandinavia and beyond. As such, it is the source of much of the silver that circulates in Russia – the silver that is necessary to buy off the Mongols. Moscow has long coveted Novgorod as a result, but so far it has largely retained its independence, fighting when it must, intriguing when it can.

NOVGOROD

‘New City’ itself is broadly circular, bisected by the Volkov River, across which is but one crossing the finely-carved wooden **Volkov Bridge**. However, the river is iced up for much of the year, and even when it flows, boats are forever crossing back and forth between the two ‘Sides.’ The west bank is known as the **Sofia Side**, after the magnificent stone **St Sofia Cathedral**, whose great bronze doors were plundered from Sweden. The cathedral is just one of the structures within the wooden walls of the **Detinets**, the city’s kremlin, along with the palace of the archbishop and the **Church of SS Boris and Gleb**. The Sofia Side is regarded as more

The Veche

Central to understanding Novgorod is the veche (VYEAH-cheh), a town assembly. All Russian cities used to have them; some, like Pskov, still do, but they have become nothing more than public gatherings at which the prince issues his decrees and hears petitions. In Novgorod, though, this remains a vibrant expression of a form of urban democracy. This is still what Lord Novgorod – not a person, but the city state itself – is all about. Any citizen of the city can speak and vote at the veche, although in practice the loudest voices belong to the ‘three hundred golden belts’, the city’s boyars, not least as they are not shy about spreading their silver to buy votes. The veche elects the posadnik, the city’s mayor, and it is this functionary who is the real ruler of the city. Novgorod usually has a prince, but the prince is not a ruler but an employee of the city – a figurehead, final judge of the city’s courts and, above all, a military leader in times of war. The prince is chosen by the posadnik and the other key movers and shakers of the city, subject to the approval of the veche.

The Purge of the Strigolniks

The strigolniks are a dissident Christian group which first arose in Pskov but was strongest in Novgorod. They criticise the Russian Church for becoming lazy and corrupt, above all for simony, the sale of holy office to the highest bidder. Although Posadnik Elizaveta is neither especially pious nor a great friend of the Church, she nonetheless assented to Archbishop Gennadi’s demands for a purge, seeing it as a useful way to placate him. In the ‘night of the closing book’ in 1376, several dozen strigolniks were arrested for heresy by mobs of Christians led by priests. Most were drowned in the Volkov, including their charismatic leader, a deacon known as Karp. Overt dissent within the Church disappeared, but in the past year four Novgorodian clergymen have been found butchered, beneath graffiti claiming their deaths for ‘Martyred Karp.’ Is it coincidence that the world ‘strigolniks’ comes from ‘cutters’ (in that the first adherents were cloth-cutters)?

prestigious, but it is little different in its maze of wooden-walled enclosures, connected by roadways of split logs laid onto the mud, from the **Market Side** on the east bank. This is dominated by the **Great Market**, beating heart of the Novgorodian economy. On one side of the Great Market is **Yaroslav’s Court**, a wooden-planked courtyard used to gather the veche. On its fronts the **Palace of Yaroslav the Wise**, once home of the city’s princes, now the offices of the posadnik. Any citizen of Novgorod has the right to ring the great bell which hangs in the palace, to summon the veche. The walled compound known as **Petergof** is where merchants from the Hanseatic League live and store their goods; it has its own magistrates, is guarded by its own German mercenaries and is an embassy as well as a trading station.

The city is divided into five districts called ‘Ends.’ On the Sofia Side they are, from north to south, the **Nerev End**, where the houses of rich fur-traders overlook the city’s slave market, the **Zagorod**, where rich boyars’ houses line Prussian Street, and the **Potters’ End**, a commoners’ quarter where the simple huts of domestic servants stretch between orchards and market gardens. On the Market Side is the northern **Carpenters’ End**, full of artisan’s workshops of every kind, and the **Slavno End**, poorest of all, a place of miserable, rotting huts half-sunk in the mire.

Even the churches of Novgorod are engaged in the frantic commercial activity of the city. For example, the **Church of St Ivan**, right by the Great Market, is sponsored by the honey and wax merchants’ guild and is as much as anything else a guild hall, and is where the



official weights are kept. However, paganism is still strong here, with the pine grove at **Peryn**, south of the city, one of the most important of Perun's holy places in all Russia. Indeed, the local Orthodox Church is torn: Archbishop Gennadi Iron-Hand is a hardline zealot who regards unorthodox Christians and those who practice dvoeverie as even worse than pagans. However, the bulk of the city's clergy accept dvoeverie and only the abbot of the gloomy **Yuriev Monastery**, perhaps the oldest in Russia, is aligned with Gennadi.

However, Gennadi is severely constrained, not just by his weakness within his own hierarchy but also by the machinations of the posadnik, the hard-bitten **Elizaveta of Both Banks**. The widow of a rich merchant, she proved even more able than her husband when she inherited the business. For the past six years, she has been an equally effective, no nonsense mayor. Facing the threat of Lithuanian invasion, Novgorod felt it needed a general of charisma and cunning, and found it in Prince **Porfiri the Bright**, a disgraced younger son of Prince Yuri of Kiev. But the Lithuanians never came, and Porfiri's relations with Elizaveta and the trading magnates of the city have soured. His manners are still impeccable, his wit as sharp as ever, but in his hilltop fortress of **Gorodische** dominating the southern approaches to the city, he broods and thinks...

ARCHANGEL

The **Archangel Michael Monastery** on the estuary of the Northern Dvina is an anchorage point of Novgorodian power in north-western Siberia. Within its double-ring of wooden ramparts are not only churches and monastic cells, but warehouses, a fur market, a small artisan's quarter (as full of low-living dives as workshops), barracks for a company of Novgorodian troops and even a small shipyard, building and repairing boats for both river and sea. Abbot **Ivan Lossov** is thus in effect as much regional governor and trading magnate as a clergyman.

KHLYNOV

For two hundred years, Novgorod has maintained this semi-autonomous walled trading town in the middle of Siberia. The level of real control Novgorod retains over it is limited, as it takes months for a round-trip between the two, and periodically its own posadnik must pay off the Golden Horde, too. However, amongst many of the dominant families of Novgorod it is still seen as a rite of passage to go to Khlynov for a season or a year, and this helps retain the links between the two. Nonetheless, the real power in the town is not the major (currently **Volodya Tarakanov**, a man so dispirited with his virtual exile here that he works his way through a dozen buckets of mead each day), but the formidable trapper, trader, explorer and entrepreneur **One-Eyed Maxim Ktovich**, the so-called 'Duke of Khlynov'.

Khlynov itself is a rough frontier town, medieval Russia's closest equivalent to the archetypal Wild West

town, where there is little real law beyond the fists and weapons of the personal retainers of the mayor and important Novgorodian merchant houses and dignitaries. Every tavern, every brothel has its own thuggish enforcers and life is cheap. At the same time, there are also opportunities to make a fortune unparalleled anywhere, whether trading furs, prospecting for gold or making a killing (sometimes literally) gambling and preying on hard-working victims. Several times it has been attacked by the Votyaks or other Sibiriyaks, but its high wooden palisade and its motley but effective force of Novgorod militia and mercenaries saw them off.

One-Eyed Maxim

Everyone knows his as One-Eyed Maxim, not Maxim Ktovich (the name is a joke, anyway: it means 'Maxim Whose-son?'). A legend on the frontier, Maxim made his first fortune trapping furs amongst the Nenets, then lost it in a month-long debauch about which the vodka-sellers and whores of Novgorod are still talking. Then he engaged a troop of Lapp mercenaries and made his second fortune carving out a trading empire in Siberia around and beyond Khlynov. Now, he is not only the richest and most famous man in the town, he has a formidable network of factors travelling amongst the Sibiriyaks, buying furs and gathering information

Big Man in Khlynov 10¹¹4, Knows Siberia 1¹¹2, Adventurer 1¹¹4, Rich 10¹¹3, Drink You Under the Table 10¹¹2, Tough As They Come 20¹¹1, Only One Eye 20

VOLOGDA

First there was the **Trinity Monastery** here on the site known by the local Nenets tribes as 'the Pure One' for the translucent, icy water spirits which slide along the Vologda river. This is a portage point between tributaries of the Volga and Dvina, though, and as the monastery's fortified compound became a favoured waystation for caravans travelling in and out of Siberia, Vologda grew as a Novgorodian mercantile centre. As a means to begin to exert control over here, Donskoi has sponsored the construction of the **Spaso-Prilutsky Monastery**, whose abbot, Vadim of the Two Sermons, is a protégé of Sergius of Radonezh. Thanks to numerous donations and aggressive usury, the monastery is fast becoming one of the major landowners in the region. Novgorod has struck back in its own way, creating the **Bear Market**, an open trading centre under the protection of Veles, whose taxes flow to Prince **Erofey**, giving him a good reason to see this pagan institution prosper. Vadim broods, sulks, grumbles and plots, but since ten of his monks were hung from the city walls for trying to burn the market, he dare not act.

II. RUSSIAN WAYS

“Custom is stronger than law.”

The faiths of the Rus' are at once homely and safe and also austere and forbidding. This is common both to the pagan traditions and also the relatively new (only 400 years' old!) Russian Orthodox Church. After all, the same pagan faith which teaches people how to befriend the spirits of their homes and bathhouses also explains why sometimes blood must be let in the fields to assuage the spirits of the land. Likewise, the Christian Messiah is a loving and gentle one, but his God can close his eyes to the suffering of his people in this world. To the Russians, however, these are not contradictions. They know that life is hard, that it is full of tests and torments. But it is precisely for that reason that they are also eager to drink, to dance, to sing and to love: if there is pleasure to be found today, then take it, for tomorrow there may be none.

Russian Orthodox Christianity was brought to the Rus' by princely decree and on point of spear, and for many conversion was in name only. Jesus, the saints and archangels simply became

additional Powers to add to their existing pagan pantheon, one which anyway embraced Baltic, Viking, Slav and eastern influences. From this was born *dvoeverie*, 'dual-faith', a characteristic Russian willingness to embrace both paganism and Christianity and ignore the contradictions between the two.

Most Russians now consider themselves Christians; no more than a fifth cling exclusively to the pagan ways, and they are predominantly found in the countryside or to the north. Of the Christians, though, around a half practice *dvoeverie*, with the other half solely following the Orthodox faith. The latter are disproportionately found in the towns and cities (where pagan ways are often seen as somehow backward and rustic) and in the territories around Kiev.

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the main belief systems of the Rus' and the customs, festivals and hierarchies of the pagan and Christian faiths (but not keywords, which follow in the next two chapters) – as well as the dark, alien temptations of the demonic entities known as the Kam.



TWO FAITHS - AND DVOEVERIE

This is a time of increasing religious tension, though. The main force behind this has been a movement within the Russian Orthodox Church for 'spiritual purification.' Its adherents come predominantly from the monasteries, and their inspiration and spokesman is Sergius of Radonezh, abbot of the Trinity Monastery of Zagorsk, profiled below. Sergius believes that the Tatar Yoke has been a curse from God to punish the Russians for their half-hearted conversion, and believes that no military campaign will ever free Russia unless they first master their paganism. This is just one of the fault lines

within the Orthodox Church, discussed in greater length below, but it does mean that there is the beginning of an Orthodox movement against both paganism and *dvoeverie*.

Will there be a backlash? Pagans have rarely had any particular problem with the Orthodox faith as such, especially given the way it tolerated them in contrast with the Catholics of the West and Greek Orthodox of the south. But will the Rus' be prepared to abandon their old ways in the name of spiritual unity?



Russians who choose to practice *dvoeverie* acquire two separate Faith keywords and develop their respective Pieties and other abilities normally. Most Russians see no problem in combining Russian Orthodox Christianity with worship of their pagan deities. The only exception are those pagan deities listed as the ‘Unacceptable’, whom the Christians consider either parodies of God or tools of the Devil. Beyond that, there are no problems with heroes (whatever their nationality) combining worship of Russian Orthodox saints and Russian Pagan deities.

They may at any time abandon *dvoeverie*, at once losing the Piety and magical abilities associated with the faith they have renounced. They may in the future abandon their new, single faith and return to the other, like any other hero changing faith, but they can never again practice *dvoeverie*.

SPECIAL ADVANTAGES

Distinctively, the Russians therefore have access to any one of three Special Advantages relating to their faith; one for those who solely follow paganism (Sacrifice) and one for those concentrating on Russian Orthodoxy (Hierarchy), while the unique ability to combine the two in *dvoeverie* is in effect a Special Advantage in itself.

Special Advantage: Close to the Gods

Russian paganism is unusual in that it does not foster a distance between worshipper and god. As a result, **it is easier for devotees who follow Russian paganism exclusively to learn Secrets.** Instead of needing at least three abilities (from the Power’s affinities, virtues, mythology and Worship) at 20th each, they need only be at 15th.

Special Advantage: Hierarchy

The Russian Orthodox Faith teaches the importance of acceptance of higher authority – so long as that authority respects and obeys true doctrine. **Worshippers may freely augment attempts by their direct political superiors to cast magic using their Worship God ability.** This takes place automatically, and can be combined with other augmentation. However, the superior must follow only Russian Orthodoxy and have a *Worship God* ability equal to or greater than the subordinate’s and not be casting magic for some purpose which could be considered hostile to the beliefs of the Russian Orthodox faith. For the purposes of this ability ‘superior’ means higher in a specific, identified political hierarchy – it is not enough, for example, just to be of higher social standing. Thus, the Christian prince of a city can be augmented by all his Christian subjects, but a bishop can only be augmented by those under his political control, typically lesser priests of his church.

Special Advantage: Dvoeverie

The very fact of being able to combine two faiths counts as their special advantage: those practicing *dvoeverie* do not have access to the specifically Orthodox advantage of Hierarchy or the Pagan power of Sacrifice. They will have both Russian Orthodox and Rus’ Pagan Faith keywords and Piety ratings.

In addition, **those following *dvoeverie* suffer a -5 penalty when using their Piety ratings to resist magics cast by those who worship undividedly either Rus’ paganism or the Christian faith.** This only applies when using either of their Pieties for magic resistance, not if using other magic, abilities, etc. They thus trade a greater range of powers for slightly greater vulnerability – which also helps explain why in the north-west, where the Russians have been most regularly assailed by Christian enemies, *dvoeverie* is practiced less frequently and Russian paganism is strongest.

THE RUSSIAN OTHERWORLD

The Otherworlds of Russia reflect this mingling of faiths. The Ideal World is, of course, like an exaggerated version of the Mortal World, but the Representational World displays distinct differences between Christian and Pagan forms, although there is much blending of the two and rarely a sharp border between them.

Christian

In Christian lands, typically to the south and west, it generally takes the form of a Christian icon, with a ‘background’ of wood. This follows Eastern iconic traditions, so it is different from the Representational World of Catholicism or even Greek Orthodoxy. The palette of colours is richer and brighter, more gold and red and blue. More to the point, this style is heavily influenced by its pagan roots, and often much more naturalistic than its other Christian counterparts.

Boundary Worlds are relatively few, and generally at locations analogous to Christian cities, churches and monasteries of particular virtue or renown. They tend to resemble white or gold stairways, towers or ladders leading up, though the newly-formed (and still rather uncertain) one ‘above’ the Trinity Monastery of Zagorsk looks like a thread of sweet incense curling up to the Transcendental World that is Heaven in the bright blue sky.

Pagan

The Pagan Representational World looks like a fairy-tale illustration, best exemplified by the works of the Russian artist Bilibin scattered through the book. It is a world of bright and vivid colours, of sharp and clear lines, and simple textures. In many ways this is a ‘comic book’ version of Russia, even more saturated with magic and life than the Ideal World. Here it can sometimes feel that every other tree can speak, that it is a rare animal which is not intelligent, and every deep, dark forest





contains a witch's hut, a wood tsar's palace, a lost princess... or all three!

The Boundary Worlds are, unlike those of many other faiths, more than just transfer points. Many are realms in their own rights, such as the Thrice Ninth Land, the Sea Tsar's Castle and the Bear's Forest. However, in

form and feel they are hardly perceptibly different from the Representational World, which is one reason why wandering the Otherworld can be dangerous: travellers may unknowingly start on the roads leading them to the Transcendental World of the Rus', notably the Summer and Winter Lands where the gods and greatest heroes walk.

RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY

Russian Orthodoxy has its origins in Greek Orthodoxy – when Prince Vladimir of Kiev decreed the adoption of Christianity to his people in 988, it was to Tsargrad and its splendours he was looking. Indeed, technically the Russian Church – although it conducts its services in Russian, not Greek, and has its own take on many of the same saints – is merely a Metropolitanate (the jurisdiction of a Metropolitan – a senior archbishop) of the greater Patriarch of Constantinople. In practice, the Russian Church is pretty much autonomous. Any Patriarch in Constantinople who tried, for example, to impose a new Metropolitan on them against the will of the Russian clergy would soon discover this.

The Metropolitan of the Russian Church was originally

based in Kiev. In 1326, though, he was wooed to Moscow. Ivan I, realising the spiritual authority having the Church based in Moscow, had made Metropolitan Pyotr an offer he could not refuse, pledging to build churches and monasteries and a purge of the pagans. The last of the three never materialised, but by that time the Metropolitanate had moved and in Moscow it would stay.

BELIEFS

You are probably going to hell, you poor, miserable sinner. But you might, just might, have a chance of

SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

Sometimes the most dangerous zealots are also the most softly-spoken. At first, Sergius looks like a kindly grandfather, with long white beard and twinkling blue eyes, but beneath his gentle, almost sleepy manner is an iron will and a ruthless dedication to Russia's future (he was, after all, born to the aristocracy) – which he believes depends not only on unifying the cities under a single dynasty but also driving out the pagan influences polluting Russian Orthodoxy. One of the founders of the rapidly-growing Trinity Monastery at Zagorsk, he is a powerful, charismatic man, even in his 60s. He has been a fierce supporter of Donskoi, especially because he believes that by extending Moscow's rule over the Russias, his authority in Moscow means that he will in effect be extending his own control over the Russian Orthodox Church. Except on those brief occasions when he flies into an epic, screaming rage, Sergius is not the type to give orders directly. Instead, he simply voices a hope that such-and-such a thing is done, or a prayer that the Lord's just vengeance will strike down this pagan or that backslider, or tells a parable with obvious implications, and lets his devoted followers act as they see fit.

Russian Monk 1m4, Devotee of St Andrew the First-Called 1m3, Devotee of St Basil the Great 2om3, Pious 2om3, Kindly Manner 2om, Quiet Charisma 1m3, Inner Zealot 2om2, Political Insight 1om2.

METROPOLITAN ALEXEI OF MOSCOW

God chose him, he knows it. In his childhood, when Alexei was out hunting, God spoke to him: 'Alexei, why do you rush around so fruitlessly? I will teach you to catch men.' So Alexei became a monk and has done the Lord's work tirelessly since, bringing healing to where there is pain, peace where there was strife. He even visited Verdevir Khan to make peace with the Mongols some twenty years ago and cured Amurat Khan's wife of blindness, for even pagans are God's children. He was also Donskoi's spiritual mentor in his earlier years, and taught him much about politics and the building of alliances. Now, though, he is tired: he feels he has outlived your span, done the Lord's work. But there is still more to do: again war presses upon the Russians, the Patriarch is again trying to assert his authority over the Rus', and above all that yammering zealot Sergius – Alexei knows he ought to be more charitable towards a man whose piety cannot be questioned, but finds that very, very hard... – is forever trying to tell him what to do, what is right. But until the Lord calls him, he will do what he can and must.

Russian Priest 18m3, Devotee of St Nicholas the Wonderworker 1m3, Devotee of St Vladimir 18m2, Pious 2om3, Decent Man 2om, Tired 1m, Resent Sergius (but feels he shouldn't) 2om, Friends in Unexpected Places 2om.



Church Law

The Church claims the right to try its own for crimes short of murder or treason, or where the culprit was caught in the act. The 'justice' meted out on monks, priests and deacons breaking the law thus depends very much on the character and interests of the local bishop – and their own connections within the Church.

Furthermore, it claims exclusive right to prosecute moral crimes such as adultery, heresy and witchcraft ('spoiling' – discussed later in the chapter). In general terms it is often conservative in ideas, pragmatic in practice. A bishop may well have strong views on adultery deserving death by drowning and the need to cast out all pagans. However, the village priest, living next door to pagans and those practicing dvoeverie, and dependant on the community to enforce his judgements, is likely to be rather more flexible. The adulterer might well be publicly shamed, for example, while as for the bishop's castigation of pagans, well, that obviously means *bad* pagans, like witches, or those people in the village next door. Not good old Volodya Mikhailovich, who was the first to fetch water when the church caught fire last year, or Svetlana Yurevna, who bakes such lovely honey cakes... In areas where paganism is dominant, they must be even more politic.

Besides, these are rights not every prince is willing to grant. Donskoi, for example, does, and thus so do the cities under Muscovite domination. (Donskoi doesn't like seeing a single potential scrap of power or silver coin in fines out of his grip, but he values the Church's support too much – for now). On the other hand, Prince Mikhail of Suzdal, known as a just and measured ruler, refuses to allow clerics any different status. There is thus a constant struggle over jurisdictions. Heroes might even find themselves asked to smuggle a suspect from one principality to the next, either to ensure or prevent him from being tried by the Church.

avoiding this fate thanks to the only true, Orthodox Church. You must not just believe, not even just do the right things – attend church, be pious and chaste, accept your God-given place in life – you must *immerse* yourself in your faith to be able truly to accept the salvation which is the gift of God.

To this end, Russian Orthodoxy is about scale, about grandeur, but also about public participation. It is about allowing people to lose themselves in their faith. Although in the village the local priest may well be just another farmer six days a week, when it comes to religious ceremony, Russian Orthodoxy emphasises that everyone is a part of the faith but at the same time the distance between priest and flock, mortal and God, and the splendour of Heaven.

Ceremonies are long, sumptuous affairs, appealing to all the senses: sight through the glittering icons and interiors of the churches and the rich vestments of the clergy; hearing by the melodious chants and hymns (most of the service is sung or chanted as a dialogue between priests and congregation); smell as the priests pass through the church swinging censers to spread sweet incense throughout the building. Churches will be as splendid as the local priest and congregation can make them. Churches in towns or villages favoured by the local boyar will often be richly decorated inside, their walls covered in gilded carvings and bright paintings. Even poorer, wooden-built churches will usually be finely carved, often by the parishioners themselves. Inside, even the meanest peasant can, for a while, feel transported to a place of glory and wonder.

At the same time, that peasant must know his place. There is a strong sense of hierarchy and submission, of accepting one's place in society. In all but the smallest churches, for example, a screen called the iconostasis divides the altar, where the priests carry out their devotions, from the congregation. This screen mounts icons, religious images, and conceals the altar from the

congregation, except at those parts of the ceremony when central doors are opened, only then to be shut. Meanwhile, the congregation stands – no sitting down in the presence of God – for what can be many hours of listening and singing.

The Church also clings to a strong belief in the separate roles of men and women. Only men may become priests or monks (nuns exist, but they cannot rise far up the religious hierarchy) and women are expected to be chaste, obedient and hard-working. Whereas Russian paganism is relatively egalitarian, the Russian Orthodox faith is at this time increasingly concerned about maintaining women in what it sees as their proper place.

STRUCTURE

The head of the Russian Church is the Metropolitan of Moscow, currently Alexei (although it is an open question where real authority lies between him and Sergius of Radonezh). Technically, the Metropolitan holds office at the pleasure of the Patriarch in Constantinople, and his formal letters to Tsargrad are always couched in the most respectful terms. In reality, Constantinople's grip on the Russian Church is very weak, and if the Patriarch wants Russian silver, prayers or other support, he has to ask nicely and, as often as not, send emissaries to haggle for them.

The Metropolitan has his own civil service of monks, priests and laity. They administer his lands, gather money through fees and fines levied on the clergy and worshippers alike and otherwise do his bidding. However, outside the territories over which he has direct authority – around a quarter of all Church lands – the Metropolitan has little more real power than the Patriarch has over him.

Perhaps most day-to-day power in the rest of Russia is in the hands of the 3 Archbishops (*eparks*) of



Novgorod, Kiev and Vladimir and 12 Bishops (*episkops*). The Archbishop of Novgorod, presently Iron-Handed Gennadi, is the most powerful. They have considerable autonomy and are figures of religious, political and economic authority, with extensive land holdings (and thus thousands of peasants and slaves under their rule) and numerous other enterprises and interests, from money-lending to bankrolling expeditions into Siberia. Although the Church preaches that lending money on interest is a sin – usury – it is now one of the largest sources of money-lending in Russia. Loans are typically for a month or a year, and the interest rate is typically round 15%.

Ordinary priests, in the towns and the villages, are spiritual guardians, teachers and the leaders of religious ceremony. They are required to marry and must balance their religious duties with day-to-day survival. In most villages, a plot of reasonable land will be granted him by the local community for him to farm. His parishioners will also pay small fees (in goods, coin, or labour) in return for his blessing their homes, baptising their children, conducting their marriages and burying their dead. Life is often hard, though.

Bishops and richer priests wear fine cassocks, richly-embroidered and in every kind of bright colour (many seek to have a wardrobe of every colour robe, as each hue has a separate religious significance) and tall, cylindrical hats. Poorer priests are more likely to wear the simple black cassocks also worn by monks, and a black hat, though. No wonder that priests often compete fiercely for appointment to those churches which come with an endowment or other support from a local aristocrat.

These parishes are beyond the reach of most ordinary priests, though. Many simply followed in their fathers' footsteps, with little real learning (they may be able to read their Bibles, but in some case simply memorise it), returning to their home village after being ordained.

The Monasteries

Russia has a very strong monastic tradition, and is scattered with religious settlements of every size. These range from small communities which are little more than a handful of hermits eking out a bare existence in the deep forest, to mighty monastic complexes. Moscow's Daniilov Monastery, for example, is not just a fortress in its own right, it owns huge tracts of land to the south and west of the city, has underwritten a trading expedition into Siberia and has shadowy financial relationships with everyone from German Hanseatic mercantile houses to Venetian bankers.

Monks take vows of chastity, piety and obedience to the Church, although just how seriously these are taken varied tremendously. Perhaps the most extreme variety of monasticism is that practiced by a select few in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev (see **LANDS OF THE RUS'**), but in general it is important to stress that there is no one model. Some monasteries are powerful political-religious centres, whose monks live lives of relatively comfortable and disciplined order, as much religious

Onion Domes

Russian churches are distinctive for their onion-shaped domes, the numbers and colours of which have their own symbolic meanings. A single dome represents Christ, 3 the Holy Trinity, 5 Jesus and the Four Evangelists, 7 is a sacred number in itself, 9 stands for the nine ranks of angels and 13 Christ and the Twelve Apostles. Gold domes symbolise Jesus (and also remind everyone how rich that church and the patron who helped build it are). Blue domes stand for the Holy Spirit and Green the Holy Trinity. Black domes are typically found on monasteries, as they show willing subordination to the World of God.

bureaucrats as men of faith. The *igumen*, or abbot of such a monastery is typically a man of power and influence, while the *arkimandrites* who control several monasteries are the equal of a boyar. Others may be ramshackle testaments to raw piety, in which monks starve so that they may experience the divine in their visions or simply so that they may hand out all they can do the hungry and the needy. Because monks typically wear dark cassocks, they are often called the "black clergy" in contrast to the regular "white clergy".

Nunneries are also a part of the Russian monastic tradition, albeit nowhere near as common as monasteries. As well as providing a haven for the pious, they are sometimes used as politically-convenient places to, in effect, imprison inconvenient women of the court, such as the widows of former princes and even the occasional over-critical mother-in-law.

THE MAGIC OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

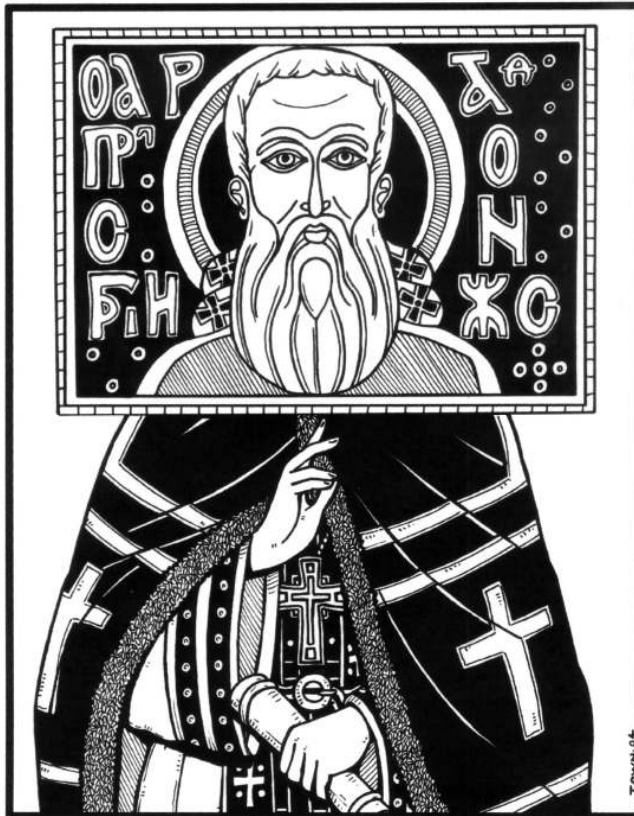
Relatively few worshippers of the Russian Orthodox faith initiate and even fewer become devotees unless they are priests, monks or aristocrats – there is still a belief that this is a privilege and thus it is presumptuous for those whom God has not granted other signs of favour to seek such status. Typically no more than one in twenty adults initiate, although this is around one in ten amongst those who practice *dvoeverie*. It is also more common around Kiev (where everyone thinks they are already special!) and, as will be discussed below, the Cossacks.

Russian Orthodox magic tends to be showy and formal in its manifestations. The caster's face will often begin to take on the stylised appearance of an icon – indeed an actual icon's frame may form around it. The air will billow with incense, and ring with musical chants.

SHRINES AND ICONS

The holy places of the Russian Church are as many as they are varied, ranging from awe-inspiring cathedrals whose painted onion domes glitter in the sunlight





through to simple carved road-side crosses. A key aspect of the faith is the icon, a religious picture typically representing a saint and his or her holy deeds. Russian icons are distinct in their artistic tradition from Greek ones, being richer and warmer in their colours, softer in their lines. A simple peasant family may have a crude wooden icon carved by the father in pride of place in the 'Beautiful Corner' of their hut, while a noble house would have several, painted by professionals (typically monks), embellished with gold leaf.

HOLY DAYS

Every saint has his or her holy day, but there are also numerous festivals observed across the faith, including the following.

Christmas (Nativity: *Rozhdestvo*) is a relatively low-key event, held on 7 January, at which services are followed by processions to nearby rivers and lakes, which are then blessed. Celebrants then take some of the water home to bless their houses. This is followed by a traditional feast within the community. Even so, it is generally overshadowed by the pagan winter solstice celebrations of Kolyada (although eventually the two will in effect merge).

Rather more boisterous is the spring festival of **Maslenitsa**, held in early March. While originally a pagan rite, is celebrated by all Russians, as a joyous farewell to deep winter. It is described below, but in communities with stronger Christian influences, there will be less emphasis on the scarecrow-burning and the like and open-air sermons aplenty. But the pancakes will be as golden and tasty!

This is the last chance for the faithful to fill their bellies before the Great Lent, which follows, stretching 48 days until **Paskha**, Easter Sunday, which falls some time between March and early May. During this time, the faithful are expected to abstain from meat, eggs, dairy products, fish and wine. Easter is the most important festival of the Orthodox Church, celebrated with both joyous sermons and also the inevitable feast. During the day, people greet each other with three kisses and the words "Christ has Risen!" Eggs, either carved from wood or drained and cured, are richly decorated and given as gifts.

On **Trinity Sunday** in June, it is customary to visit the graves of the departed, to tidy their resting places, leave flowers and drink a toast to their memories.

The Nativity of the Theotokos at the end of August celebrates the birth of the Holy Virgin Mary, who plays a key role in Orthodox belief (see **RUSSIAN SAINTS**).

COSSACK WAYS

The Cossacks are Russian Orthodox, but they have their own distinctive take on the faith. As noted in **KEYWORDS**, Cossacks are much more likely to initiate or devote to a saint (around one in five adults are initiates, one in twenty devotees), although at the same time *duoeverie* is very rare and generally frowned upon, and no more common than the occasional retention of Mongol animist ways.

That said, there is still a distinctive dimension to the way their Christian magic manifests, which tends to be less sedate and more dramatic. Instead of measured chanting, the air may be full of more boisterous choral music, for example, while the Cossack is almost as likely to be singing a jovial Christian folksong as a hymn. It is certainly much less static in its manifestation – if regular Orthodox magic often seems to 'freeze' the situation for a moment, that invoked by Cossacks by contrast creates blurs of movement and a sense of dynamic action.

They follow the same cycle of religious festivals, but given the rationale of the Cossack people, there is often a more martial edge to them. Many incorporate horse festivals at which young men tame bucking colts and demonstrate their skill with a sabre before heading off to pray for Earthly peace. Likewise, Trinity Sunday is often also marked with a mounted parade.

PAGAN WAYS

Russian paganism is rooted in the elements and the primal realities of life: birth, death, farming, war, power and love. It is in essence very simple: there is no great body of scripture, no lengthy list of taboos and sacred duties. It is more than anything about living right, respecting the community and the powers upon which everyone depends, and celebrating life, whether through joyous song, simple prayer or a damn good party.

THE PAGANISM OF THE RUS'

The world is. Some say it was formed by Belun and Chernobog, the White and Black gods; others say that Moist Mother Earth was created when Svarog Bright Sky cried. To most Russians, it doesn't matter. What is, is, and that is that.

Instead, the heart of the pagan belief system is how to placate those forces which are dangerous, please those which are friendly and live as good a life as possible in between. The gods and goddesses are human in their motivations and passions – even Moist Mother Earth is, like any good mother, loving but also strict.

Russian paganism is thus intensely pragmatic. Worshippers carry out rituals because they are communal and often enjoyable events and also because it helps them in their lives, whether ensuring that winter will end or simply helping keep the new roof from leaking. Likewise, worshippers follow particular deities because they are patrons of their professional work, because they represent characteristics they themselves would like to demonstrate or simply because they like them!

The role of women within the faith likewise mirrors that in Russian society as a whole. They are formally subordinate the men, but in practice much more independent than that, and certainly than in Orthodoxy. Their roles are generally different – although there are women warriors, just as there are some male midwives – but just as important. After all, everyone lives on and depends on Moist Mother Earth.

RUSSIAN PAGAN PRIESTS AND MAGICIANS

There are three broad kinds of pagan priest. The more traditional sort are called *volkhvs* (the masculine singular is *volkhv*, the feminine *volkhva*). There are travelling priest-minstrels called *skoromokhs* who

especially minister to smaller communities. Then there are also the individual wise-men and –women called *kolduns*.

VOLKHVS

The *volkv* is a pagan priest or priestess, who has both a communal role as well as a personal devotion. He will espouse the virtues and interests of those deities to whom he is most closely tied (although it is by no means rare for one to be a devotee of more than one), but he is above all a representative of the pantheon. As such, he or she defends the local community from evil magic, from curses and spoilings, from poor harvests and harsh winters, from bandits and rapacious princes, from alien faiths and internal dissention. *Volkhvs* are community leaders, often the first to call the menfolk to support their prince in a just war or gather a mob to drown and burn a witch. They witness oaths and seal marriages, make the five gestures which stop a newborn baby's soul from being eaten in the night and remind everyone of their great traditions.

They lack the formal hierarchies of their Christian counterparts and also tend to work as individuals or small groups. There are few 'temples' which would require substantial organisation, and those that there





are – such as the shrine to Perun the Warrior in Rostov, or the shrine of Stribog’s Rock outside Novgorod – tend to be under the patronage and control of a particular prince or potentate, so the volkhvs and other staff are essentially their followers.

Volkhvs are thus typically linked with a specific shrine, although they may still travel, especially if part of a collective group associated with one. For example, the shrine to Perun the Warrior in Rostov is sufficiently large, with usually around 7-9 volkhvs, such that at any time one is attached to the prince’s court, one to his army and one is free to travel.

Some volkhvs will attract others to learn from or worship with them, but status is generally individual. The priest serving a greater god such as Perun or Mat-Syra-Zemlya has more prestige than one serving a more minor deity, such as Zvezda Dennitsa. However, it matters far more whether he or she is charismatic, magically potent (most are devotees), respected by princes and peasants alike and a common visitor to the otherworlds.

SKOROMOKHS

Most villages will not have even one such shrine, and the volkhvs are primarily – although not exclusively – found in towns, cities and a few larger villages or more important holy places. In the countryside, the main providers of spiritual guidance and assistance are the skoromokhs, wandering minstrels, tellers of tales and mongers of news. Along with entertainment, their songs of ancient heroes and stories of the ways of the gods remind their audiences of the great past and their greater future. Skoromokhs are generally men, although there are occasional women in their number.

Quite how great a religious role each individual skoromokh plays varies greatly. Some are entertainers first and foremost, but even so the very nature of their repertoire of stories (and the expectations of their audiences, who expect a degree of moral instruction, especially in tales told to the children) mean that they also play a role as religious teachers. Others are essentially itinerant preachers, typically devotees of at least one deity, who use their showmanship to attract an audience for sermons thinly veiled in song, story or other entertainment. Most are somewhere in between; much of the time, they sing, juggle and spin a yarn to earn a meal, a bed and some coin, but some of their routines are also holy rituals, and when the circumstances or audience indicate, they will also take on their role as travelling holy men.

KOLDUNS: SORCERERS, HOLY MEN AND WARLOCKS

There is also a third, even broader tradition within Russian paganism: the *koldun* (feminine: *koldunya*). A koldun is essentially an individual with magical powers operating outside even the loose frameworks of the

volkhvs and skoromokhs and who have no overt religious role. They may draw their powers from a deity, but they do not preach or officiate at public rituals.



History Lessons

The earliest definite use of the term koldun dates back to the sixteenth century, but since it appears with relatively little explanation in the text in question (an Episcopal instruction to priests to drive out ‘women fortune-tellers and kolduns’) it is reasonable to suppose that it was already an established term. More to the point, the Russians actually used a bewilderingly broad range of terms for these hedge-wizards and witches – several dozen, at least. Rather than burden the reader with a huge range of often complex and specialised names, such as portelshchik (‘spoiler’), oblakoprogonitel (‘cloud-disperser’) and znakharka (‘whispering woman’), many of which were regionally-specific, it seemed better to stick to one!

As such, the kolduns are a very mixed bag, whose reputation is generally shaped by the worst among them. Some may be virtuous hermits and holy men, more interested in doing good or contemplation than engagement in public worship, and many a vedun (solitary Rus’ fortune-tellers – see **GODS OF THE RUS’**) is also considered a koldun. However, more often they are sorcerers and hedge witches driven by personal ambition or dark and corrupt designs.

They are figures held in equal parts fear and respect. Fear because of what they can do to you, but also respect because, like it or not, they have power. Living hard lives in hard times, Russian peasants need must appreciate power, even as they fear it. Furthermore, while that madwoman in the woods or sinister traveller may represent a threat to you, he might also be a useful, if dangerous ally. The Russian approach is very practical: a koldun might be evil, insane, selfish or sadistic, but there may be circumstances in which he can be of use, or a greater threat to your enemies than to you. Thus, those regarded as kolduns are often given a wide berth, but a sensible peasant community will also show them respect, perhaps leave offerings of food or drink at their door on holy days and otherwise hope to placate them. You never know what they might do to you – and what you might need to ask them some day in the future.

That said, a koldun’s life is an uneasy one. A perennial Russian fear is ‘spoiling’, magical cursing (discussed later in the chapter) and often simple bad luck is explained away in these terms. There is always the danger that one day the peasants will decide – rightly or wrongly – that their woes are the fault of a local koldun, and descend with scythes, cudgels and torches to rid themselves of this threat. Beating the koldun to death, burning the body and then scattering the ashes on running water are an approved way of ensuring the villain stays dead, although as discussed in the section on *samosud*, the Rus’ are nothing if not inventive in their ways of killing.



Some kolduns have no magical powers at all; often these individuals are either confidence tricksters preying on the gullible or else are maladjusted or mentally ill. Of those who do, most simply rely on one or two standalone magical powers, such as the ability to *Heal Children with Songs* or *Curdle Milk at a Glance*. The small and dangerous minority who do have serious and extensive magical powers tend to be worshippers of the Kam, discussed below. It is this kind of koldun who are to blame for the kind of excesses that give them all such a dangerous reputation.

THE MAGIC OF RUSSIAN PAGANISM

Where dvoeverie is practiced, rates of initiation and devotion are broadly similar to that of Orthodox Christians. However, amongst those who purely follow the pagan ways, perhaps one in 5-10 initiate and one in 15-20 become devotees.

Russian pagans know that the world is full of spirits and other strange creatures and forces, even if they often cannot see them. Their magic often manifests itself by making these entities visible and directing, expelling or otherwise influencing them. Thus, a healer may scold a headache goblin out of someone's forehead, while a craftsman may not so much reshape wood so much as politely ask the spirit of the wood to reshape itself. Pagan magic often involves conversations, offerings of small sacrifices or their promise ("come out from that wound, little arrowhead, and I'll rub off that rust from you and fix you onto a fine new pine shaft") or even songs and riddles. The more powerful magics often involve invocations to the gods directly, but even then these may be impressive and sonorous, but there is often an informal ring to them. Calling down lightnings on an enemy, a volkv may shout "may Perun's skyfires kindle your bones!" but he is just as likely to say "see where the rascal is, Perun? How about some skyfire to melt his icy heart?"

SHRINES AND ICONS

The pagans do not have churches in the Christian sense. Instead, the main places of worship are shrines in both the town the countryside, as well as sacred groves and other natural locations. A typical shrine will comprise a tall stone or wooden idol, generally four-sided, the house or hut of the resident priest and maybe a sacrificial stone, sacred tree or pool. There are also shrines with no permanent priest, before which local worshippers will gather on holy days or in time of need. Then a passing skoromokh or simply the most respected or magically-powerful villager will preside.

Small statuettes are often made, like miniature versions of the idols, and these are found everywhere from the 'beautiful corner' of the meanest peasant hut to the personal chambers of a prince. However, for personal worship it is more often for a god to be represented

either by a symbol on some appropriate item (such as a shape carved on the side of a plough or Perun's lightning-flash on an axe's blade), a symbolic item (such as the wooden phallus many followers of Yarilo possess) or some token, such as a straw man sanctified to Svarozhich or an ancient coin, representing Veles.

HOLY DAYS

Each of the Rus' deities have their own holy day or days, but there are three main festivals observed by all within the faith:

□ **Kupala:** The summer solstice is special to both Dazhbog the Sun and Mat'-Syr-Zemlya, Moist Mother Earth. The whole day is both an important religious rite and a festival, from the gathering of the bonfire the night before to the lighting of a flame to welcome the sun, to the great feast that evening. This is about fertility and purity: men and women who lie together now are more likely to conceive, a successful rite ensures a good harvest and while leaping through the flames of a Kupala bonfire may be risky, it burns away spiritual pollution, hauntings and curses. An effigy is burnt on the flames that night, to scour away any bad luck for the village. Dew gathered the morning after has medicinal properties.

□ **Kolyada:** The winter solstice marks the lowest point of the long chill, and it is celebrated both to keep the community's spirits up and also to celebrate the slow recovery of Svarog's dominion over the earth. The rich will have stockpiled fine food and drink for the event, but even a poor peasant village will do what it can to pull together a feast, even if it just means decorating the usual fare to look festive. This is largely an indoor event due to the cold, with songs, dances and toasts, but as night falls, bands of young men and women in masks go from door to door, soliciting something to eat, a riddle or a joke. Someone dresses up as *Dyed Moroz*, 'Grandfather Frost', to distribute what food and gifts may be available to the children and be praised lavishly for it. Men may go out looking for the icily beautiful Snow Maiden, daughter of Morozko (as the frost god is properly known) to snatch a kiss, but those of ill fortune or bad repute may instead be turned into icicles.

□ **Maslenitsa:** This early spring festival is about breaking the power of Morozko, celebrating what is good about winter but also that it is coming to a close. This is a time to eat *blini*, pancakes, and to play games. There will be races, wrestling, blini-eating contests and more, but the two signature competitions of Maslenitsa are pole climbing and storming the ice castle. Prizes are placed on the end of a smooth wooden pole some 7-8 man-heights, which is then erected and men clad only in breech-clouts brave the typically sub-zero temperatures to scale the pole and claim a trophy. The ice castle is literally that, a wall taller than a man, with a single tower in the middle, all built of blocks of ice. Men and women divide between attackers and defenders and the battle commences, fought with snowballs, bare hands (used to try to break the 'fort') and much laughter and



playful wrestling. Then it is dusk, time for a straw effigy called ‘maslenitsa’ – which had been welcomed at dawn – to be taken in procession to a field outside the village and burned. Bonfires are then lit around the village and a flaming wheel (or a wheel whose axle is a burning pole) is pushed around its confines.

There is still a strong pagan element to many Christian festivals (Kolyada and Christmas are close and

Maslenitsa is celebrated in common), and pagans gladly join in the more festive parts of Christian feast days, if allowed, but ignore all the sermons! As usual, quite how the Christians respond to this depends on the extent of *duoeverie* and the relationship between the communities and their religious leaders.

THE KAM

The Kam is not a deity, it is an army (the word ‘Kam’ can be both singular or plural). Nor is it truly part of the mythology of the Rus’, which is why it is not in the next chapter, but it is an invading force whose nature and motivations are still unclear. From time to time, it has descended upon parts of the Otherworld, bringing chaos and destruction in its wake. It seems to come from the east, but it is not of the Mongols, nor the Sibiryaks. Some Russians thought the latter, because the name Kam is used by some tribes as their word for a shaman, but this seems simply to reflect their own encounters with these terrible foes, such that it carries implications of might and fear, rather than any close ties.

It is because of the Kam that there are no longer geese who lay golden eggs in Russia, for example (although some say one survives). Even the *bogatyr*s failed when they tried to defeat the Kam at the Crystal Mountain: for every one which fell, two more spring from nowhere to take their place. This is why Ilya Muromets no longer walks the mortal world and where Dobrynya Nikitich lost a thumb. Fortunately, the Kam appear only very

rarely, and disappear as quickly once their objective has been achieved, even if it is not always easy to understand just what that was.

The Kam are thus a strange, hostile and enigmatic force. They are also very varied: some are bestial monsters, others apparently entirely human, and some a mix of the two. Each of these supernatural warriors and raiders seems to have his (or, rarely, her) own powers and characteristics. They are not worshipped as such, but it is possible for those corrupted souls who seek power at any cost to strike deals with them.

HERETICS, SPOILERS AND ENEMIES

These people become the worst of the koldun, and a magician who has succumbed to the temptations of the Kam is also known by a variety of other names, including ‘heretic’ and ‘spoil’ and a *vrazhnoi*, from

Sample Kam

Arkavash the Beast

A bestial monster, each of whose eight arms carries a different jagged-edged sword, whose eyes flash fire and whose tusks can rip out a man’s throat in an instant. *Skill*: Blade in Each Hand Fighting; *Virtue*: Bloodthirsty; *Affinity*: **Killer** (Disembowel with Bare Hand, Keep On Fighting, Maniacal Shriek)

Chort Who Spoils Everything

A shifty, undistinguished little man whose breath causes plants to wither, whose gaze makes women miscarry and whose rusty little knife can punch through the toughest mail and causes wounds which fester and rot. *Skill*: Disease Carrier; *Virtue*: Spoil; *Affinity*: **Spoiler** (Infectious Touch, Pollute Drink, Putrefying Wound, Spoil Food)

Nine-Fingered Nanik

By his bestial tattoos, Nanik appears to be an ancient Derevlian, one of the precursors of the Slavic tribes, even though that would make him over 500 years old. He never speaks, and dresses in a simple leather loin cloth and hood. He bears a wooden spear, its tip hardened in fire, and only smiles when he kills Russian warriors and ravishes their women, revealing teeth filed to points. *Skill*: Spear Combat; *Virtue*: Hurt Russians; *Affinity*: **Derevlian Warrior** (Bite Throat, Dodge Past Blade, Thrust Spear Through Armour)

The Sly Brother

From the front, a young man with open face and cheery smile, but from behind he is a hollow half-shell of a person. He spread discord by his very presence. *Skill*: Start Argument; *Virtue*: Malicious; *Affinity*: **Discord** (Convincing Lie, Know Innermost Desire, Trust Me, Turn Children Against Parents)



vrag, ‘enemy.’ These individuals are very rare, but also very dangerous. They contact and strike a Faustian pact with one of the Kam. Rarely, the Kam is encountered by chance in an Otherworld (they have never been seen in the mortal realm), but more usually the prospective koldun is taught or otherwise learns how to contact one from another, or from some blasphemous book or intrusive nightmare.

‘Spoiling’

The Russians are great believers that if something goes wrong it is for a reason – and that is often that someone has cursed them. While perhaps verging on cultural paranoia, it does mean that there is a great and constant concern about this ‘spoiling’ – and those who can make it happen (or who are even believed to) are generally feared and disliked yet at the same time placated or actively sought out to curse others.

As well as possessing the kind of bankrupt morality necessary to even consider dealing with the Kam, the prospective koldun must sacrifice a human being to make the initial contact. There is no initiate status: the character must try to become a devotee straightaway. The contest is slightly different from the usual:

Contest: Become a Devotee of a Kam

Appropriate Ability: [Power Virtue] or an ability such as Power Hungry, Corrupted or Downright Evil.

Typical Modifiers and Augments: The highest ability of the sacrificial victim may be taken as an augment.

Resistance: 20M.

Any Victory: Pay 6 hero points to become a devotee. Gain *Devotee of [Name] of the Kam* at 17, as well as the appropriate affinity and three of its feats.

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: You are not yet ready. You may reapply later, but in any case

you also gain one or more Flaws: one at 17 for a Tie or Marginal Defeat, two for a Minor, three for a Major. The narrator decides, but these will typically involve some visible sign of the character’s internal corruption, such as *Withered Arm*, *Aversion to Sunlight* or *Makes Babies Cry*.

Complete Defeat: The Kam destroys the character for his temerity.

KAMS AND THEIR POWERS

The standard keyword for template Kam is below, but in many ways the Kam are all individuals, albeit twisted, hateful and essentially evil individuals. A few examples are given, but players and narrators are encouraged to create their own, for occasional, dark and dangerous foes... or even more dangerous allies and masters.

Entry Requirements: As above.

Abilities: Devotee of [Name] of the Kam *or* Initiate of [Name] of the Kam, Secrets of the Kam, [Kam’s Specific Skill].

Virtues: Hate, [Kam’s Specific Virtue – if that’s what it can be called].

Affinity: [Kam’s Own Affinity]

Rites & Representations: Varies, but the Kam are typically represented in the most horrifying manner possible, or else through distinctive and unpleasant items, such as a savagely hooked and blood-encrusted sword or a mask made from the skin of innocents.

Antagonisms: Pretty much everyone else. The Kam don’t even like each other much, for that matter.

Disadvantages: The Kam are hostile, malign outsiders, and those who make their unholy pacts with them are clearly dangerous. Those who are identified or even suspected of having such ties will be feared. They are just the kind of miscreant heroes should seek to bring to justice (generally involving sharp metal or a nice big bonfire).

12. THE GODS OF THE RUS'

“Pray to the gods, but be sure to bring in the harvest.”

Many are the gods of the Rus' and these are the main ones, those worshipped across (and in some cases beyond) their lands. There are many other petty godlings worshipped in a particular region or else different, typically lesser aspects of these deities. There are also local pagan forms of certain Christian saints, further remnants of the Norse deities brought by

the Varangians and even influences from the Mongols and other eastern and southern cultures. After all, the Rus' perspective on deities does appear to be the more, the merrier, witnessed by their willingness to accommodate Russian Orthodoxy alongside paganism in *duoeverie*.

SVAROG

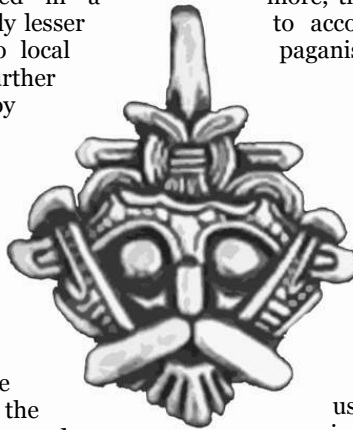
The Bright Sky

Svarog, also known as the 'Most Hot,' is the god of the sky, and to his worshippers he is the father of all the gods. Once, he played an active part in the affairs of men and his temples were many, places where princes would lay the standards of defeated armies in homage and priests would sacrifice animals (and sometimes, it is said, even people) to his name. He was also the first blacksmith, who fought the many-headed dragon Zmei Gorynich and not only used its fiery breath to heat his forge, but then forged a mighty plough which Zmei had to pull. The resulting ditch separated the worlds of the living and the dead, and Zmei was then set to guard the bridge spanning it.

Since these primal times, though, Svarog has withdrawn from the affairs of men. Instead, his powers are manifested largely through his two sons, Dazhbog and Svarozhich, the Sun and Fire, respectively, while Perun is recognised as the warlord of the gods. Nonetheless, Svarog is still considered a primal force and source of blessings, on those rare occasions when mortal matters attract his attention

Amongst the pagan Balts and in the north-west of Russia, Svarog is also known as Svantovit; however as his worship there emphasises his role as a ruler and is also rather more immanent to the lives of his people, it is written up as a separate deity. Any who move from the cult of Svarog to Svantovit, or vice versa, may do so by spending 3 HP, converting their *Initiate of...* or *Devotee of...*, *Mythology of...* and affinity ratings directly across, albeit suffering a -3 penalty to all in the process.

Entry Requirements: None.



Abilities: Blacksmith, Devotee of Svarog or Initiate of Svarog, Fertile, Mythology of Svarog, Never Dazzled.

Virtues: Benevolent, Distant, Paternal.

Affinity: **Bright Sky** (Boundless Strength, Primal Energy, Rise into the Heavens, Shape Energy, Shape Metal, Spear of Light)

Secret: **Father of Fire** (The devotee may use any feats of Dazhbog or Svarozhich, using the Secret's rating.)

Rites & Representations: Svarog is represented in many forms, including a golden-horned ox, a horse or a falcon. Only rarely is he shown as a human, and then it is as a vigorous old man, with flowing white hair and beard, often leaning upon a molten gold spear or staff, or else bearing blacksmith's tongs. [Svah-ROG]

Worshippers: Everyone reveres Svarog, but few worship him specifically, and they tend to be those with greater destinies... or who think they have.

Connections: Svarog is linked with Dazhbog and Svarozhich.

Antagonisms: Many Christians regard him as a mockery of God, and thus he is considered among the Unacceptable.

BELUN

The White God

The primal force of Goodness in the world, counterpart to Chernobog. The two of them are outside the hierarchies of the other gods, and largely ignore and are ignored by the bulk of the pantheon.



In contrast with Chernobog's complex schemes, Belun never seems to worry about anything other than individual, random acts of kindness: he travels the world during the day, curing a sick horse or child, repairing a roof in winter, finding a lost mirror, and on the list goes. However, it always seems to happen that these seemingly-minor acts of goodness somehow bring down Chernobog's schemes or otherwise bring about disproportionate benefits to the innocent and deserving.

Abilities: Comfort, Devotee of Belun *or* Initiate of Belun, Mythology of Belun, See Through Lies, Sense Other's Need.

Virtues: Altruistic, Forgiving, Straightforward.

Affinity: **Benefactor** (Calm Worries, Cure Minor Ailment in Other, Encouraging Word, Help the Needy, Is This What You Were Looking For?, Sense Inner Goodness, Soothe Pain)

Secret: **Serendipity** (Somehow, minor good deeds reap major rewards at key moments. For each mastery in the Secret or part thereof, the devotee needs spend one less hero point per plot edit – see the **HERO POINTS** chapter – although it always costs at least one. The change must be explained as somehow resulting from some good deed the hero performed, and cannot bring harm to another to the best of the devotee's knowledge. For example, Oxana is walking across the marketplace when an assassin draws his knife to lunge at her. She previously helped a child who had been lost in the forest outside the town, but she could not say 'the child's father happens to turn up and kills the assassin.' However, she could say 'the child's family rush up to thank Oxana, and collide with the assassin, sending his knife flying down the nearby well.' That kind of fortunate accident happens all the time to devotees of Belun!)

Rites & Representations: Belun is generally depicted as a white-haired and -bearded old man, in white robes. Many people also carry simple wooden or metal amulets, as the one shown on the previous page, to ward off bad luck. [Byeh-LOON]

Worshippers: As with Svarog, Belun is the subject of near-universal respect but few initiate or devote to him. Those who do tend to be do-gooders, the purest of heroes or those who have benefited from the kind of extraordinary good fortune that must, surely, have been a gift from Belun.

Antagonisms: Belun is engaged in constant and eternal competition with Chernobog, although he doesn't take it personally!

Disadvantages: Belun wouldn't be angry, but he would be very, very *disappointed* if any of his worshippers told any but the whitest of lies, stole or killed when they had any alternative. They would have let him down, but worst of all would have let themselves down: it is appropriate to use the rules for divine disfavour in the **MAGIC** chapter.

CHERNOBOG

The Black God

Where Belun is generous, simple, straightforward and ultimately always successful, Chernobog is a self-seeking genius, complex in his thinking and plans, yet somehow eternally robbed of his triumphs. Only seen at night, he is the embodiment of Evil not so much in the sense of savagery or despair, but the dangers of surrendering to the ego and the intellect. He could even be considered **Mythic Russia's** answer to the villain from a James Bond film. His schemes will be both grandiose and ingenious, meticulously planned and seemingly sure to succeed, until some combination of unexpected strokes of fate bring them all crashing down. Or else Chernobog will become a victim of his own complexity and intellectualism, his plans proving over-sophisticated or derailed by some unpredictable expression of positive human emotion, such as love, or conscience, or redemption. A brooding Chernobog returns to his lair, to spin some new web, determined that next time he will succeed...

Lest this makes him sound ineffectual and comical, though, it is important to stress that even if he seems denied victory in the great wars, he can and still does win many a battle. Chernobog is rightly feared by most and worshipped by a few for his ambition. His intellectual style and eager commitment to the latest ideas and technologies also means that he has a constituency among those who look not at his arrogant self-aggrandisement but see him as a champion of change and progress.

Abilities: Devotee of Chernobog *or* Initiate of Chernobog, Know [Academic Subject], Maniacal Laughter, Meticulous Planning, Mythology of Chernobog, Order Minions About.

Virtues: Ambitious, Arrogant, Cunning Schemer, Persistent, Self-Centred, Suspicious.

Affinity: **Dark** (Owl Flight, Sap Morale, Scheme All Night, See in Dark, Shroud of Darkness, Snuff Light)

Secret: **Escape Route** (Chernobog's plans may be foiled, but he always manages to escape to plot again another day – or more appropriately, night. This secret may be used actively to escape capture or provide a bonus equal to its full value to a final action intended simply to escape a dire plight. The hero slips away, probably through some secret route or otherwise thanks to pre-planning. This cannot simply be used to end one contest and immediately counter-attack.)

Rites & Representations: Chernobog is never represented directly, although he has been encountered in many forms, typically a dapper (and slightly vain) schemer whose dark goatee looks decidedly un-Rus'. He is generally represented as a small, black owl, whose cries portend death and disaster, a black dog or wolf, or simply a knife or book. His holiest day is the



summer equinox, because from this time the days shorten and the nights lengthen. That said, his worshippers rarely gather or hold any organised festivals (both because it would be dangerous and because they don't trust each other, largely), but it is not uncommon for this date to be worked into various schemes, whether as a projected start or end date or other particular juncture. [Chair-NO-bog]

Worshippers: On the whole, those with ambitions they do not feel they can attain within the existing social and moral status quo, ranging from the kind of revolutionary who believes good things can be achieved through dark deeds, through to selfish sociopaths.

Antagonisms: Chernobog is part of the Russian pantheon, even as he subverts its values and traditional hierarchy. Like Belun, he is outside the usual order, though, and likewise although often his followers will be persecuted for what they have done, worship of Chernobog is not in itself criminal. Unusual, suggestive of unwholesome passions and grandiose ambitions, but not criminal.

Disadvantages: People will tend not to trust or understand those who openly worship Chernobog. Many Christians regard him as a guise of Satan, and thus he is Unacceptable

DAZHBOG BRIGHT SUN (KHORS)

The Sun in Heaven

Dazhbog is the eldest son of Svarog, whom his father placed as tsar of the heavens. He is the bright sun, who sets forth in the morning from his palace in his shining gold chariot drawn by golden-maned, fire-hoofed white horses as a young man, returning at sunset as an old, but still vigorous man. Many of the Russian deities are his children or other kin, and all but the evil and the outcast owe him obedience and respect. The Moon, Myesyats, is his adviser; the auroras are his daughters; the stars are his kin and retainers; and the comets are his messengers.

He is immortal, but not always infallible. There are times when the terrible World Wolf which his father Svarog bound and his daughters the Auroras guard nonetheless gets free. The ever-generous and honourable Dazhbog must then sacrifice himself to save the world, and everyone can see his forms eaten away at such times, something which presage disaster, plague and terrible winters. One such eclipse heralded the onset of the Mongol conquerors a century and a half ago. Dazhbog is master over life and death, though, and always returns: but some day, he will not, and it will be the end of the world.

This aspect concentrates on his role as the sun, and thus the friendly and outgoing source of light, life and truth.

His daily journey takes him from his palace in the Summer Land through the worlds of his dominion. As he travels, he bring light and life to the world, and he also scans his realm for evil and falsehood, for those who swear oaths on Dazhbog's name and break them are sure one day to catch his all-seeing eye and face his wrath.

This aspect is also known by its ancient title of *Khors* when placed alongside the Tsar aspect to avoid confusion; Dazhbog the Tsar is, after all, the undisputed lord of all.

Abilities: Archer, Be the Centre of Attention, Charioteer, Devotee of Dazhbog Bright Sun or Initiate of Dazhbog Bright Sun, Friendly Greeting, Keen Eye, Mythology of Dazhbog.

Virtues: Generous, Honourable, Outgoing.

Affinity: **Sun** (Banish Dark Sendings, Bless Crops, Bright Glow, Burn Oathbreaker, Drying Touch, Fiery Shield, See Far, See Through Excuses, Warm House)

Secret: **Radiant Glory** (The devotee radiates Dazhbog's mellow, life-giving aura. At levels of up to 20, it simply means an intangible sense of wellbeing and authority, but by 10 it means that the devotee quite literally begins to glow: a faint luminescence only really visible in the dark up to 10 and then increasingly bright until by 20, he constantly shines with a dazzling radiance! The effect of this secret is constant; it may be shrouded by dark magics or the like, but not dispelled short of the devotee's death or expulsion from the cult. It provides an auto-augment to the devotee's authority, charisma and fertility and also the morale of those around him, as well as a bonus of 1/4 the secret's value to resisting hostile magics.)

Rites & Representations: Dazhbog is represented as a stern and authoritative man of mature age, yet striking and strong, with the thick beard of a true Rus' patriarch. This aspect is shown with a tall crown, one hand bearing the reins of his chariot, the other a torch. If the community of a local patron can afford it, much of the idol will be gilded or covered in bronze, although in practice this tends to be confined to the crown, torch and his beard. His greatest festival is the summer solstice: dawn is greeted with a great chorus of songs and praise and the lighting of a brand, which must be use just before it burns out to light another. This brand will then be used to light the great bonfires which accompany sunset, when a great feast is held to Dazhbog. If the brand goes out during the day, it is a terrible omen. [DAZHBog]

Worshippers: Dazhbog Bright Sun is a popular deity, worshipped widely.

Connections: Almost all the gods of the Rus' owe him fealty.

DAZHBOG THE TSAR

Tsar of Tsars

Dazhbog is the lord of the heavens, and this aspect reflects this role. He is the stern, yet fair and generous tsar, mindful of the need to defend the established order yet also protect his people.

Entry Requirements: There are no formal requirements, however any women or commoners who seek to join this largely male and aristocratic cult will need to prove that they have extraordinary qualities and/or the favour of the god.

Abilities: Commanding Manner, Devotee of Dazhbog the Tsar or Initiate of Dazhbog the Tsar, Govern People, Mythology of Dazhbog, Politics, Weigh Arguments.

Virtues: Authoritative, Conservative, Generous, Honourable.

Affinity: Rulership (Aura of Authority, Command Household Spirits, Enforce Obedience, Force Underling to his Knees, Inspire Loyalty, Rally Troops, Sense Mood of People)

Secret: Dazhbog's Blessing (This is a less obvious counterpart to the sunny radiance of Dazhbog Bright Sun. The devotee is clearly marked for greatness; this provides a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating to any activity relating to rulership, governance and command. On the other hand, this also counts as a penalty to attempts to appear inconspicuous.)

Rites & Representations: As above, but this aspect has a multi-pointed crown and bears a sunburst-topped sceptre of office. A sword is sheathed at his belt.

Worshippers: Dazhbog the Tsar is also widely respected and acknowledged, but active worship at initiate or devotee level is largely confined to the aristocracy and those born to greatness.

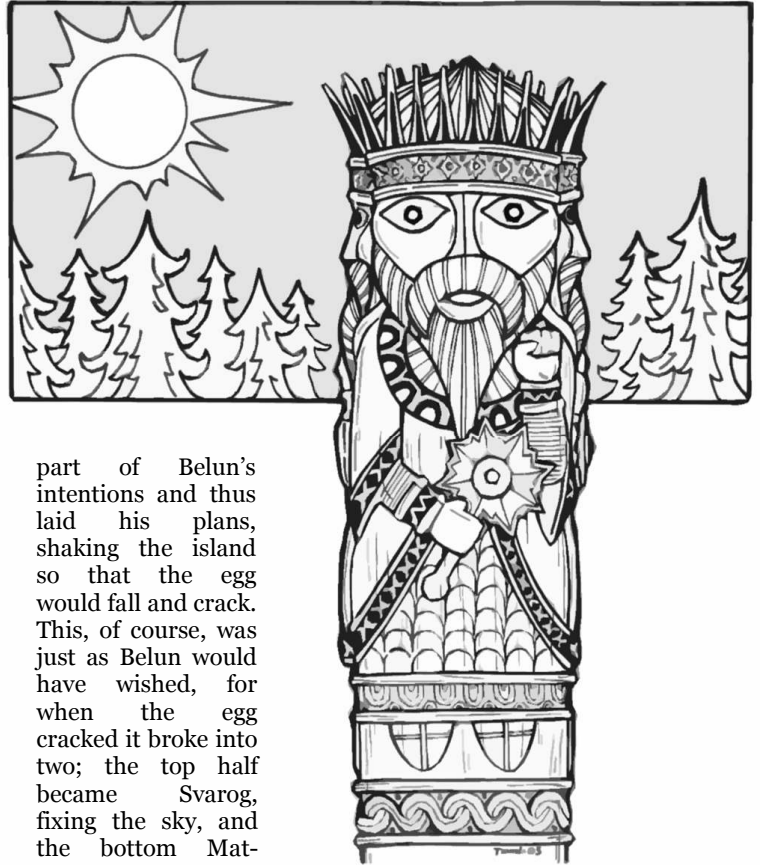
Connections: Almost all the gods of the Rus' owe him fealty.

Disadvantages: Devotees of Dazhbog are treated with respect, but likewise are considered to be the representatives of divine order and protection. They can expect to be called on by their communities and even outsiders for all sorts of reasons, whether to be godfathers for newborn children or champions driving evil spirits from the neighbourhood.

MAT-SYRA-ZEMLYA, THE MOTHER

The First Mother

There once was an island, which emerged from the primal ocean when Belun smiled upon it. On that island, a duck laid an egg. Chernobog knew that the egg was



part of Belun's intentions and thus laid his plans, shaking the island so that the egg would fall and crack. This, of course, was just as Belun would have wished, for when the egg cracked it broke into two; the top half became Svarog, fixing the sky, and the bottom Mat-Syra-Zemlya, Moist Mother Earth, the primal deity of the land

Hail Dazhbog the Tsar! No evildoer may hide from his sight, and the world bows before him.

She is generally considered to be the wife of Svarog, but in reality there was no marriage. Instead, they lay with each other and thus continued Creation. They do not have any real relationship beyond this: part of that act of Creation was precisely the definition of Sky and Earth, the masculine and feminine principles. The one still lies upon the other, and thus life begins afresh, over and over, but they are separate.

Few people, even her worshippers, worry about such issues. To them, it is simply enough that Moist Mother Earth is. Hers are the secrets of womankind, of life, of nurture. But hers also are darker secrets, about which the devotees whisper in their midnight rites beyond the circle of the firelight.

There are three main aspects, although as she is also the most widely worshipped deity (at least at initiate level) and also so fundamental to such a range of vital elements of life, there are others and variations worshipped locally.

This aspect is actually less about motherhood and fertility, despite its name, and more about womankind in general.

Entry Requirements: None (though male devotees are few and far-between, and typically regarded as second-class woman by the women and second-class men by the men).

Abilities: Befriend Woman, Devotee of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Mother or Initiate of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Mother, Encourage Others, Mythology of Mat-Syra-Zemlya, Stand Up To Man.

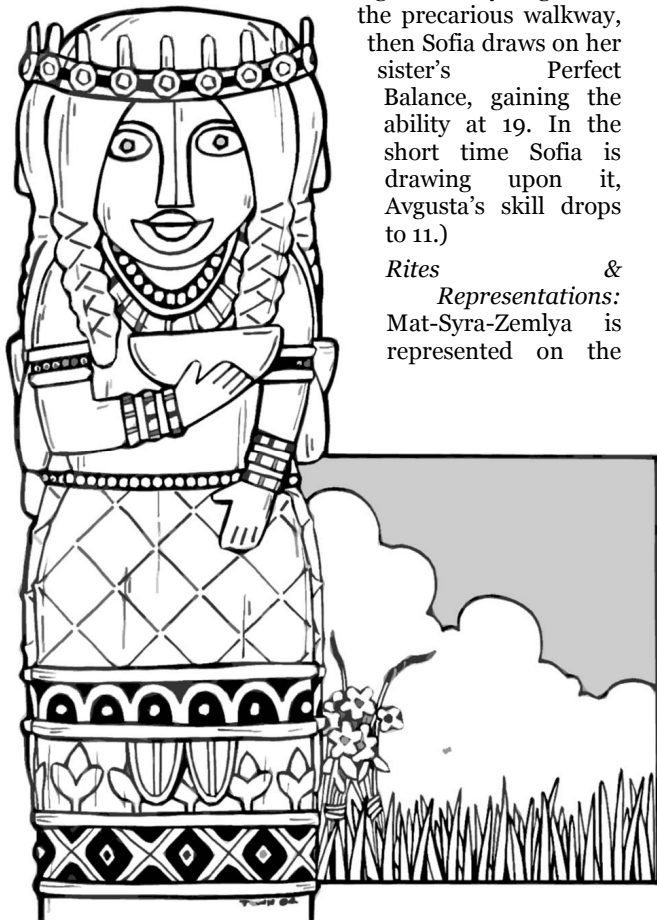
Virtues: Caring, Sensible, Support Women.

Affinity: **Woman** (Berate Man, Bless Woman, Listen to the Woman!, Multitask, Rally Women)

Secret: **I'm Every Woman** (The devotee may 'share' in the mundane skills or magical power of any woman in her vicinity. In effect, the devotee acquires the ability at either the original or the secret's rating, whichever is lower. If the 'donor' is unwilling, then the devotee must first overcome the ability's rating with the secret. The 'donor' loses as much ability at the devotee acquires. This lasts so long as the devotee wishes it, or until she is either unconscious, dead or no longer in the donor's vicinity. For example, Sofia has the secret at 19 and her sister Avgusta has Perfect Balance 1011, but they both want to get onto the roof to get the best view of the returning army, which contains their respective husbands.

Avgusta easily negotiates the precarious walkway, then Sofia draws on her sister's Perfect Balance, gaining the ability at 19. In the short time Sofia is drawing upon it, Avgusta's skill drops to 11.)

Rites &
Representations:
Mat-Syra-Zemlya is represented on the



usual four-sided idols as a maternal-looking woman, with traditional headdress; this aspect typically bears a spindle or a large ladle (in some more militant representations, she even seems to be brandishing it as a weapon!). The Mother expects her children to obey such restrictions as not ploughing or hitting the land before the spring equinox but Kupala, the summer solstice, is her holiest day. The evening before, hearth fires in homes and temples are put out and then ritually relit to symbolise rebirth. On the day, there are often mass bathings (though this is less common since the arrival of Christianity and their use of mass and often forced baptisms) and a tree is uprooted and then replanted, beneath which is placed a straw figure dressed like a woman. This figure is then burnt in one of the great bonfires lit that night. [MAHT SEE-ra Zem-LYA]

Worshippers: Men and women alike love and revere Mat-Syra-Zemlya, although the Mother, while not formally closed to men, is an aspect less likely to appeal to them. This is the least popular of the aspects, but conversely has the highest proportion of devotees, including those who would defend women from the abuses of men.

Connections: All the mainstream pagan Russian deities respect Mat-Syra-Zemlya. The Russian Orthodox Christians equate her with the Virgin Mary.

MAT-SYRA-ZEMLYA, THE MOIST (MOKOSHA)

Moister Earth

This aspect of Mat-Syra-Zemlya, also known as *Mokosha*, 'Moister', is the font of earthly fertility, watered by the rain she can draw from the sky, and the incarnation of motherhood and motherly love. She is a caring and gentle mother, but one who knows when to be tough and also fearless in defence of her family.

Abilities: Assess Suitable Match, Befriend Domovoy, Care for Children, Control Children, Devotee of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Moist or Initiate of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Moist, Mythology of Mat-Syra-Zemlya.

Virtues: Gentle, Love Children, Love Family, Maternal.

Affinity: **Moist Fertility** (Bless Child, Bless Family, Blossom, Call Rain, Conceive Child, Ease Birth, Heal Child)

Secret: **Not My Family!** (The devotee may take on to herself any attack or harm directed at any blood-kin within two removes – in other words, her children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, siblings and nephews and nieces, but normally not a husband or stepchild. The devotee may either take on the attack as it happens, in which case it is resolved as if against



her, or else let it be resolved normally and decide to take on the *effect* immediately afterwards. This can only happen at the time and place of the attack, with the devotee present, and can mean that she sacrifices her own life to protect her kin. Thus, if her child drank of polluted water and was affected by a disease, and the devotee knew this and was present, she could take the disease on there and then, but not if it only came to light the next day when the child started getting feverish. A spouse *can* be protected by this secret, but only at the cost of 1 hero point per event.)

Rites & Representations: As above; this aspect typically bears a cup or a bowl.

Worshippers: This is by far the most popular of the aspects; in many communities it is almost regarded as routine for women to initiate to her on reaching maturity or becoming (or wanting to become) pregnant. Devotees are often midwives and matchmakers.

Connections: As above.

MAT-SYRA-ZEMLYA, THE EARTH

Earthmother

The earth is the ultimate source of life, but it is also the resting place for the bodies of the dead, so Mat-Syra-Zemlya is the beginning and the end, the single unwavering constant. This aspect celebrates her role as a goddess of the field and the farm and the deep, rich power of the black earth of the Rus' lands.

Abilities: Devotee of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Earth or Initiate of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Earth, Farming, Mythology of Mat-Syra-Zemlya.

Virtues: Level-Headed, Maternal, Reliable.

Affinity: **Earthmother** (Bless Field, Bless Sapling, Command Polevik, Healing Mud, Open Trench, Sense Fertility of Soil, Seal Oath, Smooth Ruts)

Secret: **Rich Black Earth** (The soil is at the heart of the Mother's power and worship. This secret may be used permanently to lay to rest the unquiet dead, to heal physical injuries short of death or to induce a safe birth of an overdue baby, but only on targets buried completely in loose soil or mud.)

Rites & Representations: This aspect is represented as older than the other two, with an old woman's headdress and carrying a woven basket. Worshippers often place a handful of the goddess's earth on their head before taking a vow, in this way sealing it in her name (of course, those with the relevant magical feat may take this a stage further and make sure!).

Worshippers: This aspect has the highest proportion of male initiates and devotees, who near enough equal their female counterparts.

Connections: As above.

MOROZKO

Grandfather Frost

Morozko is the spirit of the freezing frost, and as such a figure to be feared and respected. He is one of the relatively few deities who does not pay Dazhbog fealty, but not only does he fear the Sun and his father Svarog, he does pay homage to Stribog who, in turn, is one of Dazhbog's subordinate princes.

He is generally malign; his icy grip can suck the heat from a mortal's bones and leave nothing but an icicle. But he is also capricious and respects strength of character. When her evil stepmother forced Marfusha's father to leave her in the forest to freeze, Morozko was so taken by her bravery that he gifted her with jewels and furs, but when the stepmother instead sent her spoilt brat to the same place the next day, he had no qualms in striking her dead.

Abilities: Arctic Survival Skills, Devotee of Morozko or Initiate of Morozko, Dodge Falling Icicle, Endure Cold, Mythology of Morozko, Skate.

Virtues: Capricious, Chilly, Vain.

Affinity: **Frost** (Chill Air, Draw with Hoarfrost, Freeze Inanimate Objects Solid, Freezing Breath, Icy Grip, Slide Across Ice, Slippery Surface)

Secret: **Freeze** (This magical attack, if successful, freezes its animate target solid. He is still alive, albeit insensible, and if carefully thawed will survive, although running the risk of frostbite or other damage. However, a rapid thawing will be fatal, and human icicles are vulnerable to deliberate or accidental breakage.)

Rites & Representations: Most of his rites are about placating rather than celebrating him. Each midwinter, someone dresses up as *Ded Moroz*, 'Grandfather Frost', to distribute food and gifts to the children and be praised lavishly for it. This often tickles Morozko's vanity, and so he lets them live another winter. Strangers might be surprised to hear the frequent and enthusiastic praise heaped on this dangerous and often vicious god! Otherwise, he is portrayed as a thin old man, with straggly white hair and beard, dripping with icicles. [Ma-ROZ-ko]

Worshippers: Morozko is a deity to placate more than worship; those who do take their commitment to him as far as initiation or devotion tend either to be those whose profession requires them to master the powers of frost and ice, such as northern hunters, or those who revel in using his powers for selfish purposes.

Connections: Morozko is a subject of Stribog's, albeit often a grudging one.

Antagonisms: Morozko is driven away by Dazhbog's glorious solar radiance. He is Unacceptable to Christians.



Myesyats

Uncle Moon

Myesyats is the Moon, whose bald, round face peers down at the world as he considers the deeds of men, all the better to advise his nephew Dazhbog. As his chief counsellor, Myesyats advises him on everything from the ebb and flow of the ways of men to the wealth in his celestial treasury. As such, he is an invaluable adjunct to Dazhbog's court, even if sometimes overlooked in the presence of other, mightier and showier deities.

However, Dazhbog knows his worth and prizes his uncle highly. Myesyats is also married to the flighty and beautiful Zvezda Dennitsa. She can be considered an aspect of Myesyats, and vice versa. To some, he is the elder man ensnared by the wiles of a younger woman, but given the care and consideration he put into wooing her and the apparent happiness of their union (during times when the moon is but a thin crescent, some wits look up and say that she is clearly wearing him out with her amorous energy), it is more generally regarded as proof that a man's wits and decency can count for as much as looks and youth!

He is thus a god known for his wise council (about everything other than relationship issues). He can be a little pompous and pedantic at times, but his close observation of the ways of mortals has also given him a profound sympathy for them. Ordinary people can thus appeal to 'Uncle Moon' and his worshippers for advice on everything from affairs of the heart to how to heal illnesses.

Abilities: Debate, Devotee of Myesyats or Initiate of Myesyats, Know Trivia, Long-Winded, Mythology of Myesyats, Numerate, Politics, Read & Write.

Virtues: Analytical, Curious, Even-Tempered, Patient, Pompous.

Affinity: **Wisdom** (Count Wealth, Gauge Right Gift, Know the Right Words, Know Remedies to Ailments, Listen To Me, Overhear Whispers, Sense Treachery)

Secret: Deep Thought (This secret provides a bonus of ¼ the rating to any activities which involve thought and calm concentration. It can also be used as an active ability to ignore distractions or recollect old memories.)

Rites & Representations: Myesyats is often represented simply by a stylised moon, but otherwise he appears as a bald and rather stout middle-aged man holding a book or scroll. His holiest rites take place on Midsummer's Night; if the sky is unclouded and Myesyat's face clearly visible, then this is a good omen. [MYAY-syats]

Worshippers: Many call on Myesyats when they want advice or wisdom, but he tends to be worshipped actively only by a relative few: scholars, functionaries and those who would think before they act.

Connections: Myesyats is Dazhbog's adviser and thus a central figure in his court and also, thanks to his marriage to Zvezda Dennitsa, his family.

PERUN LAWGIVER

The Law

Perun is the mighty and boisterous god of rains and thunders, a warlord and warrior without peer, who bears a shining axe and arrows of lightning. As such, Dazhbog has made him prince of the lower skies, and he is also charged with dispensing justice and punishing or banishing the guilty. His thunder drives away evil forces, and carries omens the wise men can hear. His queen is Zorya Utrennaya, one of Dazhbog's daughters. She is a forceful but obedient wife in times of peace, but a canny ally in war.

Entry Requirements: This is the only aspect of Perun women may join; however, they must be unmarried (while initiates or devotees, at least) and childless.

Abilities: Carrying Voice, Devotee of Perun Lawgiver or Initiate of Perun Lawgiver, Know Laws of the Rus', Lead by Example, Mythology of Perun, Sense Mood of People, Throw Axe.

The Vedun

The *vedun* is a particularly Russian kind of fortune-teller, typically a man, a loner who lives on the road or in some sacred grove. Many, to be honest, are charlatans or lunatics, but those who are genuine are generally devotees of Perun Lawgiver, who have mastered his secret. Although not widely known outside cult circles, this is a favoured way to atone for sinning against Perun's ways. The wandering prophet Afanasy the Heretic was, for example, the respected Novgorod judge Afanasy Zubovich before he committed perjury to save his daughter from hanging. Now the dapper jurist is almost unrecognisable as the tattered and unkempt seer, whose refusal to tell anything but the truth, no matter what the cost, is in part a way of appeasing Perun.

There is also rumoured to be a magic text in existence, the *Gromnik*, which would allow anyone to interpret Perun's omens, even a foreigner. It would be easy to dismiss this as nonsense, were Ratoslav Two-Horses, the famously pious (and infamously fat) devotee of Perun Lawgiver not so anxious to find and, by all accounts, destroy it.



Virtues: Fierce, Just, Masterful, Uncompromising.

Affinity: **Lawgiver** (Banish Criminal, Follow Fugitive, Scare Away Evil Magic, Shame the Guilty, Silence Lies, Silence Other Voices)

Secret: **Listen to the Thunder** (During a storm, and in any case no more than once per week, the devotee may try to hear the omens in the thunder. The narrator is always free to use this as a plot device, to help move on the story. However, if you want to handle this with a contest, then the devotee must either ask a question or pick a topic and then roll against the usual resistance of 14. The detail, accuracy and clarity of the answer will be determined by the level of success. These three variables are separate, so for example the narrator could decide that a Minor Success actually will bring forth a detailed and accurate answer, but one hidden deep inside riddles and metaphors, or else a simple but not very helpful answer. Levels of failure mean increasingly inaccurate interpretations of Perun's words. It is up to the players and narrator to decide whether they are comfortable roleplaying even in the out-of-game knowledge that they may be acting upon misleading information, or whether the narrator should make both rolls in secret.)

Rites & Representations: Perun is represented as a burly man with a sweeping moustache. His image is often carved into round- or square-based pillar idols into which is worked his symbol, the six-rayed star. The Lawgiver aspect is sometimes demonstrated by gilding the moustache, although this is more usually reserved for the Prince, or else by gilding his eyes. He bears a sceptre or other symbol of authority in one hand, the other is held palm out. His greatest feast day is 20 July, when dawn is greeted by celebrants dancing the axe dances around a great bonfire, before retiring to a ritual breakfast feast at which a whole bull is sacrificed and eaten. The oak tree is sacred to him, and he is sometimes worshipped in oak groves; his idols are usually carved of oak. Cockerels or goats are the usual sacrifices made to him, bulls or bears on especially important occasions. He is also celebrated on 2 August, at a sunset rite. When times are especially hard or there are great fears for the coming winter, the community may then seek Perun's protection by human sacrifice. One of the community members is chosen by lot to give up his or her life on this sacred day. [PYEH-roon]

Worshippers: Although many a muttered prayer to Perun Lawgiver is offered up before a court case by all involved, direct worship is relatively limited, largely confined to those involved in making and enforcing laws or those with a particularly strong personal commitment to justice.

Connections: One of the aspects of Perun; a loyal liege-man of Dazhbog; husband to Zorya Utrennaya.

PERUN THE PRINCE

The Crown

This aspect of his worship concentrates on Perun's role as a rough-and-ready but nonetheless effective leader of his people. This aspect of Perun is sometimes called Rod, although this usage has largely died out, except in the north-western Rus' lands.

Entry Requirements: Only men may follow this aspect, and then they must be able to demonstrate a heritage of at least one-eighth noble blood.

Abilities: Axe & Shield Fighting *or* Sword & Shield Fighting, Devotee of Perun the Prince *or* Initiate of Perun the Prince, Inspire Followers, Lead by Example, Mythology of Perun, Noble Bearing, Sense Mood of People.

Virtues: Fierce, Loyal to his Followers, Masterful, Uncompromising.

Affinity: **Chieftain** (Charismatic Mien, Hearten the Fearful, Quelling Glower, Shattering Axebow, Shout Down Opposing Voice, Terrifying Battlecry)

Secret: **Follow Me!** (Provides a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating to all activities in which the devotee is leading his people, whether charging into battle or bringing in the harvest. However, the devotee must be at the fore of the efforts, whether in the front line of battle or swinging a scythe with the meanest of his farmers.)

Rites & Representations: As above, but the Prince aspect is demonstrated by gilding the moustache and sometimes even painting his face or skin silver. He bears an axe or sword in one hand, a sceptre or other symbol of authority in the other.

Worshippers: Worship of Perun the Prince was once widespread, but it has waned since he was supplanted by Christianity in Kiev and also because he is seen as a primitive chieftain of the old-style rather than a modern prince.

Connections: One of the aspects of Perun; a loyal liege-man of Dazhbog; husband to Zorya Utrennaya.

PERUN THE THUNDERER

The Light of the Storm

Perun is above all the manifestation of the great storm, the rain, winds and lightning. As such he is terrifying and sometimes cruel and arbitrary, but he also brings life, burns away evil, blows curses to the ends of the earth, and blasts away devils with his lightning.

Abilities: Archer *or* Throw Axe, Axe Fighting, Devotee of Perun the Thunderer *or* Initiate of Perun the Thunderer, Endure Harsh Weather, Mythology of Perun, Sense Storm's Approach.



Virtues: Fierce, Joyous in Storm, Masterful, Uncompromising.

Affinity: **Storm** (Blast Evil Spirit with Lightning, Blow Away Curse, Blow Away Missiles, Call Storm, Drenching Downpour, Lightning Axe, Rain of Arrows, Thundering Bellow)

Secret: **Ride the Storm** (The devotee may fly through the air on the winds of a storm. The normal resistance of 14 applies, increasing the more persistent or formidable the actions the devotee wants to carry out. Swooping down on a wind, striking a foe and then swooping away, for example, would have a resistance of 5 \blacksquare . To fly more than an hour in a day adds a cumulative +10 per hour, checked again per hour. Combat while flying incurs a penalty of -10, from which is subtracted $\frac{1}{4}$ the secret's rating, so a devotee with Ride the Storm 12 \blacksquare would only suffer a -2. Only very serious failures actually mean the devotee falls from the sky; usually they simply reflect an inability to ride or control the winds, a mishap such as dropping something, or else that the storm has dispersed.)

Rites & Representations: As above, but the Thunderer has a lead-covered or -coloured moustache and bears an axe and jagged lightning arrow.

Worshippers: Some professional fighters, but mostly those who are brawlers at heart, those who think the best answer to most problems is force.

Connections: One of the aspects of Perun; a loyal liege-man of Dazhbog; husband to Zorya Utrennaya.

PERUN THE WARRIOR

The Edge of the Blade

The Warrior is a more disciplined counterpart to the Thunderer: Perun in his role as the defender of his people (even at those times when the best defence is a strong offence).

Abilities: Axe & Shield Fighting, Battle Tactics, Devotee of Perun the Warrior *or* Initiate of Perun the Warrior, Lead Troops, Mythology of Perun.

Virtues: Brave, Masterful, Uncompromising.

Affinity: **Warrior** (Hurl Thunderbolt, Lightning Axe, Storm Shield, Thundering Warcry)

Secret: **Commander** (Acts as a further affinity, with the following feats: Break Enemy Line, Force Foe into Single Combat, Iron Will, Rally Troops.)

Rites & Representations: As above, but the Warrior has an iron or bronze moustache and sometimes skin, wears a helmet and bears an axe and shield.

Worshippers: Soldiers and those who try to balance aggression with discipline.

Connections: One of the aspects of Perun; a loyal liege-man of Dazhbog; husband to Zorya Utrennaya.

RUGYEVIT

The Eight Swords

Rugyevit is a god of war and autumn, whose seven swords represent the seven months of the 'dead seasons' (September to March) and also the seven tests administered to the souls of his dead followers to prove their virtue and strength. He is an uncompromising and ferocious figure, who neither asks nor offers mercy. Civilised people and rulers often regard his followers with fear or suspicion; until, that is, they need warriors.

Once his worship was also strong among the Prussian pagans, where he was closely associated with the island of Rügen. In its woods were built his greatest temple and idol. They were destroyed by the Danish Christian archbishop and statesman Absalon of Lund, and his remaining worship amongst the Prussians stamped out by the crusaders of the Teutonic Knights. Rugyevit has been a ferocious foe of the Danes and the Catholic Church ever since.

Abilities: Devotee of Rugyevit *or* Initiate of Rugyevit, Mythology of Rugyevit, Remember Past Grudges, Size Up Enemy, Sword Fighting, Sword & Shield Fighting.

Virtues: Fierce, Hate Catholics, Hate Danes, Never Give Up.

Affinity: **Seven Swords** (Call Sword, Cut Deep, Hack Spirit, Sever Diseased Limb, Sharpen Sword, Slice Through Shield, Stab Ghost)

Secret: **The Eighth Sword** (Whenever the devotee wields a sword, it takes the form of Rugyevit's long, straight iron blade. Over and above any provided by magic and the usual +3 for a sword, it has a bonus in combat or similar activities – such as hacking through an obstacle – of + $\frac{1}{4}$ of the secret's rating. However, the devotee is in a frenzied rage, and cannot retreat from a combat. In an extended contest, the devotee must wager at least one-quarter his present or original AP totals, whichever is greater, each round until the contest is over and the sword sheathed.)

Rites & Representations: Rugyevit is represented as a huge, burly warrior in the style of an ancient pagan, with seven faces, seven swords hanging from his belt and an eighth in his hand. His colour is purple. When Rugyevit is invoked in or before a battle, he is promised one tenth of all the booty. [Roo-GYAY-vit]

Worshippers: Warriors, and those who hate the Catholics. Not surprisingly, when cities feel under threat from the Teutonic Order, many flock to his cult.

Connections: Rugyevit considers himself a warrior more than a chieftain, and acknowledges Svantovit as his master.



Disadvantages: Worshippers of Rugevit are expected never to retreat from or surrender to Catholics. If devotees ever do, for whatever reason, then they cannot cast any Seven Swords feats (only augment from the affinity) until they have purged themselves of this shame, something which tends to involve extravagantly dangerous raids against the Christians.

STRIBOG

Wind Lord

Stribog is the lord and grandfather of the winds. He is both the winter king and also the patron of sailors and the master of the gentle cooling summer breeze. As such, while he owes fealty to Dazhbog, he is also a changeable and independent prince of the heavens. He thus also brings dispute, argument and dissention.

The winds are nine: Dogoda, the gentle and autumnal East Wind; Pogoda, the tender Southern Wind; Severin, the harsh Northern Wind; Vostochka, the wet wind from the West; then there are four special winds: Vikhr the whirlwind, Uragan the hurricane, Primorsky the sea breeze and Buran the snowstorm; the ninth wind is unknown and lost, possibly forever. Even Stribog either cannot or will not say who he (or she) was.

Abilities: Breathe Well, Devotee of Stribog or Initiate of Stribog, Know Wind's Direction, Mythology of Stribog, Sailor, Start Argument.

Virtues: Argumentative, Changeable, Unsettled, Volatile.

Affinity: **Wind** (Blow Something Away, Blow Something to Hand, Cutting Wind, Gentle Breeze, Whisper of Dissent, Wind in Your Sails)

Secret: **Fly On The Wind** (The devotee may leap onto a wind and be carried upon it – looking uncannily like an aerial surfer on an invisible board. The secret's rating is used in the case of prolonged or complex flight. To fly more than an hour in a day, for example, has a resistance of 14, which is checked again per hour thereafter with a cumulative +5. Combat while flying incurs a penalty of -10, from which is subtracted ¼ the secret's rating, so a devotee with Fly On The Wind 8^{mf} would only suffer a -3.)

Rites & Representations: Uniquely, Stribog's idols are triangular in cross-section, with a face on each of the three sides. One of the bearded, windswept faces is the smiling Summer Friend, one the scowling Winter King, and the third is blowing up a gale, the Unexpected Calamity. [STREE-bog]

Worshippers: Stribog is favoured by sailors and also the rootless and easily-dissatisfied, who are more interested in what tomorrow will bring than enjoying today.

Connections: His nine grandchildren are the winds; Morozko is his vassal.

Disadvantages: Stribog is – reluctantly – a vassal of Dazhbog's, so all magic related to Dazhbog receives a bonus equal to ¼ of the caster's appropriate Piety when cast against an initiate or devotee of Stribog.

SVANTOVIT

The Strong Light

Svantovit is a form of Svarog, as worshipped in the Baltic regions and far north-west of Russia; see the entry on Svarog for further details. His worship has suffered terribly as a result of the crusades of the Teutonic Knights and other Catholics and this he has list his Secret.

Svantovit is regarded as far more active and martial than Svarog, a king rather than an abstract source of authority. However, he is rarely immanent in daily life, but this is explained away not by any conscious detachment, as with Svarog, so much as because he is so powerful and with so many other demands on his time. He bears a horn of wine, which can never be emptied, and which can also prophesy the future.

Abilities: Devotee of Svantovit or Initiate of Svantovit, Fertile, Mythology of Svantovit, Never Dazzled, Noble Bearing, See Far.

Virtues: Distant, Fierce, Hate Catholics, Paternal.

Affinity: **Bright Sky** (Boundless Strength, Command Energies, Rise into the Heavens, Spear of Light, Sword of Glory)

Rites & Representations: Svantovit appears as a vigorous king, with flowing white hair and beard, cornucopia in one hand, sword or spear in the other. Alternatively, he is portrayed as having four heads, each facing a different direction, and this is the form most usually shown on idols. He is also sometimes represented as a golden-horned ox or a white horse. [Svan-TOE-vit]

Worshippers: He is widely revered in the Baltic region and north-east of Russia, and initiates are not uncommon, but devotion still tends to be restricted to those with a destiny or those committed to reversing the spread of Catholicism.

Connections: Svantovit is a form of Svarog.

Antagonisms: Many Christians regard him as a mockery of God, and thus he is considered among the Unacceptable.

SVAROZHICH

Living Fire

Svarozhich is the Living Fire, second of Svarog's sons: as Dazhbog's sun retires for the night, it is the fires of Svarozhich which take his place, warming mortals and keeping them safe until the dawn.



From his father Svarozhich has inherited some mastery of blacksmithing, but he is also a wild and wilful god, a dangerous friend to mortals, for while his powers can be used, he can never be tamed. There are thus elaborate rituals to appease Svarozhich and the fire, from the daily thanks rendered to the hearthfire for not going out in the night to the apologies which must be made for spitting in a fire.

His places of worship are not temples, but shrines in smithies or, more usually, drying barns, where corn and grain is set to dry over a fire pit before threshing or baling.

Abilities: Blacksmith, Devotee of Svarozhich or Initiate of Svarozhich, Endure Heat, Make Fire, Mythology of Svarozhich, Wield Hammer.

Virtues: Careless, Fiery, Passionate.

Affinity: **Fire** (Flaming Hammer, Heat Metal, Light Fire, Make Fire Last, Strengthen Fire, Unharmed by Fire)

Secret: **Living Fire** (The devotee's body bursts into living flame – this includes clothes, equipment, etc, which are not harmed. All the usual effects of fire apply to those around him, and he also gets a bonus to any magics using the Fire affinity of ¼ the secret's rating. This is a magical flame, but nonetheless water-based attacks are half again as effective against the devotee.)

Rites & Representations: Often represented simply as a flame burning in a pot or cauldron, Svarozhich is also portrayed as a burly man with a wild beard of copper hair. He is either portrayed as a blacksmith, in which case atop his head is a pot of fire, or else as a warrior, with a golden helm in the shape of a bird with outstretched wings and a flaming hammer. Sacrifices to Svarozhich are thrown into a firepit, which is then filled in and left; to dig up such a pit and steal whatever offerings are left is the greatest impiety. [Sva-ROE-zhich]

Worshippers: Devotees of Svarozhich tend to be professional blacksmiths or others who must know fire and its uses and dangers, but Svarozhich is a useful and approachable deity, and many men and women initiate to him.

Connections: Svarozhich is brother to Dazhbog, son of Svarog.

VELES, HERDER OF THE DEAD

Counter of Bones

Veles is the god of precious things, of those resources which can be gathered and protected. This explains his role as god of cattle (and, by extension, other livestock) and also trade, but his role as god of the dead also reflects this preoccupation with accumulation and protection. The souls of the dead have been placed in his care by Svarog, until it is time for the new world to be reborn after the destruction of the old.

Of course, there is a big difference between those who have died a 'good death' at the end of a long and fruitful life and those taken prematurely, by murder, war, accident, famine or disease. The former go easily and gladly to their long sleep beneath the earth. The latter, though, may return, as unquiet ghosts, ghouls and other unclean and dangerous spirits. They are the *zalozhens*, the 'covered up' because the earth will not take them until their proper time comes.

Either way, the follower of Veles knows what must be done. For those who die a good death, as fine a coffin as the family can afford, a dignified farewell and an alcoholic wake. For the rest, he knows the rites and magic words which may help ensure that the dead soul waits quietly for its time in the holy soil – and if necessary has the magic and the dedication to see to it.

Abilities: Conduct Funerary Rites, Devotee of Veles Herder of the Dead or Initiate of Veles Herder of the Dead, Dig, Make Coffin, Make Funeral Oration, Mythology of Veles, See Spirits.

Virtues: Conscientious, Conservative, Not Fear Death, Stubborn.

Affinity: **The Dead** (Bring Forth Tears, Command Spirit of the Dead, Conjure Coffin from Wood, Fortify Mourners, Glimpse of Mortality, See Through Illusions)

Secret: **Time to Go** (May be used as an active ability to lay a dead spirit to rest permanently. May also be used as an active ability on a living target; on any result less than a Complete Victory, then the devotee has erred; it is not that mortal's time to die and Veles is displeased with him, withdrawing all of his magic powers until some suitable act of atonement has been completed. On a Complete Victory, the target dies. Just like that.)

Rites & Representations: Veles is represented as a burly man with the head of a bull. In this aspect, he bears either the axe he uses to cut the final spirit-cord linking the spirits of the dead to their bodies, or else bones or skulls. Perhaps precisely to alleviate the rather macabre impression this gives, he is usually shown smiling or even laughing, for he knows that death is not a final end. [VEH-less]

Worshippers: Many pray to Veles to look after the dead, but initiation and devotion is usually the mark of someone with a particular fascination with death or, more often, a professional undertaker. In small communities unable to support such a specialist, this figure will also have a primary job.

Disadvantages: No initiate or devotee ought, without very good reason, to pass up a request to officiate at a funeral. No devotee ought to allow the unquiet day to remain so.





VELES THE CATTLEMAN

Counter of Cattle

This is the most common and approachable of the aspects of Veles, the herder and butcher of cattle and other livestock. He cares for his herds and build them up, but he knows that he does so for a purpose, and he does not shrink from the butcher's block when it is time for the slaughter. Then he will toast them with a drink and a song as he eats them, knowing that their souls will be reborn and there will be more beef or mutton for the table tomorrow.

Abilities: Butcher, Devotee of Veles the Cattleman or Initiate of Veles the Cattleman, Mythology of Veles, Sing Peasant Songs, Tend [Herd Animal], [Herd Animal] Lore.

Virtues: Care for Herd, Conservative, Expand Herd, Hard Working, Pragmatic, Stubborn.

Affinity: **Cattleman** (Bull's Bellow, Find Herd, Gather Herd, Know Numbers of Herd, Master Herd Leader, Sense Predators)

Secret: Nurture the Herd (The herd of a devotee of Veles the Cattleman will be healthy and fertile; in effect, all the relevant animals gain a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating to their resistance to curses and diseases, as well as their fertility and speed of recovery.)

Rites & Representations: As above, but this aspect is often represented in especially animal form, emphasising the bull's head and shaggy form.

Worshippers: Veles the Cattleman is respected and worshipped by many farmers, drovers, butchers, shepherds and others who rely on the herds for their livelihoods.

VELES THE MERCHANT

Counter of Coin

The Merchant aspect is the most recent and sophisticated of the aspects of Veles, and is especially a product of the cities and marketplaces. Just as the herd needs fresh blood to grow and the best calves are sired from the best bulls, even if of another herd, so the follower of the Merchant knows that his wealth depends not so much on a miserly grip on every coin but smart husbandry, knowing when to spend and when to shut the shop.

Abilities: Assess Value of Goods, Devotee of Veles the Merchant or Initiate of Veles the Merchant, Haggle, Keep Talking, Know Currency, Mythology of Veles, Numerate, Strong Lock.

Virtues: Acquisitive, Stubborn, Unsentimental.

Affinity: **Merchant** (Assess Weight, Count Coins, Make It Look Good as New, Persuasive Patter, Sense Fraud, Spot Thief, Talk Way Out of Trouble)

Secret: Close the Deal (Automatically succeed at a single final action during any contest in which the hero has used his Merchant affinity and not yet made a profit. Can instead be used to provide a bonus of ¼ its rating to any contest over a deal, but in this case cannot be used to guarantee the final action.)

Rites & Representations: This aspect is shown bearing either a large peddler's woven-twig basket or else a pair of scales. In the cities, his animal nature is often downplayed, and he is represented as a heavy-set man, perhaps with small horns on his brow.

Worshippers: Merchants, peddlers and those who would make a canny deal. He is also popular amongst the entrepreneurial people of Novgorod.

YARILLO

Ardent Sun

Passion, fertility and seduction are at the heart of Yarilo's orgiastic rites. He is a son of Dazhbog's and the bringer of fertility to the world, who lies with his sister Yarila to rekindle the fecund powers of the Earth each spring. (This is a mystic union; even the most devoted of their followers do not interpret this as any kind of blessing for incest.) Yarilo is much more widely worshipped than his sister, but women may join Yarila's cult, which is in essence the same, substituting I'm Not Pregnant, Welcoming Hollows and Outrun Cheated Wife for the appropriate feats below.

Entry Requirements: Only men may join Yarilo's cult; only women Yarila's.

Abilities: Dance All Night, Drink Copiously, Devotee of Yarilo or Initiate of Yarilo, Enthusiastic Lover, Make Friends, Mythology of Yarilo, Orgy!

Virtues: Amiable, Lusty, Party Animal.

Affinity: **Lover** (Conceive Child, Cure Sexually-Transmitted Disease, Enormous Penis, Love You Long Time, Outrun Cuckolded Husband)

Secret: Fertility (The devotee exudes fertility. In his presence, flowers blossom, couples are more likely to conceive and prize bulls get busy with the rest of the herd. In situations where this needs to be handled by a contest, the secret provides a bonus of ¼ its rating to the fertility of all forms of natural life in whose vicinity the devotee spends at least a day.)

Rites & Representations: Either by a phallic idol or a young man with a ridiculously exaggerated manhood, a white cloak and crown of wild flowers. His main rites are held to usher in the spring, involving riotous parties, sex, drinking, sex, dancing and sex. [Ya-REE-lo]

Worshippers: Yarilo's rites are, unsurprisingly, popular, and he and his sister are widely worshipped: sometimes by midwives, animal breeders and the like, sometimes by people who just enjoy his ways and the chance to bring



pleasure and life to what is often a difficult and dark world.

History Lessons



There is relatively little known for sure about the worship of Russian pagan goddesses and while these are all based upon actual belief, especially their roles as guardians of the Wolf and Dazhbog's chariot, the Auroras have all been made rather more formidable than they were in reality. They were part of the pantheon, but probably not worshipped separately. However, my view was that they were interesting figures worth expanding, and also provided women heroes with deities and magics suited to adventure.

ZORYA POLUNOCHNAYA

The Aurora of Midnight

Zorya Polunochnaya is the oldest and most unapproachable of the three Auroras, daughters of Dazhbog, whose veils glow in the northern sky. During the day, she appears as an old woman, albeit still spry, with a sharp gleam in her black eyes, but at night she looks like a lean and fit woman in her 40s. That said, few see her except when she wills it.

After all, while her sisters also have a responsibility for seeing Dazhbog off on his tour of the skies and welcoming him back, and are thus ladies of his court, she is the loner who devotes herself almost exclusively to making sure that the World Wolf, whom Svarog tied by an iron chain to the constellation of the Little Bear, remains bound. Sometimes he breaks free and wreaks terrible havoc, but is rebound. One day, though, he will bring about the end of the world. When not on guard, she rides the night skies on her black horse, bearing a wickedly-barbed berdysh, which she nonetheless wields as lightly as if it were a willow switch. Her veil is black and sewn with diamonds, which sparkle in the sky as she rides, such that mortals think stars are shooting through the heavens.

The three Auroras are sisters who work and are often worshipped together. They share the same Mythology and a devotee of one of the Auroras can improvise individual feats from the affinity of one of the other Auroras as if an appropriate initiate, with a rating equal to either her own affinity rating -10 or her Mythology of the Auroras, whichever is lower. For the purposes of multiple initiation or devotion, they count as aspects of the same Power.

Entry Requirements: Only women may worship her.

Abilities: Berdysh Fighting, Devotee of Zorya Polunochnaya or Initiate of Zorya Polunochnaya, Mythology of the Auroras, Ride Horse, Unexpected Strength.

Virtues: Loner, Quiet, Socially Graceless, Watchful.

Affinity: **Midnight** (Glittering Stars, Heal in the Dark, Lethal Silver Berdysh, See in the Dark, Shooting Star, Summon Darkness, Veil of Night)

Secret: **A Woman Alone** (The devotee may use this as an active affinity to be unseen and unnoticed at night, or as an augment at any time to attempts to remain undetected or shake off unwanted contact, whether a drunk's hand on her arm or a pursuing Mongol war party.)

Rites & Representations: She is represented as a thin, pale and unsmiling older woman, wearing a dark veil and dark cloak over glittering mail. [Zor-YA Pol-oo-NOCH-naya]

Worshippers: Her worship is relatively limited, but she appeals to women who wish to lead independent lives, or who feel separate from their peers but who are still prepared to accept responsibilities within their communities.

Connections: She is a daughter of Dazhbog and sister to the other Auroras.

ZORYA UTRENNAYA

The Aurora of Morning

Zorya Utrennaya is the youngest of the three Auroras. She is wife to Perun, but retains two cosmic responsibilities placed upon her by her father, Dazhbog. She is responsible for preparing his chariot before the start of day and then throwing open the gates to his palace, so he may ride forth in splendour. She also, with her sisters, shares the duty of keeping watch upon World Wolf, and her role is to predict its ploys and frenzied attacks. Her veil is glowing red and yellow silk, hanging in the sky to the north in summer.

Zorya Utrennaya is a model of the competent wife; she respects her father by continuing to tend his horses; she observes her duties to her community by watching the Bear; she loves her husband and knows when to obey him and when to change his mind. She is thus as happy in a stable as a court, and when Perun goes to war, will gladly take up arms alongside her husband.

Entry Requirements: Only women may worship her.

Abilities: Devotee of Zorya Utrennaya or Initiate of Zorya Utrennaya, Know the Time, Mythology of the Auroras, Organise People, Predict Foe's Next Move, Shine & Polish, Sword Fighting, Tend Horses.

Virtues: Clever, Dutiful, Punctual.

Affinity: **Morning** (Awaken Alert, Bright Blade, Open the Gate, Rise and Shine, Yellow Glowing Veil)

Secret: **Wife of the Thunderer** (The devotee may acquire any one of the affinities of any of the aspects of Perun and learn its feats. This affinity takes the place of a separate feat, and costs 6 HP to gain at 13, and then the usual costs as if the hero were also a devotee of the appropriate aspect of Perun.)

Rites & Representations: She is portrayed as a young and beautiful woman, with flowing blonde hair confined in a circlet and behind a golden veil. She

typically bears a currying comb in one hand.
[Zor-YA Oo-TREN-naya]

Worshippers: The Aurora of Morning is popular among women who accept their social responsibilities, but see no reason why it should make them weak, subordinate or irrelevant.

Connections: She is a daughter of Dazhbog, wife to Perun and sister to the other Auroras; her younger sister Zvezda Dennitsa was her handmaiden and assistant, although she now helps but rarely since she married Mesyats.

ZORYA VECHERNAYA

The Aurora of the Evening

Zorya Vechernaya is the middle of the three Auroras. If Midnight represents the choice of separation from conventional society and Morning its acceptance, Evening is considered the most wilful of all, the woman who seeks to pick what she wants from each way of life. As such, she is at once respected by some women and, truth be told, disliked by others and feared by many men. After all, she represents an implicit challenge to the established social and sexual order. However, her cosmic role is precisely to demonstrate that women can choose to follow or flout the status quo, and so long as her loyalty to Dazhbog and her charges remain unquestioned, he is prepared to turn a blind eye to her waywardness. She is also respected for her powers of driving our fevers, which as any good Rus' knows are wicked girl-spirit; Zorya Vechernaya, though, can be demure enough to get close to them without their hiding, then frightening enough to make them flee.

As well as keeping World Wolf chained, she is charged with closing the celestial gates to his palace when Dazhbog returns at sunset, and then ensuring their security through the night. By day, then, she is a demure handmaiden, who tricks, teases and tames World Wolf, by night she is a ferocious virginal warriorress. The same special conditions apply as with the other Zoryas. Her veil shines with green, blue and white radiance, stretched across the northern skies in winter.

Entry Requirements: Women only may worship her.

Abilities: Courtly Manners, Devotee of Zorya Vechernaya or Initiate of Zorya Vechernaya, Diagnose Disease, Mythology of the Auroras, Tame Wolf, Stay Alert, Spear & Shield Fighting.

Virtues: Changeable, Dedicated, Playful, Virginal.

Affinity: **Evening** (Blade of the Night, Blue Glowing Veil, Drive Out Fever, Quick Change, Time for Bed, Veil of Dusk)

Secret: **I Make My Own Choices** (Gives a bonus of ¼ its rating to resist any attempt to make her do something she does not want to, whether by magic, social pressure or any other means.)

Rites & Representations: A young and lissom woman with dark hair. Zorya Vechernaya is generally shown in one of her two guises but with a hint of the other, so she may look like a young noblewoman in courtly finery, but carry a sword sheathed or behind her back, or else a warriorress, her hair bound in an elaborate headdress instead of a helm. Either way, she has a long veil. [Zor-YA Vye-CHAIR-naya]

Worshippers: Women who follow Zorya Vechernaya are deliberately questioning the existing order – as such, while many privately admire her, only the more determined will openly worship her.

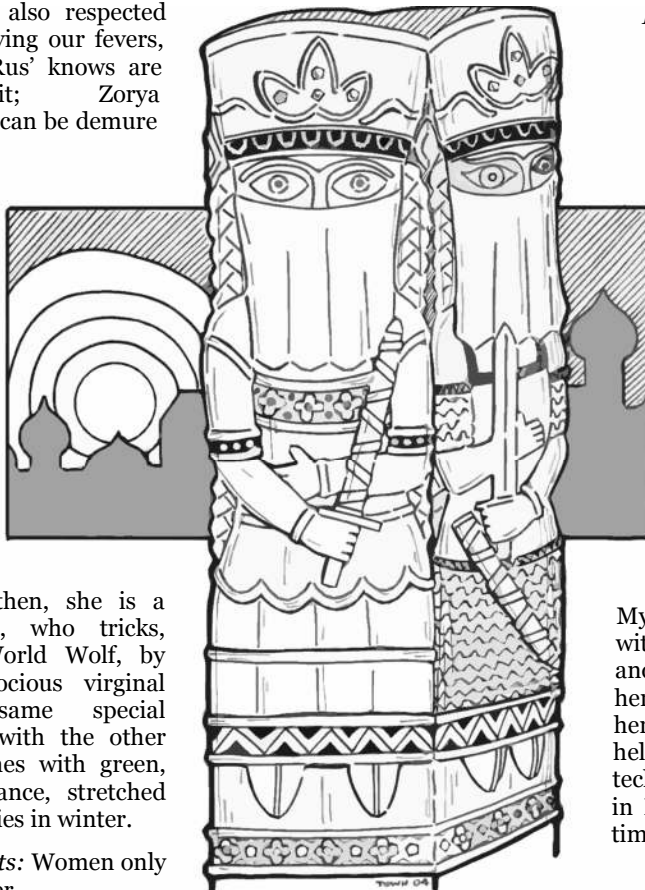
Connections: She is a daughter of Dazhbog and sister to the other Auroras; her younger sister Zvezda Vechernaya is her handmaiden.

Disadvantages: There are those who disapprove of Zvezda Vechernaya and her worshippers. In certain social situations, the Piety rating could be applied as a penalty (such as in convincing a conservative family to accept a worshipper as wife to its heir).

ZVEZDA DENNITSA

Morning Star

A younger daughter of Dazhbog and twin to Zvezda Vechernaya, the Morning Star used to help Zorya Utrennaya, until she caught the eye of Myesyats, the Moon. He wooed her with wise words, well-chosen gifts and the prospect of being mistress of her own realm, and she willingly let herself be won. She still occasionally helps Zorya Utrennaya, who is still technically her mistress while she is in Dazhbog's realm, but most of the time enjoys her new status.





As such, she occupies a place in the heavens but also two cosmological roles. On the one hand, she is an aspirational figure: the younger daughter who makes good, wedding a mighty lord. On the other, she can be regarded as little more than an opportunist, who used her charm and youthful beauty to ensnare an older man and has become spoilt and vain.

Zvezda Dennitsa can be considered an aspect of Myesyats, and vice versa.

Entry Requirements: None, though it is very rare for men to worship her.

Abilities: Attract Attention, Devotee of Zvezda Dennitsa or Initiate of Zvezda Dennitsa, Look Good, Mythology of Zvezda Dennitsa, Shopping, Tend Horses, Throw Tantrum, Titivate.

Virtues: Ambitious, Conventional, Vain.

Affinity: **Beauty** (Body Language, Elegant Movements, Fascinate Man, Hide Blemish, Make Best of Clothes, Rise and Shine)

Rites & Representations: A beautiful young woman, in rich, formal garb, almost painfully proper, in full veil, but with some touch of mischievous or salacious informality, such as a flash of ankle or thigh or even, most shocking of all, a bare shoulder! [ZVYEZ-da DYAY-nit-sa]

Worshippers: Women who aspire to elevate themselves by their looks, charm or wiles, and also those who accept the conventional wisdom that their marriage provides them with security and status.

Connections: See above.

ZVEZDA VECHERNAYA

Evening Star

The Evening Star is twin to the Morning, but their characters are very different indeed. Whereas Zvezda Dennitsa is flighty and gay, more interesting in company and play, Zvezda Vechernaya is a serious young lady, utterly committed to her role as groom to Dazhbog's horses and horses in general. As Zorya Vechernaya's handmaid and assistant, she clears out the stables during the day, while her mistress is at court, then settles the horses down at night while the Aurora is on guard. Fiercely loyal, she nonetheless finds it hard not to disapprove of what she sees both as her sister's fluttery pursuit of fripperies and the good life and her mistress's refusal to settle down and accept that rules are there to be followed.

Abilities: Devotee of Zvezda Vechernaya or Initiate of Zvezda Vechernaya, Disapproving Look, Horse Lore, Mythology of Zvezda Vechernaya, Practical Clothes, Ride Horse, Tend Horse, Train Horse.

Virtues: Dutiful, Love Horses, Obedient, Serious.

Affinity: **Horses** (Communicate with Horse, Hasten Horse, Heal Horse, Mend Horseshoe, Ride Through the Air, Stay on Horse)

Rites & Representations: A plain, serious young woman, usually in plain, serious clothes, holding a bridle. Sometimes, though, she is portrayed as a horse-headed girl or a horse. [ZVYEZ-da Vye-CHAIR-naya]

Worshippers: Any who love and work with horses, although she is regarded by most as primarily a goddess for girls and women who love horses.

Connections: She is twin to Zvezda Dennitsa and daughter to Dazhbog. She is the (sometimes quietly disapproving) handmaiden to Zorya Vechernaya.

B. SAINTS OF THE RUS'

“Honour the saint, because everyone needs friends in high places.”

This is a selection of the most famous, widely-worshipped and unusual of the Orthodox Russian saints of the Rus.’

What’s in a Name?

One problematic issue was whether to keep familiar English names of familiar saints or whether to stick to Russian forms. The answer has been a compromise: on the whole, Russian forms are given (Ekaterina instead of Catherine and the like), both for colour and also to help distinguish them from the saintly cults in the Greek and European chapters. In a couple of cases, though, it seemed too jarring: St George is thus still St George, rather than St Yuri, as he is in Russian, and likewise SS (saints) Nicholas and Peter keep their familiar forms.

ST ALEXANDER NEVSKY

The Great Prince

Very recently sanctified, which may explain his lack of a known Secret yet, this is the same Alexander who defeated the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of the Ice yet made his peace with the Mongols and began Moscow’s rise to power. Although Moscow’s official patron saint is St George the Brave, many see Alexander as a more obvious choice, both because of

his history and also his slightly ambiguous lessons about power.

Abilities: Assess Enemy’s Strength, Command Troops, Cunning Tactics, Devotee of St Alexander Nevsky *or* Initiate of St Alexander Nevsky, Life of St Alexander Nevsky, Quickly Change Plans.

Virtues: Ambitious, Confident, Flexible.

Affinity: **Victor** (Claim Success, Intimidate Foe, Out-think Rival, Perceive Dangers, Stirring Speech)

Rites & Representations: Nevsky is represented as a bearded prince in armour, with a red cloak over it, and wearing a prince’s crown or circlet. He bears a sword or a banner. His feast day is 23 May, when he is celebrated in both Novgorod and Moscow.

Worshippers: He is popular in both Novgorod and Moscow, and regarded as a patron to both cities. He is also worshipped by the ambitious, whether warrior, princes or neither.

ST ALEXIS

The Redistributive Saint

Alexis was a child of rich Christian Roman stock, but he secretly yearned for a monastic life. When he heard that he was to be married, over his objections, he sneaked from his home disguised as a peasant, carrying much gold, with which to do good works. Eventually, he returned, unrecognised, to his family home, where they demonstrated their virtue by giving him alms and shelter, until just before his death he revealed himself to them and there was a joyous reconciliation. However, it is the way St Alexis began his holy career with his family’s gold that has caught the imagination of many of his worshippers, who consider his example to mean that it may be permissible to take from the rich, so long as the wealth ends up in the hands of the poor. Eventually.

Abilities: Assess Value, Conceal Objects, Devotee of St Alexis *or* Initiate of St Alexis, Disguise, Life of St Alexis, Move Unnoticed.

Virtues: Shy, Unconventional.

Affinity: **Share the Wealth** (Assess Need, Evade Pursuit, Forgotten Benefactor, Open Strongbox, Pass Through Door)

Secret: **Seen But Unseen** (With this secret, the devotee can become not invisible, but unrecognised, and in many cases ignored. He could hand his grandmother a bag of silver, and all she would register is that someone of roughly his size and build gave it to her, but she would have no real recollection of quite





what he looked or sounded like. So long as the hero is not doing anything unusual, he will not attract any attention, either. For example, if a steady stream of people are passing through the city gates, the devotee will be unnoticed as he does the same – so long as he is successful in using his secret – even if a wanted felon or carrying a dead body. If people register the body at all, for example, they will just remember ‘a guy carrying a sack that looked like a body at first glance.’ The resistance is 14, although if others are trying specifically to penetrate illusions, scan the crowd especially carefully, know the hero well or the like, they use their perception ability or relationship against the secret’s rating. If the hero is doing something especially active or unusual or out of keeping with the ‘backdrop’ then the resistance will increase, and observers get additional attempts to penetrate the magic.)

Rites & Representations: He is portrayed as man in simple robes, with open hands. His feast day is 17 March, when the rich give generously, hoping in that way to protect the rest of their possessions in the coming year.

Worshippers: Let’s be honest, the most devoted worshippers are often thieves. But thieves who also want to look after their souls.

Disadvantages: There will always be some suspicious surrounding devotees of St Alexis, especially when anything goes missing. The narrator may in this case assume that the *Devotee of St Alexis* ability also doubles as *Suspected by All*.

ST ALYPIUS

The Iconographer

Alypius was a Kievan monk and artist from the 12th century, whose icons shone with holy glory. He died half-way through painting an icon, and an angel completed it for him, for it would have been a terrible sin for his work to be wasted.

Abilities: Assess Quality of Materials, Devotee of St Alypius *or* Initiate of St Alypius, Draw *or* Paint, Life of St Alypius, Mix Pigments.

Virtues: Artistic, Imaginative, Spiritual.

Affinity: Icons (Finish the Job, Glowing Colours, Paint on Anything, Quick Strokes, Remember What I Saw, Unfading Picture)

Secret: Holy Art (The devotee can create icons which are magical and have long-term power; this must be negotiated with the narrator.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as an elderly man in monk’s robes bearing an icon. His feast day is 17 August, an especially propitious one to finish or commission a work of art. [AL-LEAP-yus]

Worshippers: He is the patron of artists in general, iconographers in particular. He is also especially well-loved in Rostov, whose Dormition Cathedral houses perhaps his greatest work, the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir.

ST ANDREW THE FIRST-CALLED

The Russian Apostle

A patron saint of Russia, Andrew was one of the original Twelve Disciplines of Jesus, who then preached the gospel in Asia Minor before being crucified on an x-shaped cross in Greece on the orders of the Roman governor. Although the Greeks claim otherwise (because they are jealous, and foolish), any good Russian knows that St Andrew travelled across Russia. He set a cross upon the hill where Kiev was later built, predicting the rise of a great city, and made similar predictions when at the site of the future Novgorod. His omission of any mention of Moscow may help explain why the Muscovites prefer St George.

Abilities: Charismatic Preacher, Devotee of St Andrew *or* Initiate of St Andrew, Good Memory, Know Russian Geography, Life of St Andrew, Never Surprised, Seasoned Traveller.

Virtues: Inspirational, Passionate.

Affinity: Apostle (Advanced Warning, Believe Me, Know the Right Time, Listen to Me, The Feet Know the Way)

Secret: Where I Ought to Be (This is an often subtle and powerful secret; if there are important reasons why the hero ought to be at a particular place at a particular time. Maybe he gets lost and ends up not where he meant to go, but where it turns out he needed to be. Perhaps a friend asks him to accompany him or a superior sends him on an errand. Even wilder developments are possible: sleepwalking, being kidnapped and happening to wriggle free at the right time, even being seized by a huge bird and flown somewhere! The secret’s rating is used to assess just how convenient the transfer and in what state the hero is when he arrives, set against a resistance of 14. For example, if the hero ‘ought’ to turn up at his sweetheart’s arranged marriage to foil it, a marginal success might mean that he hears about it at the last minute and turns up, alone, breathless and wearing his poorest clothes, and still has to get past the ushers guarding the church, while a complete success may mean a powerful patron takes him there, and he can sweep in at the right moment, silhouetted dramatically against the sunlight outside, accompanied by an honour guard and a bishop... Obviously, this is a secret which will involve considerable negotiation between player and narrator for it to be an entertaining part of the ongoing story, not an over-frequent gimmick freeing the hero of having to think for himself.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as a white-bearded man bearing a rolled scroll. His feast day is 13 December, when there are particular celebrations in Kiev.

Worshippers: St Andrew is worshipped widely for his role and his patronage of Russia.





ST BASIL THE GREAT

Venerable and Heavenly

Another of Russia's patron saints, Basil was a 4th century scholar who became a hermit and then founded the first monastery in Asia Minor, later clashing with the emperor in Byzantium but still drawing huge crowds with his preaching. He is thus regarded as the founder of Russian monasticism.

Abilities: Carrying Voice, Devotee of St Basil the Great *or* Initiate of Basil the Great, Inspiring Preacher, Life of St Basil the Great, Organise People.

Virtues: Ambitious, Bossy, Determined, Will Be Heard.

Affinity: **Preacher** (Be Heard, Gather Round, Impress Audience, Overtalk Other, Silence Heckler, Tub-Thumping Finale)

Secret: **Play to an Audience** (The devotee may either ignore multiple target penalties when using any feats from his Preacher affinity or else use this to give a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating to preaching, rabbleroising or otherwise working up an audience.)

Rites & Representations: He is typically represented as a bareheaded cleric, clutching a book. His day is 1 January.

Worshippers: Monks, scholars and people keen on the sound of their own voice.

ST BORIS

Plough of God

Boris was a son of Vladimir Bright Sun, but was not a warrior or leader of men so much as a smith who forged the first plough along with his brother, Gleb. (Russians of any learning know that there were ploughs before Boris and Gleb, but will say that theirs was the first *proper* plough.) However, while Gleb stuck with his ironworking, Boris then took the plough and taught people how to use it, enriching their lives in the name of God. Boris and Gleb ultimately died martyrs' deaths in the name of peace, refusing to take up arms against their ambitious elder brother Svyatopolk, when he seized power on their father's death; for this they were both sainted and also loved by those who despair of the bloody ways of so many Russian rulers. Some of their worshippers take this further, actively campaigning for a new style of rule, for 'princes of peace.' Most of Russia's present rulers are unimpressed.

Abilities: Devotee of St Boris *or* Initiate of St Boris, Farming, Life of St Boris, Repair Implements.

Virtues: Help Others, Peaceable, Work Hard.

Affinity: **Plough** (Bend Swords into Ploughshares, Break Ground, Scatter Seed Far, Shatter Stones, Strong as an Ox)

Secret: **Peace!** (With a loud cry, expansive gesture or other dramatic act, the hero seeks to stop violence around him. The hero simply has to succeed with this secret against the single highest resistance of those around him

involved in violence, and if successful this creates a moment's pause of around ten seconds or so. It does not prevent them from restarting the mayhem afterwards, but can provide a breathing space in which to try other means of ending the bloodshed, to flee or even to recover from a dangerous predicament.)

Rites & Representations: St Boris is represented as a vigorous young man, sometimes in princely robes but even so bearing some agricultural implement. His feast day is 24 July.

Worshippers: Farmers, especially.

Connections: The cult of St Boris still has good relations with St Gleb's – as well as St Vladimir's.

ST CASSIAN THE UNMERCIFUL

The Crooked Look

Cassian was a 5th century monk whom only the Russian Orthodox church regards as a saint – but in a very distinctive way. He is regarded as a dour and unsympathetic figure, who once was out walking with St Nicholas when they came across a peasant whose cart has become mired in the mud. St Nicholas helped him, St Cassian did not, so God took his annual feast day from him, instead giving him the 29 February, so he is only celebrated (after a fashion) every four years. St Nicholas acquired his extra day!

St Cassian is regarded as a bringing of bad luck and ill winds, whose eyes are usually downcast. When he does raise them and squint around him, whatever he sees is cursed and withered. So why worship him? Most of his powers relate not to bringing misfortune to others, but in taking it on. There are some who are drawn to him because his dour and self-denying worldview suits them, but there are also those who choose to follow his difficult path not to bring misery to others but to take others' burdens on to them.

Abilities: Devotee of St Cassian the Unmerciful *or* Initiate of St Cassian the Unmerciful, Life of St Cassian the Unmerciful, See What Could Go Wrong, Shrug and Carry On.

Virtues: Lugubrious, Pessimistic.

Affinity: **Scapegoat** (Be In Wrong Place, Endure Pain, Give Me Your Pain, Hit Me Instead, Windblown)

Secret: **The Squint** (This is, in effect, the evil eye: the devotee may bring misfortune on to anyone and anything he sees. This may be used as a direct and immediate magical attack, perhaps making someone drop the delicate crystal figurine they are holding or double up with a sudden stomach cramp. Alternatively, it may be used to curse someone. On a Major or Complete success, they acquire 'Cassian's Curse' at the secret's rating, which acts as a permanent negative augment to all actions. It lasts a day for Major successes, or days equal to the secret's auto-augment rating for Complete. It may also be lifted by a suitable holy blessing



– which defeats the secret's rating – or divine intercession.)

Rites & Representations: A stern old man, his eyes downcast, hidden under bushy eyebrows. His feast is 29 February, which is regarded as a very unlucky day. If a church has an icon to him, it hangs on its own, above the door, facing rather than on the iconostasis.

Worshippers: Essentially, this is a cult for martyrs, scapegoats and the occasional sadist.

Disadvantages: See the line above!

ST CYRIL

The Father of Russian

Of Greek birth, St Cyril was educated in Constantinople before embarking on a life of missionary work, during which, with his brother Methodius, he invented the written script for the Russian tongue, which has become known as Cyrillic. He became a monk under the name Constantine and is therefore also known as St Constantine, but under whichever name has become a patron of those who use and love the written word.

Abilities: Devotee of St Cyril or Initiate of St Cyril, Fine Penmanship, Life of St Cyril, Literate.

Virtues: Bookworm, Methodical.

Affinity: **Literacy** (Copy Text Beautifully, Copy Words Accurately, Erase Text, Permanent Writing, Protect Birchbark Scroll, Read Any Language, Write Quickly)

Secret: **Truth on the Page** (The devotee may use 'automatic writing' to reveal the truth. This could be used when writing down what someone else is saying, in which case the actual words on the page will reveal what he is really thinking. Another example would be to write notes on a subject, only to find that the notes also contain some new information. The secret may only be used once on any subject on any day, and the level of success against resistance 14 determines the level of insight gained. A Marginal Success may only show that there is some deeper truth to be found, a Minor one a clue, a Major success a substantial piece of information, a Complete success the full story.)

Rites & Representations: He is portrayed as an old man in monk's robes and cowl, clutching a cross-topped staff in one hand, an unrolled scroll bearing Cyrillic lettering in the other. His day is 14 February.

Worshippers: Monks, chroniclers, scholars and those who appreciate the written word and the truths it can convey.

ST DMITRI OF SOLUN

The Myrrh-Flowing

A slave from Greece, Dmitri was a Roman proconsul who bravely affirmed his Christianity to the emperor. Thanks to his blessing, his champion, Nestor, was able to defeat the emperor's in a gladiatorial combat, but

Dmitri was still put to death. When his remains were discovered in the 5th century, they were uncorrupted, and sweet myrrh (a scented tree sap) flowed from his crypt. He manifested to bless Rus' armies marching against Constantinople in the 10th century, and since has been regarded as a protector of Russian warriors.

Dmitri Donskoi has dedicated himself to St Dmitri, and claims that the saint was instrumental in victory at Kulikovo.

Abilities: Assess Fighting Ability, Assess Fighting Style, Coach, Devotee of St Dmitri of Solun or Initiate of St Dmitri of Solun, Encourage Ally, Life of St Dmitri of Solun, Ride.

Virtues: Brave, Supportive.

Affinity: **War-Blessing** (Bless Warriors, Glowing Radiance, Hearten Troops, Shield Warriors)

Secret: **Sweet, Sweet Myrrh** (Acts as an affinity with the following feats: Bring Forth Myrrh, Healing Myrrh, Refreshing Myrrh, Sweet Scent.)

Rites & Representations: A bare-headed, armoured warrior. His day is 22 October. [Dee-MEE-tree] [St Demetrius of Thessalonika]

Worshippers: Military commanders and trainers.

Connections: Alexander Nevsky was beloved of St Dmitri, and now he is sainted, his worshippers and those of St Dmitri maintain close relations.

ST EKATERINA THE MARTYR

Quiet Wisdom

Born of a noble family in pagan Alexandria, Ekaterina (Catherine) was known for her wisdom and beauty and was wooed by suitors from far and wide. She demanded a husband who was as fine and wise as she, and a toothless hermit accosted her one day and said he knew of such a one, granting her a vision of Jesus Chris. That day, she was baptised into the Christian faith and devoted herself body and soul to the Lord. When the Roman emperor visited Alexandria and demanded obeisances to his pagan gods, she fearlessly professed the gospel. In a fury, he had her imprisoned and ordered learned pagans to convince her of the error of her ways. In fact, so steadfast, wise and scholarly was she in her answers that she converted them, instead, and in a fury the emperor had her killed, earning her the martyr's crown.

Entry Requirements: Only women may follow St Ekaterina.

Abilities: Deep Thinking, Devotee of St Ekaterina the Martyr or Initiate of St Ekaterina the Martyr, Eloquent, Life of St Ekaterina the Martyr, Well Read.

Virtues: Quietly Fearless, Speak Up for What is Right, Uncomplaining.

Affinity: **Bear Suffering** (Bear Heavy Burden, Heal Quickly, Ignore Cold, Ignore Fire, Ignore Pain)

Secret: **Martyr** (Beaten, broken, battered and burnt, somehow the devotee can survive. She





can invoke this secret to avoid permanent, debilitating damage by violence. Thus, if the house in which she was sleeping caught fire naturally, then this would not help, but it would if instead it had been torched. Furthermore, this only applies to suffering serious damage; in an extended contest, for example, it would only apply in a round which would take her below 0 AP. The resistance is the natural 14, augmented by the source of the violence. Thus, the resistance to avoid having her head cut off by an axeman with *Chop Head 12m* and a Very Big Axe +4, would be 14 + 4, or 18. This cannot be used as a combat power; it is about trusting meekly to God's protection and being saved, and the devotee would generally be immersed in prayer.)

Rites & Representations: Ekaterina is portrayed as a beautiful dark-haired woman wearing a martyr's crown, holding a crucifix. Her day is 24 November, a day in which expectant mothers can expect to be especially well-cared for; she is prayed to during difficult childbirths. [YEAH-cat-air-eena]

Worshippers: Ekaterina is revered by several orders of nuns as well as any who must endure suffering with a good heart.

ST GEORGE OF THE SPRING

Spring George

George was a Cappadocian of Christian faith who nonetheless served valiantly in the Roman army, winning the favour of Emperor Diocletian and performing such extraordinary feats as defeating the dragon of Beirut, earning himself the title 'Victor-Bearer.' When the emperor began a campaign against the Christians, George spoke out against it before the senate. First Diocletian tried to persuade him to recant, then tortured him so viciously that George was killed, without abandoning his faith. As the emperor left the scene, there was a clap of thunder and God himself spoke, bringing George back to life. George endured many more tortures and temptations before the emperor had him martyred (again), but stayed true to his faith. His example made even Diocletian think again about his pagan ways, eventually leading to his granting Christians religious freedom.

Holy Great Martyr St George, as he is technically known, is one of the most popular saints across Russia, and he has been claimed by Moscow as the city's patron saint. He also has several aspects. When St George defeats the dragon, he unlocks the fertility of the earth after the long winter and defends the herds and flocks of his people from its monstrous hunger. This aspect is thus in a sense linked with fertility and farming, although it is overshadowed by the more popular worship of St George the Brave and the more specialised ways of St Boris.

Abilities: Devotee of St George of the Spring or Initiate of St George of the Spring, Life of St George, Ride Horse, Spear Combat.

Virtues: Brave, Inspiring, Untiring.

Affinity: **Defend the People** (Break Curse, Drive Out Demon, Hunt Predator, Raise Community's Spirits, Pray for Fertility, Sense Unease, Smite Bandits)

Secret: **Fight On!** (This ability may be used either for or to augment a Final Action. Alternatively, it may be used to allow the warrior to fight on, even when his AP fall below zero. He may continue to act until his AP fall below -[his rating in this ability]. If he manages as a result to bring his AP back into positive figures, he sustains no injuries, but if falls below the ability's threshold or else remains at minus AP when he wins the contest, he then collapses and suffers the appropriate consequences.)

Rites & Representations: St George is represented generally as a mounted warrior upon a horse, bearing a spear and usually killing a dragon. Uniquely, this aspect is sometimes represented by St George on foot. He has two feast days. One is 26 April, when cattle and horses are blessed and protected (by being circled three times with an icon) and then turned out to pasture for the first time that year. The other is 26 November, although this is more associated with St George the Brave

Worshippers: Widely worshipped, especially in the countryside and by the poor.

ST GEORGE THE BRAVE

Slayer of Dragons

This is the primary aspect of St George among the nobility: the brave warrior, defender of the weak, slayer of dragons. He is especially popular in the Kievan lands and also Moscow (on whose crest he appears), with both trying to claim that theirs is the true home of his worship and values.

Abilities: Devotee of St George the Brave or Initiate of St George the Brave, Life of St George the Brave, Ride Horse, Spear Combat, Sword & Shield Combat.

Virtues: Brave, Loyal, Upright.

Affinity: **Soldier of God** (Armour of Faith, Pray for Strength, Righteous Spear, Shield of Glory, Terrible Swift Sword)

Secret: **Fearless** (This secret provides a bonus equal to its full rating to any attempt to resist fear or otherwise stay in good heart, including recovery through a Final Action.)

Rites & Representations: This aspect is always a mounted warrior, although he may bear sword and shield instead of spear. His main feast day is 26 November, also a day in which old grudges are settled or put aside and peasants may freely move to new communities, although he is also revered on 26 April.

Worshippers: Nobility, soldiers, those who seek or respect bravery. George the Brave is perhaps the most popular single saint amongst the Cossacks.

Disadvantages: Dragons are rare, which is just as well, for no devotee (and few self-respecting





initiates) of St George the Brave may pass up the chance to take one on.

ST GEORGE THE PITILESS

Wolf George

“If the wolf has something in its teeth,” the proverb goes, “George put it there.” This aspect of St George is very Russian and even amongst the Rus’ is rarely worshipped openly, only invoked in the hardest of times. Sometimes, the weak, the sick, the old, the foolish, the criminal and the useless must be sacrificed, such that the community survives. It is this, the toughest of all loves for his people, that St George must sometimes display. ‘Wolf George’ – after the pagan beliefs that wood spirits sometimes single out the sick and the old for the wolves to eat – is called upon when such extreme measures are needed, although he also has a secondary and more generally acceptable role as the patron of public executioners. Some people whisper of a terrible secret the most hardened of his devotees possess, but nothing is known about it for certain.

Abilities: Accurate Blow, Devotee of St George the Pitiless or Initiate of St George the Pitiless, Harden Heart, Life of St George, Sense Weakness, Spear Combat.

Virtues: Do What Has To Be Done, Pitiless.

Affinity: **The Cull** (Banish Nightmares, Banish Sentiment, Kill Weakest Quickly, See Inner Sin)

Rites & Representations: This aspect of St George is very rarely represented; the only existing icon in a church is the rather disturbing ‘George Weeps’ in the Cathedral of St George in Yuriev-Polsky. Technically, he shares the same feast days as the other aspects, but he is rarely directly celebrated.

Worshippers: Scapegoats, executioners, the desperate and the ruthless.

ST GLEB

The Good Smith

Gleb was a smith who, with his brother Boris, made the first plough, before dying rather than engage in fratricide. He continues to work metal to make human lives easier, and grieves over the use of his arts for forging weapons of war.

Abilities: Blacksmith, Devotee of St Gleb or Initiate of St Gleb, Good With My Hands, Know Metals, Life of St Gleb, Strong Arms.

Virtues: Honest, Good Natured, Peaceable, Practical.

Affinity: **Blacksmith** (Blunt Blade, Endure Heat, Hammer Metal into Shape, Remove Impurities

STORY SEED: WHEN THE WOLF COMES TO THE DOOR

A drawn, worn Cossack on an equally underfed-looking pony arrives in a village. The Cossack simply calls himself Old Pavel, and is a singularly unsettling individual, with one rheumy yellow eye, several days of stubble, ill-fitting riding clothes and the habit of talking mainly in proverbs and obscenities. He walks around the village, muttering and sniffing, until he sees three children playing. Without hesitation, he draws his sabre and with a single cut, lops off their heads. Then ignoring the wails of their mothers, he continues on his way. Quickly an angry crowd gathers, but he ignores them. Then he spots some more children and out slides his sabre, but one quick-witted villager grabs his arm and before he can do anything else, he is buried in an avalanche of furious peasants. In the melee, someone slams him in the head with a stone and he falls, unconscious. The villagers mill about, some calling for a rope to hang him, when the priest arrives and then staggers back, hands pressed to his eyes. The unconscious form is bathed in bright, holy radiance. So what is a holy man doing killing their children? Old Pavel himself becomes feverish and may not live, and in any case there are still many who say he should not survive anyway. But would the village not be cursed if it killed a holy man? What’s going on?

► Old Pavel is a devotee of ‘Wolf George’ who has realised that the entire village is at threat. Five generations ago, the villagers had made a terrible pact with a demon in return for surviving a terrible winter. Now the demon is calling in the bargain, and the children, one by one, are being possessed. The villagers do not know this, because their ancestors agreed never to tell their own children. When all them have been possessed, they will kill and eat their parents. Old Pavel saw this and, in his own way, began to deal with the problem. Weakened by the blow, though, he is locked in spiritual conflict with the demon, which meanwhile has its minions possess more of the children every night...

► Old Pavel is a devotee of ‘Wolf George’ who has seen that a terrible disease is soon to strike the village, unless those most at risk – the sickly children, the frail older people – can be eliminated. Without them, the disease spirit will dwell but briefly in the village before moving on, but with them present to incubate the malady, half the village will die. Is there another way to fight this plague?

► Old Pavel is a crazed and vicious deserter and bandit, who cruelly murdered the Nine-Fingered Horseman, a devout follower of ‘Wolf George.’ He buried the body in a shallow grave a little way outside the village, but dressed it in his own filthy rags, taking for himself the Horseman’s clothes. What the priest saw was simply the residuary ‘radiation’ the clothes had picked up from their long association with the Horseman, and which also helped push him over the edge into rabid insanity. He desires whatever fate the villagers have in store for him – but why was the Horseman coming here in the first place?





in Metal, Toughen Armour)

Secret: *Invention* (This secret may be used to produce better quality normal weapons and equipment; add its auto-augment to the usual equipment bonus it provides, so that a sword forged by Timofei with *Invention* **1M** would get an additional +2. It can also be used to create something unexpected and magical from whatever oddments are to hand. Essentially, this device will have a rating equal to the secret's, for whatever it does, and the narrator is free to destroy it or have it fall apart at any time after its first use – typically, at the most dramatic or entertaining moment. For example, Timofei is trapped in a barn by some marauding bandits. He has barred the door, but the fact that they are stacking firewood around the building suggests that this is not a good long-term refuge. Inside the barn is an old cart, a cauldron, a keg of vodka and other random bits and pieces. From them, he fashions a crude rocket-cart in which he plans to crash past the thugs to freedom on a jet of burning vodka. For its first use, it will have a power of **1M**, but even if it works, such a rickety contraption is unlikely to have that long a career...)

Rites & Representations: Much like St Boris, Gleb is represented as a muscular young man, although he often wears a blacksmith's apron over princely robes.

Worshippers: Blacksmiths, some craftsmen and those who enjoy working with their hands.

Connections: His followers tend to have good relations with those of St Boris, even though the latter is now largely a farming cult.

ST GRIGORI THE DIALOGIST

Voice of the Gospel

Born of rich senatorial rank in the 6th century, Gregory served as prefect of Rome before a conversion to Christianity that saw him become a towering figure of evangelical work and spiritual thought. He later became a powerful and energetic pope, acquiring the title 'the Great' and leaving behind his *Dialogues* and other important writings. While they turn their backs on the institution of the Papacy, the Russians nonetheless revere Grigori as a patron of teachers and scholars.

Abilities: Clever Rhetoric, Devotee of St Grigori the Dialogist *or* Initiate of St Grigori the Dialogist, Instruction, Know History, Life of St Grigori the Dialogist, Literate, Speak Latin.

Virtues: Energetic, Exhibitionist, Patient, Truthful.

Affinity: *Instruction* (Capture Attention, Make the Complex Clear, Sense Comprehension, Vivid Metaphor)

Secret: *Know This!* (The hero may drive a fact, phrase, image or the like into a recipient's consciousness, such that they may never forget or ignore it. Thus must be done through conversation or similar contact, and can be

resisted if the target is unwilling. The level of success determines the level of accuracy and immediacy of the recollection.)

Rites & Representations: St Grigori is typically represented as a tonsured man in fine ecclesiastical robes, holding forth an open or closed bible. His feast day is 12 March. [St Gregory the Great]

Worshippers: Priests, monks, preachers, teachers and those who know best.

ST ILYA THE THUNDERER

Holy Glorious Prophet

Ilya is the Russian form of Elijah the Prophet, the first Old Testament prophet. However, in the Russian form Ilya has taken on some of the attributes of Perun and is also a brooding and punitive saint, casting rains and above all fire from the heavens to protect the devout from devils and witches and also visit retribution upon those who break God's laws. As such, he tends to inspire awe and respect more than affection. The fiercest storms are when he is riding across the sky in his fiery chariot, striking the earth with lightning while pursuing the Devil. In such conditions, peasants do everything they can to prevent the Devil entering their homes, by lighting holy candles, barring the doors and throwing any black cats outside, lest they attract one of Ilya's lightning bolts.

Abilities: Devotee of St Ilya the Thunderer *or* Initiate of St Ilya the Thunderer, Dramatic Denunciation, Know Scripture, Life of St Ilya the Thunderer.

Virtues: Fiery, Intolerant, Self-Righteous.

Affinity: *I Am The Law* (Beat Blasphemer, Call Down Rain, Hear Blasphemy from Afar, Shame Backslider, Sniff Out Sin, Thundering Sermon)

Secret: *Fire from the Heavens* (The devotee may bring down a pillar of fire from the sky. Treat this as any magical attack, but it may be augmented with his *Devotee of...* and *Life of St Ilya the Thunderer* abilities and his Power virtues.)

Rites & Representations: He is usually depicted ascending to Heaven in a fiery chariot, harnessed to four winged horses. His day is 20 July, when people do all they can to appease him, by abandoning work for prayer, fasting and self-criticism.

Worshippers: The self-righteous and those who believe that abhorring sin means also abhorring the sinner.

Disadvantages: Devotees of St Ilya are typically feared as dangerous zealots, except when there are spoiling witches or other magical threats around, when they become surprisingly (and briefly) well-regarded. St Ilya cannot be worshipped through *duoverie* alongside pagan Powers.



ST IOANN THE LONG-SUFFERING

The Buried Ascetic

Ioann was a glutton, a sybarite, a man who indulged freely in every carnal pleasure, until the morning he awoke to a horrified realisation of the depths of his sinfulness. He turned his back on his old ways and his face to God, and had himself buried in the ground for thirty years in order to teach him to listen to his soul rather than be mastered by the needs of his body. The Devil sought to distract him, lighting fires underground, parading fine foods and tempting maidens before him and ultimately savaging him in the form of a fire-breathing dragon. Even with the Devil's jaws at his throat and fiery breath all around, St Ioann would not be distracted from his prayers and the Devil was forced into furious, baffled retreat.

Abilities: Devotee of St Ioann the Long-Suffering or Initiate of Ioann the Long-Suffering, Disapproving Glower, Ignore Hunger, Ignore Lust, Ignore Pain, Life of St Ioann the Long-Suffering.

Virtues: Ascetic, Dour, Long-Suffering, Passive, Patient.

Affinity: Focus (Concentrate for Hours, I Won't Move A Muscle, Ignore Fear, Resist Distraction, Resist Temptation, Skip A Meal)

Secret: Absolute Focus (The devotee can draw upon the power of prayer not just to ignore but to resist the clamours of the mortal world. The devotee can use it to augment other *Ignore...* or *Resist...* abilities or feats freely, or use it directly to resist all kinds of spiritual and physical threats, from hostile magic to the need to sleep or eat. This latter use demands a degree of concentration and audible prayer: he may still move at a walk and carry out relatively simple tasks, but nothing especially demanding, such as running, fighting or invoking other magics. In the case of direct attacks, the resistance is obviously the enemy's target number. In the case of physical needs such as hunger or sleep, the resistance is 14.)

Rites & Representations: St Ioann is typically portrayed buried in the ground, with the Devil-dragon curled around him or with his hair and beard still burning from its fiery breath. His day is 18 July, but his rather severe worshippers tend to do little that demonstrative to mark it, instead turning to solitary prayer. [YO-ann]

Worshippers: St Ioann's worship appeals to a distinct minority. His dour, self-denying and ascetic ways impress the volatile and sentimental Russian people without generating much affection. His worshippers thus tend to be loners, outsiders and, truth to tell, often prigs and killjoys.

ST IVAN CHRYSOSTOM

Golden-Mouth

St John – Ivan to the Russians – was a 4th century preacher of such eloquence that he was named in Greek *Chrysostom*, 'Golden-Mouth.' His modesty was almost equal to his eloquence, and when the emperor wished to elevate him to the post of patriarch of Constantinople he sent soldiers to drag him to his new palace. He was a pious and exacting patriarch, the scourge of corrupt clergy and also an eager patron of missions to evangelise the pagans, in their own tongues. Eventually the licentious Greek Empress Eudoxia had him banished to the Black Sea coast, where he died, but he is now forever remembered.

Abilities: Devotee of St Ivan Golden-Mouth or Initiate of St Ivan Golden-Mouth, Elegant Speech, Life of St Ivan Golden-Mouth, Make Myself Understood, Persuasive, Speak [Foreign Language].

Virtues: Honest, Talkative.

Affinity: Golden-Mouth (Be Understood, Compelling Argument, Distracting Comment, Question to be Answered, The Right Word)

Secret: Tongues (The devotee is automatically understood perfectly by his listeners as though he were speaking to them in their own language. The resistance is the natural world's 14, and on any Major defeat or worse, the devotee's message is dangerously, embarrassingly, insultingly or entertainingly distorted.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as a man with a short beard wearing ecclesiastical robes and holding an open scroll. His day is 27 January. [St John Chrysostom]

Worshippers: Those who admire elegant speech, whether preachers, lawyers or orators.

ST MIKHAIL THE ARCHANGEL

Sword of the Lord

Mikhail – Michael – is one of the archangels, both an inspirational general of the Heavenly Hosts and also a warrior himself. He is a patron not only of warriors, but also armourers, swordsmiths and those others whose work contributes the martial endeavour.

Abilities: Armourer or Swordsmith or [another martial trade], Devotee of St Mikhail the Archangel or Initiate of St Mikhail the Archangel, Stern Gaze, Sword Fighting, Tales of St Mikhail the Archangel.

Virtues: Brave, Honourable, Martial.

Affinity: Warrior of God (Armour with Faith, Fly to the Attack, Hymn of Righteous Anger, Imbue Sword with Zeal)

Secret: Blade of Light (The hero may imbue his sword with divine golden light or simply materialise a blade made of such light. Either



way, it counts as a sword with the usual +3 equipment bonus, plus ¼ of the secret's rating, so with a rating of 20, a devotee could conjure out of nowhere a blade with a rating of +8 overall. Only the devotee himself may wield this blade)

Rites & Representations: Although a martial saint, St Michael is generally not portrayed in armour but robes underneath a red cloak, bearing a sceptre of office. He is always shown with his feathered angel's wings. [MIKH-ka-il] [St Michael the Archangel]

Worshippers: Warriors, armourers, swordsmiths.

ST MORIS

The Theban Martyr

Moris was the commander of the Roman Theban Legion, a force composed entirely of Christians. After suppressing a revolt in Gaul, it was ordered to give thanks before pagan idols: it refused. First every tenth man was killed, but still they stood firm in their faith. So one in ten of the survivors were killed, but still they would not obey, until they were all massacred, with Moris fighting to the last. Shortly thereafter, St Moris and other martyrs from the legion began to perform miracles, defending warriors who fight for justice and who refuse to obey sinful commands.

Abilities: Devotee of St Moris or Initiate of St Moris, Life of St Moris, Rally Troops, Sword & Shield Fighting, Tactics, Train Troops.

Virtues: Honourable, Resolute, Think for Yourself.

*Affinity: **Fight for Right!*** (Bright Blade, Drive Back the Sinful, Overcome Sinner, Resist Compulsion, Stand and Fight)

*Secret: **Legate*** (Multiple target penalties are ignored when the hero is casting magic on the members of a unit of which he is the recognised leader.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as an armoured soldier, bearing a banner and a palm, with a sword at his side. His feast day is 22 February. [MORR-ees] [St Maurice of Thebes]

Worshippers: Soldiers and those who believe in taking personal responsibility for their actions and those around them.

ST NICHOLAS OF ALL GOOD THINGS

Friend of All

Nicholas was born in Asia Minor of devout Christian stock in the 4th century and began performing miracles even as he was born. Pious beyond measure and learned beyond his years, he rose rapidly within the Church, a paragon of charity and witness. This aspect of St Nicholas emphasises his role as a protector of travellers and patron of merchants, but also stresses that with wealth comes a responsibility to be generous and charitable.

Abilities: Assess Good Trade, Devotee of St Nicholas of All Good Things or Initiate of St Nicholas of All Good Things, Know Tales of Distant Lands, Life of St Nicholas, Travel Safely.

Virtues: Generous, Honest, Open-Minded, Wanderlust.

*Affinity: **Equal Trade*** (Discourage Thief, Know Value, Know Wealth, Like for Like, Open Door, Sense Hidden Flaw, Turn Away Sinner)

*Secret: **Travel Safely*** (Acts as an affinity, with the feats Find Shelter, Fix Cart, Heal the Lame, Know Best Route, Know Way Home, Sense Ambush. On acquiring the secret, the devotee automatically gains all these feats.)

Rites & Representations: Nicholas is represented as a white-bearded man gazing directly out of the icon; he typically has one hand readied in blessing, and the other holding a suitable item, in this case usually a bible. His feast day is 6 December, when everyone in the community brings something to the table.

Worshippers: Travellers, seafarers, merchants.

ST NICHOLAS THE WET

The Fisherman

This aspect of St Nicholas is the patron of sailors, fishermen and all who make their lives on the seas and lakes. When travelling on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, after all, Nicholas saw the Devil get on board the ship and prepare to sink it, but his prayers drove him out and calmed the seas, saving the ship and pilgrims.

Abilities: Boat Lore, Devotee of St Nicholas the Wet or Initiate of St Nicholas the Wet, Fishing, Know [Sea or River], Life of St Nicholas, Swim.

Virtues: Generous, Honest, Love the Sea, Wanderlust.

*Affinity: **Mariner*** (Breathe Water, Flatten Wave, Float, Hold Rudder, Redirect Current, Spot Danger on Ship, Talk to Fish)

*Secret: **Drive Out The Devil*** (May be used as an active affinity to drive away hostile otherworldly forces or entities possessing Christians. Also provides a bonus of ¼ to the chances that any boat on which the devotee is travelling with safely complete a journey.)

Rites & Representations: This aspect typically carries a cross wrapped in a rope. In most fishing communities, on the eve of St Nicholas's day, a straw effigy is pushed onto the waters in a crude and rickety boat which is sure to sink, giving thanks for a year's protection and petitioning for a year more.

Worshippers: He is especially popular in Novgorod, but is generally worshipped by sailors, fishermen and their families.



ST NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER

The Walking Miracle

Perhaps the most widely loved of all the saints, Nicholas the Wonderworker is the protector of farmers, craftsmen and children, a generous figure whose powers are as limitless as his kindness. He is also the guardian of the gates of Heaven, who joyfully welcomes the souls of the devout and sorrowfully turns away the impious.

Abilities: Cheer You Up, Devotee of St Nicholas the Wonderworker *or* Initiate of St Nicholas the Wonderworker, Life of St Nicholas, Sense Evil Spirits, Soothe Anger.

Virtues: Kind, Generous.

Affinity: **Good Deeds** (Bless Fields, Cheer Children, Do Good Work, Drive Away Devils, Fix the Broken, Make The Hurt Go Away)

Secret: **Miracle** (The devotee can bring about extraordinary acts of good fortune for others. For each mastery in the Secret or part thereof, the devotee needs spend one less hero point per miraculous plot edit – see the **HERO POINTS** chapter – which may bring the total cost to zero. However, these can only be acts of kindness, and which will not work to the devotee's direct advantage. Even if it just that the devotee will simply gain the credit for being a miracle worker, then the hero point cost is raised by one and must be at least one. No individual may benefit from such miracles more than once per season.)

Rites & Representations: This aspect is usually shown bearing a basket. On his feast day of 6 December, a great feast is held at which the elders of the community are honoured and the children pampered.

Worshippers: All kinds of people, high or low, rich or poor.

ST NIKON

The Quiet Man

Nikon was an ascetic monk, who sought solitude but was forever followed by those eager for his wise teaching. He eventually became hegumen of the Kievo-Pechersk Monastery and is now one of the patrons of Russian monasticism, but whereas St Basil is a preacher who looks out to converts, St Nikon is a quiet and meditative figure, who converts through inner reflection.

Abilities: Devotee of St Nikon *or* Initiate of St Nikon, Forge in the Wilds, Ignore Interruptions, Life of St Nikon, Think Deeply.

Virtues: Ascetic, Contemplative, Solitary.

Affinity: **Hermit** (Hush, I Want to Be Alone, Ignore Distraction, Unnoticed in the Crowd)

Secret: **Open Your Eyes** (The hero can open the eyes of others to inner truths and the triviality

of the Mortal World's concerns before the love of God. Through the course of a sermon, conversation or even written correspondence, he targets one of his interlocutor's Virtues, Relationships or mental Flaws. If he can overcome its rating with the secret's, then he may be able to reduce or even eliminate it, and replace it with the Virtue *Love God*. On a Tie or Marginal Success or Defeat, there is no effect. On a Minor Success, the target ability is reduced by 10 and *Love God* gained at 10 or increased by 5, if already possessed. The numbers for Major and Complete successes and 15/10 and 20/15, respectively. No one individual may be affected more than once per year. If the target is a pagan, then this will create serious internal conflicts; either way, the target may resent this enforced conversion.)

Rites & Representations: St Nikon is represented either in his hegumenic robes (in which case the icon will typically also show other monks taking instruction from him) or else alone in a simple monk's cassock. His feast day is 23 March, although few of his devotees would ever actually feast. [Nee-KON]

Worshippers: Hermits and those who prize piety over petty human relationships.

ST PANTALEIMON THE HEALER

All-Merciful

A pagan doctor who was then exposed to the word of God, one day Pantaleimon came across a boy's body in the road, dead of the bite of a snake who lay nearby. He knew his medical arts could do nothing for the boy, so he instead appealed to God, and the boy awoke and the snake shattered into pieces. He devoted his life to healing the sick and spreading the gospel, until a jealous rival denounced him to the Romans Emperor. He endured torture with fortitude and forgiveness, until the furious emperor had him beheaded.

Abilities: Devotee of St Pantaleimon *or* Initiate of St Pantaleimon, First Aid, Herb Lore, Life of St Pantaleimon.

Virtues: Generous, Merciful.

Affinity: **Healing** (Amputate Damaged Limb, Banish Fever, Close Wound, Drive Out Disease, Heal Otherworldly Being, Pray Out the Poison, Purify Water, Stop Bleeding)

Secret: **Great Healing** (Allows the devotee to carry out major magical healing.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as a beardless young man, bearing either a small wooden box or else medical implements. His day is 27 July. [Pan-ta-LAY-mon]

Worshippers: Healers and any who would know how to heal.

ILYA MUROMETS

GREATEST OF THE BOGATYRS

Never has there been such a mighty and pious Christian hero as Ilya of Murom. Of all the bogatyr, he is the most closely identified with the Orthodox faith, and even though his mortal body is dead, his soul is a powerful presence in the Otherworlds.

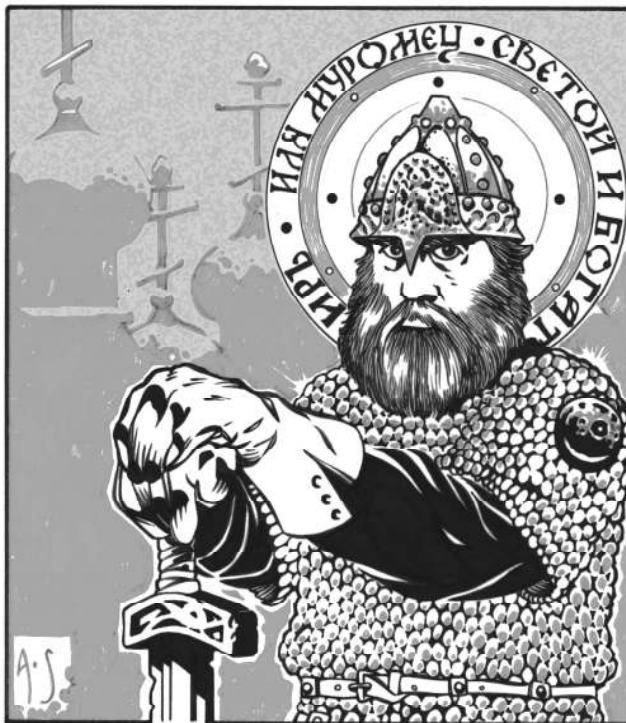
Born of peasant stock in the town of Murom, he was afflicted from the first with complete paralysis of his legs. His family had to leave him lying on their stove every day while they went out to scratch a meagre living.

One day, when Ilya was 33, men wearing rags came by his hut. "Good day, Ilya Muromets," they greeted him, "good day, protector of the Russian land and invincible victor over its foes." Ilya morosely replied that he was no glorious warrior, he who could not even walk. The men scoffed: "Get up, Ilya Muromets, joy to your eager heart, straighten your strong shoulders, stretch your quick legs."

And he did. And the saints who had visited him, their work done, ascended to Heaven.

Ilya proved a fine man, tall, unbelievably strong, skilled with weapons yet never too busy nor too proud to help a stranger. He set out for Kiev, to offer his services to its prince, but on the way was at Chernigov when the Tatars attacked, and he alone drove them off. Then, passing through the Black Mud forest, he was set upon by the infamous bandit Nightingale, who killed traveller after traveller with his terribly loud whistle. Nightingale heard the hoofbeats of Karushka, Ilya's horse, and let out a whistle more fearful than a wolf's howl, a bear's roar, a wardog's bark. The leaves on the trees withered and the grass was flattened, but Ilya simply fired one arrow from his bow, knocking Nightingale from his perch. Binding him to his horse, Ilya continued to Kiev.

There, he entered the service of Prince Vladimir Bright Sun. Many were his adventures. He slaid dragons and ogres, and even the Great Oak Chieftain, an insane leshy who was binding a whole forest of trees into his madness-engorged form. He broke the back of Kredek the Golden Wrestler and carried all twenty-seven Pigeon Children to safety on his shoulders across the flooding Dvina river. He travelled to the Holy Mountains and befriended Svyatogor, last of the trueblood giants. Eventually, though, the bogatyr were forced to take on their greatest challenge yet, when Russia was invaded by a monstrous magical army of strange beasts and entities called the Kams.



The bogatyr could not destroy this army, although they did prevent it from laying waste to Kiev. The final battle was a catastrophic maelstrom of blade and magics, and from it Ilya did not return, as he sacrificed his life that his comrades might live.

His mortal form is destroyed, but he is still encountered in the Otherworlds, slaying the evil, helping the weak, encouraging the down-at-heart. He is a bluff, jovial mountain of a man, but his piety is obvious and his years unable even to walk have left him with a surprising empathy for those in terrible plights. Many know that he is devoted to St Mikhail, but few realise that he is equally committed to St Nicholas the Wonderworker, until they meet him.

Short of archangels and the like, Ilya Muromets is as powerful an entity as heroes might ever meet. No abilities are given here: they would be up to the DM's mark, and in practice narrators should feel free to make them as high as they need to be. After all, this man took on an entire army of Kams... and almost won!

ST PARASKEVA

Saint Friday

A virgin-martyr from Roman times, the cult of St Paraskeva is a thinly-disguised Christianisation of pagan beliefs, but she is widely revered and only the most dour and zealous priests seek to denounce her, despite the antics of the worshippers. She travels the country making sure women do not breach the laws about working on Fridays (they may not spin, wash linen or clean their houses). However, twelve Fridays through the year are considered sacred to her, and on these days men and women will strip naked and dance, claiming to be following the saint's bidding. Even some theologians accept that she is a representation of the joy of creation, but nonetheless the extent to which she is still close to paganism appears reflected in her lack of a Secret.

Abilities: Dance, Devotee of St Paraskeva or Initiate of St Paraskeva, Infectious Joy, Life of St Paraskeva, Make You Smile.

Virtues: Joyous, Unconventional.

Affinity: **Dance of Joy** (Bind Evil in Danced Circle, Infectious Laughter, Join the Dance!, Quickstep, Whirl in a Circle)

Rites & Representations: She is represented either in conventional terms as a tall, austere young woman in cowl or one with long, unbraided and uncovered hair (unusual and rather risqué by Russian standards). Either way, she holds a cross in her right hand. Her day is 28 October. [Pa-ra-SKEY-va]

Worshippers: She is widely worshipped, especially in the countryside.

Disadvantages: Not only do those who follow other forms of Christianity consider her worship blasphemous, but so do the more uptight and scrupulous Russian Orthodox priests.

ST PETER OF THE HORDE

The Tatar Saint

St Peter of the Horde is a most unusual Russian Orthodox saint: a Tatar prince of the Yuhides tribe. He was converted and baptised by Bishop Kirill of Rostov and, given the Horde's permissive views on religion, maintained his position, doing much to spread understanding of the Orthodox way among his peers and develop relations with Rostov in particular. St Peter of the Horde does not provide any specific magic himself, but he does allow his worshippers to see that there is a Christian purpose behind Mongol ancestor worship. His worshippers may become or continue to be initiates (if they are initiates of St Peter) or devotees (if devotees of St Peter) of Mongol Great Ancestors. If they are devotees of a Great Ancestor but only initiates of St Peter, they only act as initiates until they have also become devotees of St Peter. They may also retain powers granted by Little Ancestors. While they may not

join or retain worship of any of the Tenger, devotees can keep any feats they have already acquired as standalone active powers, but these can no longer be improved.

Abilities: Devotee of St Peter of the Horde or Initiate of St Peter of the Horde, Life of St Peter of the Horde, Mongol Customs, Ride, Speak Mongol.

Virtues: Eager to Convert Mongols, Understand Mongol Virtues.

Rites & Representations: He is shown as a man with Mongol features and moustache, wearing a Mongol hat yet holding aloft a crucifix. His feast day is 30 June, although in many places this ends up seeming a rather Mongol celebration, with horse races.

Worshippers: Especially Mongols, but St Peter of the Horde is also popular in Rostov and Moscow, and with some Cossacks.

Disadvantages: Although most Mongols are relatively tolerant, there are those who frown on one of their own who has turned him back on their ancestral ways.



ST PIMEN THE MUCH-AILING

The Sick Saint

Pimen was born ill and went downhill thereafter. Taken by his parents to pray for recovery at the Kiev Caves Monastery, he was instead hit by the revelation that through suffering can come redemption and instead



prayed for continued ill-health. Angels tonsured him and clad him in the raiment of a monk, and he joined the religious order there, although afflicted by great illness until three days before his death. He was tended by the other monks through his life, although many found this a great burden and sometimes neglected to feed him, but Pimen endured all with joy and without complaint, accepting this so that he could still lighten others, through healing and spiritual enlightenment.

When a worshipper of St Pimen heals or aids another through the use of his feats, this counts as Major Magical Healing, but he assumes the illness, impairment or other problem in question at the same rating. Wounds have the same rating as their Mundane Healing Resistance, 'rounding' in favour of the worst result. However, its effect is reduced by the worshipper's *Devotee/Initiate of...* rating. For example, Vadim is Dying (resistance 20 \mathfrak{M}). If Olga heals him, she acquires the same terrible wound, but fortunately she has *Devotee of St Pimen* 5 \mathfrak{M} , so she merely suffers a wound with a rating of 15, which means an Impairment (as a Hurt is 14, so the effect is 'rounded' to the next worst). On any result less than a Complete success, the narrator may rule either that only partial healing has occurred, or that the healer has actually suffered greater harm as a result.

Abilities: Devotee of St Pimen the Much-Ailing or Initiate of St Pimen the Much-Ailing, Know All About Illnesses, Life of St Pimen the Much-Ailing, Sneeze and Sniffle [or some other minor, persistent ailment], Survive Regardless.

Virtues: Gloomy, Self-Sacrificing, Uncomplaining.

Affinity: **Take On Burden** (Suck Out Poison, Take on Disease, Take on Fatigue, Take on Misery, Take on Pain, Take on Wound)

Rites & Representations: Pimen is depicted as a gaunt, pale and beardless figure in monk's habit. His feast day is 7 August, but his true devotees are feeling too weak to eat much. [PEE-men]

Worshippers: Healers and hypochondriacs, and those somewhere in between.

ST PROKOPPI OF USTIUG

The Holy Fool of Novgorod

Russia has a strong tradition of the *yurodyvy* [You-Roh-DEE-vee], the 'holy fool', who is a saint but appears a madman or imbecile. Prokopii was one such, a German who, while visiting Novgorod, was exposed to the transcendent truths of Russian Orthodox and converted. After a brief and unsuccessful stint as a monk he took to the road, sometimes wandering naked, ranting, gibbering and observing no rules but his own. Wherever he went, though, he spread wisdom and performed miracles, but in such a way that at first people did not realise he was anything but a deranged vagabond. He has no secret – he says he lost it, somewhere on the road from tomorrow to yesterday.

Abilities: Beg for Alms, Crazy Caper, Devotee of St Prokopii of Ustiug or Initiate of St Prokopii of Ustiug, Disconcerting Rant, Endure Bad Weather, Life of St Prokopii of Ustiug, Unexpected Insight, Walk All Day.

Virtues: Erratic, Erratic, Erratic, Holy.

Affinity: **Holy Fool** (Distracting Outburst, Hide Truth in Gibberish, Mock the Pompous, Show People Themselves, Vile Odours)

Rites & Representations: There are few icons of St Prokopii, but he is generally represented as a figure in ragged clothes looking heavenwards with outstretched hands. He is celebrated 8 July, a day in which a feast is laid on for the beggars and vagrants of the area, and sometimes in which a tolerant or pious elder or other authority figure will wear rags and caper for the entertainment of the people he exploits for the rest of the year. [Pro-COP-ee-ee of Ust-YUG]

Worshippers: Those chosen by him, whether that means they are blessed or cursed.

Disadvantages: Pretty obvious, really...

ST ROMANOS

The Melodist

Romanos is the patron of church choirs and hymns, inspired by the Virgin Mary.

Abilities: Conduct Choir, Devotee of St Romanos or Initiate of St Romanos, Know Holy Music, Life of St Romanos, Perfect Pitch, Sing.

Virtues: Inspired, Musical.

Affinity: **Holy Music** (Deep Note, Harness Power of Song, Soaring High Note, Sing Together)

Secret: **Harmony** (If others are seeking to augment the devotee using any kind of musical magic or ability, they do so using both their own rating and also the secret's. For example, if choirmaster Yerofei Porfirovich is using his *Soaring High Note* feat to try and shatter the White Princess's Glass Troika, his ten choristers would each provide not just a +2 augment for their *Sing* 20 but an additional +2 for his *Harmony* 1 \mathfrak{M} , giving him a total augment of 40!)

Rites & Representations: He is depicted as a clear-shaven man, directing a choir. His feast day is 1 October. [ROW-man-os]

Worshippers: Choristers, choir masters and those who sing.

ST SVETLANA OF THE WELL

The Chaste Saint

Photina – whom the Russians call Svetlana – was a Samaritan woman of loose morals until she met Jesus at Jacob's Well. She was instantly converted and began preaching the gospel, until eventually joyously



embracing martyrdom when drowned in a well by the Romans (let no one say those pagans had no sense of irony). She is now patron of the struggle against the demons of lust, and much revered by fathers with pubescent daughters and spinsters of every age.

Abilities: Devotee of St Svetlana of the Well or Initiate of St Svetlana of the Well, Intimidate Suitor, Life of St Svetlana of the Well, Sense Lustful Thoughts.

Virtues: Chaste, Disapproving, Prudish.

Affinity: **The Light of Chastity** (Banish Lust, Blind Rapist, Inflict Headache, Let Virgins Glow, Strengthen Will)

Secret: **Dampen Ardour** (The devotee is surrounded by an invisible aura of innocence and prudery. All lustful thoughts in her immediate proximity, all gluttonous delight in food, all fiery passions, all self-indulgent vices – indeed, almost any passions beyond those for God and His works – are dampened by this. In effect, relevant character traits, relationships and even certain abilities are temporarily reduced by the secret’s rating.)

Rites & Representations: St Svetlana is represented as a dark-haired woman in eastern headdress. Her feast day is 20 March, when wells are covered over. [Svet-LA-na]

Worshippers: Those who value chastity over loose morals, and see no reason to keep their opinions to themselves.

ST TRYPHON

The Goose Martyr

Tryphon was a simple Christian peasant boy who reared geese in Phrygia, plucked from obscurity when it became known that the demon possessing the daughter of the Roman Emperor could only be driven out by one called Tryphon. Many by that name were brought to court to no avail, until the young peasant was summoned. He prayed before the child, and the demon was banished. The emperor was grateful, but his successor was a cruel pagan tyrant, who has Tryphon tortured, before the Lord took his soul. He is now revered as the patron of geese and other birds.

Abilities: Bird Lore, Devotee of St Tryphon or Initiate of St Tryphon, Life of St Tryphon, Look After Birds, Train Birds.

Virtues: Love Birds, Simple Faith.

Affinity: **Birds** (Command Bird, Eyes of a Falcon, Goose Honk, Heal Bird, Sing like a Canary)

Secret: **Bird Form** (The devotee may become a bird; a single type of bird is selected on acquiring this secret, then one more each mastery that is acquired. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In bird form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those

physical characteristics which seem appropriate. For example, Keen Sight will transfer, but Tie Ropes will be rather beyond the shape’s capabilities. The secret’s rating can be used to augment any of the form’s natural abilities, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Rites & Representations: Tryphon is typically represented as a young man, clean-shaven, with either a falcon on his arm or a dove flying about him. His feast day is 1 February. [TREE-fon]

Worshippers: Those who love or work with birds.

Disadvantages: His worshippers may kill and eat birds, but may not let them suffer.

ST VARVARA

The Saint in the Tower

St Varvara (Barbara) was a beautiful maiden, martyred in the 3rd century. She is now a patron of miners, architects and stonemasons, because she spent most of her life imprisoned in a tower by her tyrannical pagan father, so she learnt to understand stone and construction, among other arts. She is a miracle-worker, and her bones are some of the most sacred relics in Kiev.

Abilities: Architect, Devotee of St Varvara or Initiate of St Varvara, Educated, Life of St Varvara, Move in Confined Spaces.

Virtues: Make the Best of Things, Self-Reliant.

Affinity: **Bastion** (Hold Up Roof, Know Way Out, Sense Weakness in Structure, Stone Bones, Tough as Stone)

Secret: **Build A Tower High** (The hero may command rock and brick to reshape itself temporarily, whether to create a tunnel or opening in a wall or even to form a structure. Each use of the secret brings about a single transmutation, and must succeed against a resistance of 14 if raw stone or stacked bricks, 20 if already shaped in some form, with an additional +5 for simple structures, up to +40 for a magnificently decorated castle. The effect only lasts so long as the hero continues to pray audibly. The change happens quickly, but not so quick as to allow anyone to be buried or otherwise directly attacked – although it would be possible to trap them by throwing a wall around them. This is also a power of building, not destroying; it cannot, for example, be used to remove the bottom story of bricks to bring a wall crashing down, but it could open a hole in the wall or turn a section of a wall into a bridge over a moat. It has no effect on earth, wood or wet clay, just stone, baked bricks and the like.)

Rites & Representations: St Varvara is shown as a beautiful, long-haired young woman, hands clasped in prayer or holding a crucifix, often against the backdrop of a tower. Her feast day is 4 December, a good day to lay the foundation

stone or carve the first post of a new building. [VAR-va-ra]

Worshippers: As well as professionals using stone, she is beloved as a patron for educated women.

Disadvantages: Many worshippers also acquire the flaw *Agoraphobic*.

ST VLADIMIR

Bright Sun



Vladimir was the prince of Kiev who converted to Christianity in 988 – and his city with him. He is thus considered the first evangelist of Russia, but is essentially a saint-hero rather than a purely religious Power. (Cynics say that his conversion was a political move, and this is why he has no secret, but they will no doubt burn in hell for their impiety.) In Kiev and elsewhere he is also regarded as a patron of all good and great Christian rulers.

Abilities: Commanding Presence, Devotee of St Vladimir or Initiate of St Vladimir, Life of St Vladimir, Order People About.

Virtues: Authoritative, Evangelical, Think New Thoughts.

Affinity: **Prince of God** (Baptismal Blessing, Bright as the Sun, Strike Down Rebel, Summon the Godly, Topple Pagan Idols)

Rites & Representations: St Vladimir is always shown in conventional terms, as a crowned prince in his robes, with crucifix in one hand, the other empty or holding a sword. His feast day is 4 February, still a great festival in Kiev. [Vlad-DEE-mir]

Worshippers: Princes, warriors, evangelists and proud subjects of Kiev.

Disadvantages: St Vladimir cannot be worshipped through *duoverie* as well as pagan Powers. Furthermore, pagans who do not practice *duoverie* often despise St Vladimir – and by extension his worshippers – for turning against the old ways.

ST VLASII

The Earthly Shepherd

Vlasii was a 3rd century shepherd from Cappadocia, but his cult within the Russian Orthodox faith is clearly a Christianised form of Veles the Cattleman, and as such is fairly popular in the countryside, but less so in the cities.

Abilities: Country Wisdom, Devotee of St Vlasii or Initiate of St Vlasii, Life of St Vlasii, Tend [Herd Animal], [Herd Animal] Lore.

Virtues: Care for Herd, Conservative, Hard Working, Stubborn.

Affinity: **Cows, Sheep and Goats** (Climb Like a Goat, Find Herd, Gather Herd, Know Numbers of Herd, Master Herd Leader, Sense Predators)

Secret: **Protect Herd** (Gives an bonus of ¼ the secret's rating when protecting the devotee's herd.)

Rites & Representations: There are two clear schools in representing Vlasii: a conventional one, found largely in the cities, which portrays him as an elderly robed man holding a closed book, and the more widespread and semi-pagan form, in which he is shown as a young, powerful-looking man in simple robes, often holding a crook and always surrounded by cows, sheep and goats. [St Blaise of Cappadocia] [VLAS-ee]

Worshippers: Herders and those who depend on animals for their livelihoods.

Connections: Worshippers of Veles and Vlasii tend to cooperate well.

ST YAROPOLK OF VLADIMIR

Holy Prince of Vladimir

Prince Yaropolk Izyaslavich was the grandson of Yaroslav the Wise of Kiev, and great-grandson of St. Vladimir. When his father Great Prince Izyaslav was ousted from Kiev by his brothers' treachery, Yaroslav stayed with him and became his emissary, dealing with mighty rulers across Europe, including the Polish king, the German emperor, and the Bishop of Rome. Thanks in great part to his diplomatic skills, when Great Prince Svyatoslav died, his father was restored to Kiev. He eventually became prince of the city of Vladimir, where he carried out great Christian works, until he was murdered by a traitor. He is said to have bargained away his secret for unity amongst the Rus' – but it is largely the Muscovites who say so, claiming to be the rightful leaders of a unified people.

Abilities: Devotee of St Yaropolk of Vladimir or Initiate of St Yaropolk of Vladimir, Easy Charm, Life of St Yaropolk of Vladimir, Literate, Self-Control, Speak German or Speak Latin or Speak Polish, Speak Pretty.

Virtues: Adventurous, Loyal, Tactful.

Affinity: **Diplomat** (Beguiling Flattery, Defuse Anger, Delayed-Action Insult, Sense Motivation, Smile Regardless, Trust Me)

Rites & Representations: He is portrayed as a middle-aged man in fine but simple robes and a princely circlet. His feast day of 22 November is a propitious day for treaties and diplomatic missions.



Worshippers: Professional and amateur diplomats and those who prefer talking to fighting. He is a patron of the city of Vladimir.

Connections: His cult is linked with St Vladimir's.

MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Mother of All

The Virgin Mary is considered not only 'Saint of Saints' but also a special protector figure. This, the core aspect, celebrates her role as Mother of God and thus mother of all. Pagans associate her with Moist Mother Earth, and how the Christian responds to this parallel is a pretty good measure of their tolerance towards *dvoeverie*. Precisely because she is such an all-embracing Power, while every good Christian reveres her, she has relatively few initiates and devotees: in some ways, she is too broad in her role and deep in her religious significance for mere mortals to feel comfortable trying to emulate her.

Abilities: Calmness, Devotee of the Most Holy Mother of God *or* Initiate of the Most Holy Mother of God, Good Mothering, Life of the Mother of God.

Virtues: Loving, Merciful, Serene.

Affinity: **Holy Mother** (Bless Child, Ensure Safe Childbirth, Heal Hurt, Protect Child, Protect Family)

Secret: **Blessing of the Most Holy Mother** (The devotee and those immediately around her to whom she extends her protection automatically receive the secret's auto-augment bonus to any attempts they make to resist adverse influences whether attacks, illness, intimidation or sadness.)

Rites & Representations: The Virgin Mary is depicted conventionally, as a cowed woman, sometimes holding the infant Jesus, always with resplendent halo. The Nativity of the Ever-Virgin Mary is held on 21 September: a day of muted reverence inside the churches, joyous festivity outside.

Worshippers: The Most Holy Mother is widely revered.

OUR LADY OF MERCY

Merciful Mother

This aspect of the Virgin Mary emphasises her merciful, healing and protective character.

Abilities: Calming Presence, Devotee of Our Lady of Mercy *or* Initiate of Our Lady of Mercy, First Aid, Life of the Mother of God.

Virtues: Merciful, Serene.

Affinity: **Mercy** (Banish Fear, Drive Away Disease, Drive Out Devil, Heal Hurt, Heal Injury, Keep

Nightmares at Bay, Raise Spirits with a Smile, Stop Blow)

Secret: **Great Mercy** (Allows the devotee to carry out major magical healing.)

Rites & Representations: As above, although she is more likely to be raising a hand in blessing.

Worshippers: Healers and any who would know how to heal.

OUR LADY OF [LOCATION]

Grace to [Location]!

Many Russian towns, cities and regions have tales of visitations by the Mother of God, and have therefore their own local take on her worship. That said, the variations between them are sufficiency minor that they can be treated as the same keyword.

Abilities: Devotee of Our Lady of [Location] *or* Initiate of Our Lady of [Location], History of [Location], Life of the Mother of God, [Location] Ways and Culture.

Virtues: Love [Location], Merciful.

Affinity: **Patron** (Know Distance to [Location], Know Way to [Location], Resist Threat to [Location], Sense Mood of [Location], and one particular feat special to each location)

Secret: **Local Hero** (The hero gains a bonus of ¼ the secret's rating when in the location sacred to his aspect.)

Rites & Representations: As above, but generally bearing some item symbolic of the location. As well as the Nativity, she will have a local festival day sacred to her.

Worshippers: Those who love both the Mother of God and their how town or region.

Example: Our Lady of Igor is linked with the town of Chernigov, although it is named for the twelfth-century Christian prince Igor Olegovich who later became a monk and was martyred in his monastic cell. As well as *Know Way to Chernigov* and the like, worship of this aspect provides the specific feat *Terrifying Roar*, which seem incongruous, but reflects her mastery of the Chernigov Beast. Her icon in Chernigov is specially commemorated on 5 June, a festival day in the city.



14. EAST OF THE SUN AND WEST OF THE MOON

“You can always see a stranger sight than yesterday’s.”

The world is a strange and extraordinary place. For all that, there are always stranger places than the ones you know, just over the horizon or round the corner, east of the sun and west of the moon.

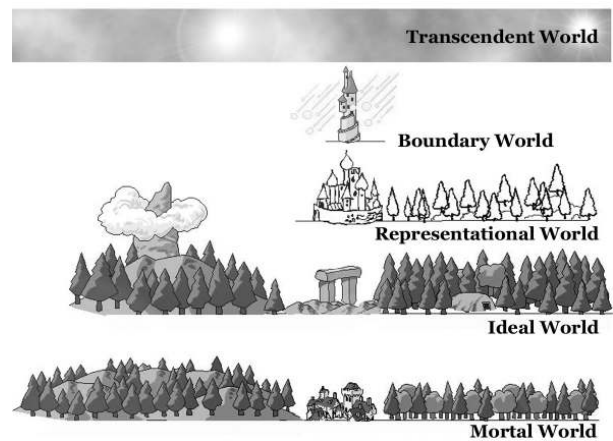
To the people of **Mythic Russia**, their whole world is a mysterious and uncertain place. To be sure, the peasant knows his own hut and village and the land thereabouts, but even there the evidence of magic and otherworldly powers is plain to be seen. From the homely domovoy, the house spirit who scuttles under the floor at night looking after the family that treats him right, to the mighty and often dangerous spirits of the wilds like the rusalkas and the leshy, all the way to the great bogatyrs, the heroes of the stories who still live in the Otherworlds and occasionally tread the mortal earth again, the ordinary Russian knows the fantastical is all around

him. Likewise, the Christian monk might scorn the pagan views of those peasants, but that is not because he disbelieves in them, but because he disapproves. Instead, he sees daily the way prayer can repel evil sendings and the healing power of a holy icon and knows that saints and angels and their representatives walk among mortals.

The Otherworlds overlay to a greater or lesser extent every corner of the Mortal World. They are magically powerful ‘layers’ in which live strange beasts and people, where mortals can meet saints and devils, heroes and gods. They are reflections of the Mortal World but they also affect it, and it is to the Otherworlds that your heroes may have to go to wreak the most powerful magics and face their most terrible foes.

THE MANY WORLDS

The Otherworlds are perhaps best conceptualised as a relief map, from which hills and mountains rise from a flat plain. Superimposed onto the whole **Mortal World** is a first ‘level’ of otherworldliness, technically described by the kind of bookish sorcerer who cares about naming such things as the **Ideal World**, for reasons discussed below. However, in places, the ‘plain’ of the Ideal World is largely overlain by a second ‘level’ of magic, representing places which are further from the world of mortals and stronger in magic and mystery. Collectively, these are known as the **Representational World**. Some of the ‘uplands’ of this Representational World stretch still higher, forming ‘hills’ further still from the mundane, mortal world. These constitute the **Boundary or Transitional World**. A handful stretch further still, into the ‘mountains’ of the **Transcendent World**, as far as mortals can possibly venture – and the rarest and most powerful of them, at that.



A Simplified Model of the Otherworlds

mortal realm by a veil of magic and belief. Where there are concentrations of humans, their mundane essences, the power of their prayers and charms, all help reinforce that intangible barrier between the two. But the barrier is much weaker in the wilds beyond the fields, farms and cities, especially the dark, trackless forests which to many Russians already seem like an alien, magical land.

TRAVEL BETWEEN THE WORLDS

There are ways, doors and accidents. The Ideal World is just around the invisible corner, separated from the





Contest: Crossing from the Mortal to the Ideal World

Abilities: Piety or an ability specific to crossing into Otherworlds; **Augments:** Magic abilities, relationships or character traits very specifically linked to the hero's reasons for crossing. See also below.

Resistance: 1114; **Modifiers:** see below.

Outcome: On any victory, the hero is successful and crosses into the Ideal World at a location analogous to his location in the Mortal World. On a Tie, the hero is successful, but has experienced some problems. Perhaps he passes through the veil but is unable to bring his followers through with him, or is hurt, or naked. On a Marginal defeat, the hero has failed but can try again after at least 24 hours' rest, meditation, prayer or similar preparation. On any worse defeat, he has failed and will also suffer suitable impairment to his abilities. He cannot retry for at least 24 hours and until those impairments are removed.

Notes: The narrator should feel free to dispense with the roll or to ignore the result if it fits the needs of the story. However, in this case, the hero may still experience some of the problems noted above.

Modifiers to the Resistance:

'Thin' place: -20 or more. Places with even lower resistances than 1113 are rare and usually protected.

'Wilderness': -10. The presence of humans strengthens the veil, but places furthest from their mundanity are magically richer. This means the heart of the deepest forests, the northern wastes of Siberia and the like, not just some hill a day's walk from a city.

Deep winter: -10. Winter is when the old magics are strongest, and winds howl between the worlds, sometimes taking mortals with them.

Bonuses to the Hero:

Propitious day: +1 to +5. A Christian seeking to cross the veil on a Sunday would get a +1, while using the specific day of the saint the hero is invoking would merit +5.

Rituals: +1 to +5; in addition, this is often the basis for Community Support if the hero has others seeking to speed him on his way.

Augments: Spiritually- or magically-powerful characters may also provide augments, as may appropriate characteristics or relationships.

After all, there are holes, through which it is possible simply to stumble unknowingly from one world to another: the woodland track, say, which leads you not to the village you expected, but a mighty clearing where spirits dance and play, or the river which carries you down towards the realm of the dead or a city of talking animals.

Or heroes will seek to enter the Otherworlds, first into to relatively near realms of the spirits of nature and place, but perhaps even further – if they dare – 'beyond the thrice-ninth kingdom,' into the most distant and magical realms: the land of the dead, realm of the Sea Tsar, and perhaps even the mystic planes where the truly holy can meet with saints and angels.

Crossing into the Ideal World

Crossing the veil from the Mortal to the Ideal World is the hardest task, but can also be done anywhere. It is 'simply' a matter of pitting the hero's Piety against the veil's resistance – however, as this is typically 1114, this may be a formidable task. Thus, it is far more often the case that the hero must rely on rituals, community support and propitious locations and times to help him in his quest.

Crossing back is much easier, and involves no contest. However, this will take several hours' travelling, meditating or whatever seems most appropriate, and cannot be done while fatigued, engaged in a contest or otherwise distracted.

Crossing into the Representational World

Travelling from the Ideal to the Representational World is actually rather easier – so long as the hero is travelling into a portion of the latter which reflects his own religious beliefs. Thus, a Russian Christian in the location analogous to Novgorod would move easily into the Russian Orthodox Representational World, but if he travelled eastwards into the Ideal World analogous to the Mongol steppes, would find it much harder to cross into its spirit realm.

The contest, such as it is, takes the form of finding a suitable crossing point into the Representational World, but in reality simply reflects how easily the hero is able to *believe* his way out of the Ideal. The crossing point could be anything suitable, that fits the hero's mythic idiom. A Christian might come across a deserted chapel, in which is a door beyond, while a pagan might instead come across a winding path through a magical grove; either way, they will know it when they see it. The only hard and fast rule is that it will not be in the immediate location in which the hero crossed through into the Ideal World (even though it may be very close by).

To travel back into the Ideal World, either the hero can return to the original crossing point, which is automatically successful, or else can seek to find a new one: use the contest above, but the effect of a Complete failure is to maroon the hero in the Representational World, unless freed by another or until he returns to his original crossing point.





Crossing into and from the Boundary and Transcendent Worlds

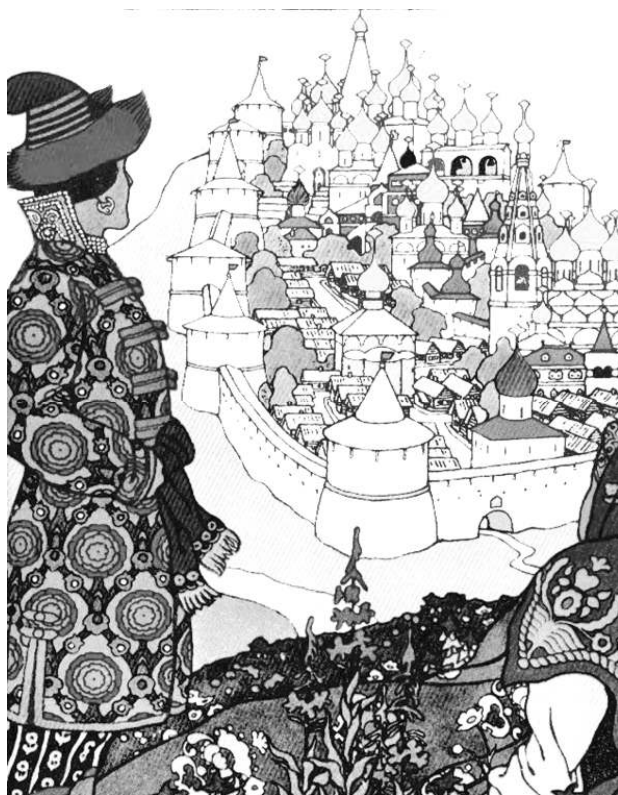
These involve no contests at all, but instead can only take place at specific locations, locations which generally have their own guardians and strictures. These are places of extraordinary power, and no extraordinary mortals will see them, or see them and survive. But then again, heroes are *heroes*, are they not?

Example: Andrei's Journey (1)

Prince Andrei of the Three Gold Debts, youngest son of the prince of Ryazan, is betrothed to Shining Feodosiya, fairest maiden in all the Russias (well, in his opinion, at least). In the course of foiling an attempt by his uncle Vasily to seize the throne, a curse was cast at him by a Sibiryak shaman. Feodosiya flung herself in its path to save him, and has been turned into a perfect ice sculpture. Even in the coldest, deepest cell in the Ryazan kremlin's dungeons, it will not be long before she melts. Bishop Epifany has counselled him that his best hope of saving her is to seek the intercession of St Basil of Ryazan, patron of their city and wonderworker. As a minor saint, he might be found on any of the Otherworlds, but he is most likely to be around the location of Ryazan or else Murom, his first bishopric, from whence he saved the fabled Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Murom. Andrei is told by his father's wise steward, Mikhail Mstislavlovich, that a small church to the south of the city is an especially propitious crossing-place, so on 3 July – St Basil's day – and after a day's spiritual preparation and a night's prayer, Andrei seeks to use the power of the church to enter the Ideal World.

The normal barrier between the Mortal and Ideal Worlds is 1114, but this is reduced by 20 because the church is a 'thin' place in the veil between the worlds, so the resistance is 1113.

Andrei has no special magics, so he is using his *Worship God* 511, augmented by *Love Feodosiya* 1011 (+3) and *Sense of Duty* 411 (+2) for a total rating of 1011. He gets a bonus of +2 for his hurried ritual, +5 for a propitious day and the communal support of his family, court and the people of Ryazan provide another +12, so 9112. At the last minute, Epifany personally blesses him, providing another +5, bringing him to 14112.



The contest is thus 14112 against 1113, or in other words 14 against 111. Fortunately, Andrei has a hero point ready for judicious use, and he succeeds...

Living in the Otherworlds?

It must seem tempting sometimes, on finding some especially lush region of the Ideal World or religiously-uplifting corner of the Representational, simply to stay and enjoy its delights. However, mortals are not meant to live for long beyond the Mortal World.

First, all the main religions consider this a sin and presumption. Even if heroes feel able or willing to ignore this stricture, those around them will at best shun them as apostate, at worst consider them enemies, whose defiance of their faith merits chastisement or even death.

Contest: Crossing from the Ideal to the Representational World

Abilities: As for crossing into the Ideal, without the additional modifiers.

Resistance: 10112; *Modifiers:* +10 resistance if crossing into a region of the Representational World of slightly different nature (Russian Orthodox into Greek Orthodox, for example), +20 if great difference (Catholic into Romuva, for instance). Where a group of heroes are seeking to cross, use the most disadvantageous modifier.

Outcome: On any victory, the hero is successful and crosses. On a major or complete victory, this is almost immediate, involving no more than a few minutes' searching to find a suitable gateway. On a minor victory, this takes an hour, a marginal 6 hours. In the case of a tie, it takes a day. On any defeats less than complete, the hero will find a gateway, but this will take time (up to a week) and possibly other challenges and problems experienced on the way. In addition, the hero will suffer the usual impairments. On a complete failure, something has gone catastrophically wrong, and the hero is stuck in the Ideal World until someone else is able to free him.

Notes: As usual, the narrator should feel free to dispense with the roll or to ignore the result if it fits the needs of the story.



Secondly, there are denizens of these worlds who might take exception, and by definition they are often magically powerful.

Thirdly, just as the residents of the Otherworlds cannot live long in the Mortal World, so too mortals will not last long away from their rightful place. Even if they seem to sleep deeply and eat well, nonetheless over time they begin to lose strength, health and will. For every week after the first spent out of the Mortal World, they lose 5 hero points, representing their willpower or protection from their gods. If they do not have all 5 to spend, they instead lose 1 from each and every ability and affinity they have. This is a permanent loss (though abilities can be bought back up again with hero points) rather than a temporary one which can be healed. The only exception to this is when they are either under the protection of a powerful entity that does belong there (for example, as a guest of the Sea Tsar) or directly placed somewhere by a deity, saint, Fate or the like. For example, the death of his mortal shell moved the hero Ilya Muromets into the Otherworlds, where he now lives.

Time in the Otherworlds

On the whole, time in the Otherworlds passes much the same as in the Mortal World. Night follows day, summer follows spring, and winter here is winter there. Of course, there are always exceptions, particular places where time may pass so quickly that a mortal tarries for a night and returns to find a year or a century gone or, alternatively, places where a hero may heal his wounds and hone his skills at his leisure and return to face his foe as if no more than minutes had passed. These are, however, very rare and special places, whose secrets are never learnt easily or without price.

Bringing Things Back, Leaving Them Behind...

Heroes will often travel into the Otherworlds on quests to gain powers, artefacts or trophies. In all cases, these ought to be gained through play and will need to be cemented with hero points. Generally speaking, heroes can travel into Otherworlds with whatever they can carry or keep close to them. A horse or hunting dog will travel with the hero; a cart may well force the hero to take a penalty to his attempt to cross the veil. An army will have to travel through one soldier at a time, which is why the Otherworlds are places visited by few mortals.

THE IDEAL WORLD

The Ideal World is shaped by the natural world.

The term for the 'nearest' Otherworld, which stretches across the mortal world, does not mean that it is especially wonderful. Some parts of it are, but others are terrible and barren. Instead, it reflects the fact that this Otherworld appears like an idealised reflection of the mortal one. The seas are that much bluer and somehow wetter, the cornfields a bright enough gold the dazzle in the sunlight, the forests taller than any forest ought to be, and dark with brooding menace...

The Ideal World is not a simple likeness of the mortal one, though. On the whole, for example, human activity is too insignificant to be reflected directly in it. There are, to be sure, centres on the sites of the greatest human cities, such as Constantinople and Rome, but on the whole the places reflecting the locations of towns and village are bare, or else marked by some other symbol. Thus, Kiev's space in the Ideal World is occupied by a grand ruin of an ancient, cyclopean fort, a melancholy place silent but for the constant whistle of the wind from the east and the howls of distant wolves. It is magically powerful for all that, and hidden caves beneath the ruin lead into the Representational World, just as heroes may be able to make that journey by leaping from its crumbling walls.

The Ideal World is inhabited by some people, who live, love, fight and die on this plane. To them, the Mortal World is a terribly drab land, insubstantial to their senses, unsatisfying to their stomachs and unsustainable to their essences. If brought to the Mortal World then they will generally sicken and die or fade away in a few months. Most of the inhabitants of the Ideal World are animals, spirits and hybrids of the two. There are talking dogs and flying horses, goblins and talking trees. In many cases, these are beings which routinely travel to the Mortal World, like the prophetic syrens or the dangerous vodyanoi that haunt the streams and rivers of Russia. For them, travel across the veil is relatively easy, and they may even cross it every night. Whereas the basic rating of normal folk in the Mortal World is 20, in the Ideal World it is 20^{mf}.

Example: Andrei's Journey (2)

Andrei ends his prayer and opens his eyes: the church has gone, marked only by a roughly cruciform shape of paler grass. Around him, the rolling hills are a lush, almost caricature green. In a vividly blue sky, a cloud in the shape of a mounted warrior ponderously circles another, which stretches out like a dragon. The very air sparkles in his lungs. After a moment's awestruck reverie, the young prince remembers the urgency of his quest. Epifany had told him to seek around for a gateway into the next Otherworld, but when asked what it would look like, had simply waved a hand airily and smiled into his beard.

Andrei is pitting his 10^{mf} (the original bonuses from the ritual, etc, no longer apply) against 10^{mf}2: or 10 against 10^{mf} (as he will be travelling into a Russian Orthodox region). He rolls an 11, a failure, while the narrator rolls a 7, a success which the mastery then bumps to a critical. This would be a Major defeat – Andrei would still get to the Representational World, but it would take perhaps a week: can Feodosiya last that long? Instead, he burns another hero point to turn his failure into a success, and so suffers just a Minor defeat. The narrator decides to delay Andrei by a day, during which time he will find himself having to bargain with a polevik field-spirit to walk the strange crop-circle in its field of 10'-high corn, which will take him through into the Representational World...

THE REPRESENTATIONAL WORLD

The Representational World is shaped by faith and extraordinary individuals.

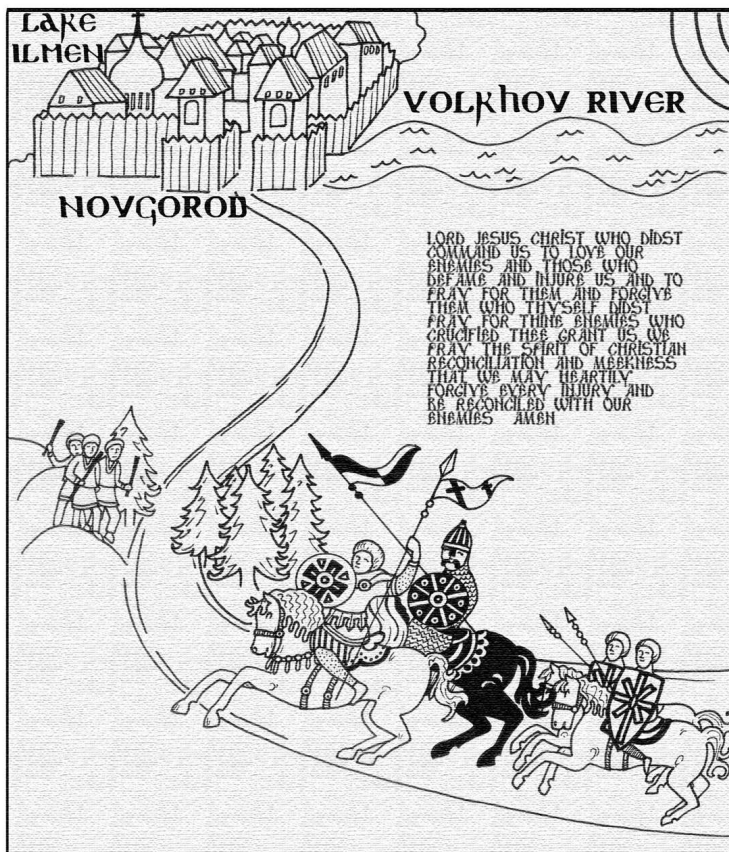
The Ideal World is essentially constant, its shape dictated more by the geography of the Mortal World than human belief. However, the more magically charged the Otherworlds, the more they are fashioned by faith. The Representational World overlies most but not all of the Ideal World – in some areas, where magic is weak or which witnessed ancient cataclysms, the Ideal World is all there is. The Representational World, though, takes a form based upon the prevailing belief system of those who live in its Mortal counterpart.

Thus, the Representational World corresponding to Western Europe is shaped by Catholic iconography and

appears to mortal eyes like a parchment psalter or manuscript page, on which the figures of knights and peasants pass between symbolic representations of cities or woods and around the illuminated words of sermons and sayings. However, as befits their practice of *duoeverie*, the Representational World over the realms of the Rus' are a blend of Russian Orthodox and pagan symbolism. The cities are largely dominated by the former, and there heroes take the form of Orthodox icons, travelling through lands richly depicted in reds and golds. However, out in the countryside, this often shifts subtly into older, pagan imagery owing as much to the vigorous folk-art of the Norse and slav cultures. Each culture and faith chapter gives a sense of the particular idiom of its part of the Representational World.

This is a land of saints and heroes. There are 'ordinary' people here, but they are little more than ciphers, all but faceless extras in great epics. A traveller could, for example, walk through the streets of the great city which represents Constantinople, and be surrounded by thronging crowds, but they would be just carrying out their usual daily routines. They have an average ability of around 20m2, but this is essentially limited to their professional skills and their defensive capacities – one of the faceless warriors guarding a city gate might be able to resist attacks at 20m2, but his own retaliatory ability would probably be around 20. Conversation with these extras is possible but usually unrewarding; they can haggle, and fight, and flirt, and laugh, but none of this means anything in the great scheme of things. Kill one today, and tomorrow there will be another, almost identical, taking his place. Amongst them, though, might walk lesser Greek saints or more likely holy men perhaps on the road to sainthood, heroes of the land and at times even the Emperor and his closest allies. They have might and power and self-will, and it is in the interaction with them that meaningful change can be brought to the Representational World.

How can you tell the difference? Form in the Representational World reflects essence, character and magical might. A warrior will look like a knight or the like, and without special magics cannot be disguised. Likewise, just as in medieval art great saints are depicted as physically larger than those around them, so too does size reflect power. One of the ordinary denizens of this world will seem about 5 feet tall, as will a hero whose highest magical rating or Piety is no more than 10m1. However, a hero with abilities as high as 1m4 will appear at least three times as tall! How does he walk through a door that fits a 'normal' person? Easily: remember, the Representational World is not a fixed and entirely logical one, it is perhaps best considered a dream. He just does walk through the doorway, just as he can stand up inside a peasant's hut, sleep in that peasant's bed or be as filled by the same portion of food as that peasant eats.



Oleg and a couple of retainers accompany the young Prince Ivan of Tver on a trip to Novgorod in the Representational World. Oleg's skill and Ivan's status ensure that they are substantial figures on the wooden 'sheet' of the iconic world, brightly inked and gilded. The retainers are smaller forms, as are the three anonymous hoodlums who are about to spring from ambush, and will regret they ever did. The labels on important places are quite usual for the Russian Orthodox Representational World, as are the occasional floating uplifting texts, which sometimes offer advice, warnings or guidance to those who are open to their messages.



Example: Andrei's Journey (3)

At the end of the crop-circle, Andrei trips on something and tumbles. When he opens his eyes and stands, he finds an even more amazing sight greets him. The world has become a huge icon, a wooden sheet stretching into the distance, painted in colours of such bright vibrancy that for a moment he is dazzled. Near to hand, where a grove of unnaturally-tall trees stood before, is instead a dark green drawing of some trees. Further away, on the horizon, a gilt onion-dome marks the place where Ryazan is in the Mortal Realm, and to which he knows he must go. As he steps out, he realises that he too has changed: where once was skin and silk and steel is a living illustration, a prince but (sadly accurately) not a warrior.

Across this strange realm he strides. As the gilt sun hangs in the smeared cobalt heavens, he comes across a village, and peasants about a foot shorter than him bow in obeisance and bring him bread and salt in greeting, kvass for refreshing and salted pork in respect. Yet even to a prince such as Andrei who pays the common folk little attention, they seem strangely anonymous, identical, their faces blurred, their voices hard to distinguish.

In due course, he reaches the simple caricature of a city representing Ryazan, although he understands that it is not his city. The guards at the gate let him pass, nonetheless, and somehow stepping into this symbol (which seemed no more than a few man-heights around) he finds himself in a bustling market. Again, though, the crowds seems more like a single simple sea of people more than a collection of individuals. Across the way, though, a figure catches his eye, a simple monk, yet taller even than he...

THE BOUNDARY OR TRANSITIONAL WORLD

The Transitional World is shaped by growth and passage.

Of all the Otherworlds, the Boundary or Transitional World is perhaps the least distinctive, but nonetheless important. Whereas most of the Mortal Realm is overlain by the Representational World, there are relatively few pockets of Boundary World. Their main importance is that they are routes elsewhere, to other Boundary regions or else further still from the mundane and towards the Transcendent World.

Each Boundary World is defined by its location and also its routes. Most connect to other Boundary regions or the Transcendent World related to its particular faith. Thus, for example, the pagan Thrice Ninth Land occupies a location analogous to lands north-east of Kiev, but is also connected to the Bear's Forest far to the north, another Boundary region, as well as the Summer Land and Winter Land, two pagan Rus' regions of the Transcendent World.

Travel along these routes seems like a journey, sometimes epic, but actually takes very little time, typically only an hour or two. However, there are often all sorts of guardians, tests and other obstacles to taking them. Beyond those more substantial realms within the Rus' Otherworlds, though, few entities actually live in the Boundary World, beyond those placed there by greater powers as watchers, guides or guardians. Their typical abilities are at 20mf3.

The Boundary World looks like the Representational World... but even more so. This is getting close to the limits of mortal senses and comprehension. All around magic, faith and power is almost visible. Indeed, sometimes it is: the air shines with divine glory in Christian lands, while in the Boundary Worlds of animist faiths such as the Mongols and Sibiriyaks, spirits flow steadily to and from the Transcendent realms beyond.

Example: Andrei's Journey (4)

Andrei is getting worried. The 'monk' turned out to be Pravoi the Truth-Teller, and he apologetically told him that St Basil had not been seen there for years. Instead, Andrei must head for Murom, over a hundred miles to the north-east. Despite various adventures, both good (such as being carried half the way by an obliging giant goose) and bad (losing his best cloak, three daggers and several pints of blood to a brace of blood-sucking goblins), he finally reaches his destination. At first, he is thrown into despair to find just a murky thicket from which glitter the eyes of unknown predators. A friendly songbird tells him that St Basil passed through several years ago, to ascend the Boundary World route at its heart, the Three-Hundred-Step Tower, on his way to Heaven. Without hero points or hope, Andrei nonetheless resolves to follow. To be honest, his adventure might well have ended there, but he manages to battle the terrors of the thicket and make it to the tower. However, as he tries to climb the Tower, finding each step taller and harder to scale than the last – representing the obstacles placed there for those not ready to stand on the doorstep of Heaven – he is fortunate to encounter Ilya Muromets on the way down. This Christian hero recognises a worthy fellow when he sees one and agrees to intercede for him. Andrei sits, exhausted, on the Seventeenth Step, as around him pulses and thrums the distant music of Heavenly choruses. He knows that he could not climb so much as a single step higher.

Then the chorus becomes louder, and down the steps walk Muromets and another figure, glowing with radiance, whose silent footfalls shake the tower. Andrei abases himself before the saint and begins to stammer out his petition for help, but St Basil waves him to silence. "Blessed are my children of Ryazan," he says, his voice a gentle whisper which nonetheless fills Andrei's ears and mind as if nothing else existed, "and strong is your heart." He raises the Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos in his left hand and holds out his right hand for Andrei to kiss. As he does so, he feels his lips quiver with warmth and magic, and he knows that a kiss from





PLAYING IN FAIRY TALES

While the default assumption is that **Mythic Russia** will be played with distinct divisions between the ‘real’ world (albeit one with magic and monsters!) and the more fantastical Otherworlds, this need not be the case. To replicate the free-flowing feeling of a fairy tale, either drastically reduce the resistance of the veil between them, or simply roll the Ideal and Mortal Worlds together. Instead of there being a distinct veil between them, the further one travels from concentrations of people, the less the world resembles the Mortal World and the more the Ideal. Thus, a town still looks and feels like a town, and so will the land within a day’s travel; a village still generally looks like a village, but even within an hour’s travel into the woods beyond, a hero may find himself in the Ideal World. This allows the players and narrators to play games which follow more the conventions of the fairy tale without concerning themselves with the rules on moving between Otherworlds, and also helps explain why most peasants stay close to home!

him will be enough to turn Feodosiya back to living, breathing life.

As he starts to give tearful thanks, St Basil simply nods to Muromets. The bogatyr steps forward and with a smile says “time you were home, lad.” He then raises one huge, gauntleted hand and slams it down upon the unprepared prince’s head. He slams down and through the stones of the tower, slams down and through the Representational Word, slams down and through the Ideal World, and slams down and onto the rough log-paved square in Murom, back in the Mortal World.

He is tired, a little hurt, and over a hundred miles from Ryazan. But he has travelled into the Otherworlds, been rescued by a hero and blessed by a saint. Even as he stumbles to his feet and prepares to explain his plight to the guards pushing their way towards him through the

A COSMOGRAPHY

This is an outline of the Otherworlds of Mythic Russia and *some* of their most distinctive or important locations. It is neither comprehensive nor exclusive, not least because the Ideal and Representational Worlds are to greater or lesser extents fluid, shaped by changed in the Mortal Worlds, just as they also influence them.

Travelling without a Map

No map is provided of the Otherworlds; although this is something Firebird Productions may turn to in due course, not only would such maps be confusing and complex, they would also begin to anchor, to weigh down, what ought to be unpredictable, fantastical and changeable.

astonished crowd, he feels the broad grin on his bruised and battered face...

THE TRANSCENDENT WORLD

The Transcendent World just is.

The Transcendent World is at the very furthest reaches of mortal consciousness, beyond the reach of all but the most holy or powerful of mortals. These are the homes of the gods, the gates into the Heaven of the Christians, the peak of the Lithuanians’ god-mountain, the Summer Land of the pagan Rus’ and the highest sky-plains of Tengri.

Example: Andrei’s Journey (5)

Andrei will not travel into the Transcendent Worlds unless and until he is much, much more powerful... or dead.

CHANGING THE WORLDS

The Mortal and Otherworlds are linked, and changes in the one can and do have an impact on the other. The spread of Christianity, the westwards rush of the Mongols, the rise and fall of cities, the migrations of peoples, all these have had their effect on the Otherworlds. This ought to be resolved by the narrator and players depending on the needs of the story, but is something which is slow and generally requires great and sustained effort. Were Novgorod razed tomorrow, it would not instantly blot out its analogue in the Otherworlds, but they would start to look damaged or worn in some way – perhaps in the Representational World its walls would begin to crumble and its markets empty, or else maybe its inhabitants would start to sicken. Over time, if the real city was not rebuilt, then it could become a ruin, just as sacking the Otherworldly counterpart would have an effect on the fortunes of the real Novgorod.

The main locations, which are often linked to particular locations in the Mortal World, are fairly fixed in location and form. However, there is far more scope for change in lesser details and locations. The winding forest path which took you to the Six Saint Spring last time may or may not lead you there again. It might be that some tree spirits have moved and block it now, or it will instead deposit you by a dragon’s lair. It could be that you will need to pry especially effectively, for the saints to guide your feet on the right path.

The Otherworlds are therefore rife for quite freeform play, and the narrator can freely add, subtract and change locations to meet the needs of the story. This also helps engender the rather dreamlike, fairytale nature of the Otherworlds, as what seemed a long distance last





time may be travelled in a single night this time, and the empty clearing in which you camped could have become a pagan shrine or the home of a colony of talking mink...

Each of the cultural outline chapters provides more general detail on how each faith shapes the Otherworlds it dominates, from the fluid spirit-chaos of the Sibiriyaks to the iconography of the various forms of Christianity.

THE IDEAL WORLD

Avdotya's Tomb: This Christian tomb is hidden deep within woods and hard to find for those who do not know the way. It is said that the truly pure of heart may entomb themselves here with the body of one they love and if they can withstand the snakes, ghosts, dragons and other threats and temptations with assail them that night, they may be able to reverse death once.

The Black Mire: This foul and foetid march, approximating the western Pripyet Marshes in the Mortal World, is full of noxious vapour spirits and malign monsters who try to pull travellers into the suffocating morass.

Buyan: This island in the eastern Baltic never seems in the same place twice – could it really move? It is home to the Russian pagan wind gods, and in caverns beneath the island are treasures from ships they sunk or scuttled.

The Dragonsblood Lake: This huge lake in the Sorochinsk Mountains was formed of the blood Goryshche shed when the dragon was slain by Dobrynya Nikitich. Goryshche still lives in the Otherworlds, although banished from the Mortal World, but bathing in the red waters of this lake help proof a hero for a while from dragon fire and magic – but can also imbe them with a little dragon soul, too.

The Green Marsh: This fecund and fertile swamp, approximating the eastern Pripyet Marshes, is home to Grandmother Hopping Frog, who may help mortals, but only in exchange for favours.

The Goose Muster: North of Vologda, where Russian influences begin to give way to the Sibiriyaks', is this huge lake, where geese and other wildfowl muster before returning to the Mortal World for their great migrations. Sometimes there may be thousands of birds here, and while they gather, they seem to have an intelligence, magical power and unity born of their numbers. This is not a place for hunters, unless they don't mind being pecked to death or lifted by a team of geese and dropped to their death in the icy waters of the lake.

Kiev: There is not city here now, just the wind-swept and melancholy ruin of an ancient, cyclopean fort. This is a magically-charged place, though, for both Christians and pagans. Hidden caves beneath the ruin lead into the Representational World, just as heroes may be able to make that journey by leaping from its crumbling walls, and it is also possible to find one of the idols of Perun that St Vladimir had toppled into the Dneiper.

Kursk: In place of the Mortal World's small fortified town in western Russia, here there is just a shattered tower, home of the huge and uncouth giant Tugarin, banished from Kiev by St Vladimir.

Lake Ilmen: The lake by Novgorod is generally a friend to the city, but it too has the soul of a merchant and expects a fair price for its favours. Its spirit appears sometimes as a bearded old man, who can command the spirits of nearby rivers to do his bidding – some say he is a servant of the Sea Tsar, some his father, and others believe he is the Sea Tsar in disguise.

Lake Onega: There are almost 1400 islands in this huge northern lake; in the Ideal World, not only is the water unnaturally cold – yet never frozen – but one of the islands is home to two leshy, who constantly squabble over ownership of the Samosek Sword, the 'self-cutting sword' that can wield itself. Adventurers sometimes manage to steal or borrow this magical blade, but eventually it turns or otherwise lets down its new master and returns to the island.

Murom: Murom is a Christian city of note but there is a persistent local strain of paganism. Here it looks like a pretty church, but it turns out to be just a facade.

Nightingale's Nest: The unusual bandit Solovei Rakhmatich, half human, half bird, nests in this wood between Kiev and Chernigov. Although Ilya Muromets drove him from the Mortal World, he still lurks here, stunning or killing passers-by with his shrill whistle, and his nest occasionally sports shiny objects he took from his victims.

Sorochinsk Mountains: A jagged range of purple mountains far to the south-east, home of many dragons including the nest of Goryshche, the 12-headed she-dragon.

Other Ideal Worlds

In Catholic regions, the Ideal World tends to appear exaggeratedly 'virtuous' (well-tilled fields full of respectful peasants, rolling green meadows, limpid brooks, and so forth) or 'sinful' (rough, brambled scrubland, dark, overgrown and jagged hills, brackish streams of muddy water). Beyond those areas bleached by the crusading efforts of the Ordenstaat, Lithuania appears as an exaggeratedly wild and verdant land of deep forests and rushing streams. The **God-Mountain** is visible as a hazy, distant spear of icy stone in the rough direction of Voruta, but always on the horizon or just over the next hill. The Sibiriyak Ideal World is exaggerated not just in scale and hue but also seasonality, a day cycling from biting winter, through spring thaws and insect-infested summer to chilly autumn and then winter again as the sun sets. The mournful Greek Orthodox Ideal World conveys Constantinople's decline more clearly than its Mortal façade. Most of the specific sites here are now ruins or empty, with the exception of the **Great City**, analogous to Constantinople itself, a place which looks more lively and impressive the further one is from it. It is nonetheless one of the few sites with a recognisable and quite homogenous presence in both the Ideal and

Representational Worlds (others include Rome, Jerusalem, Great Zimbabwe and the Great Pyramids).

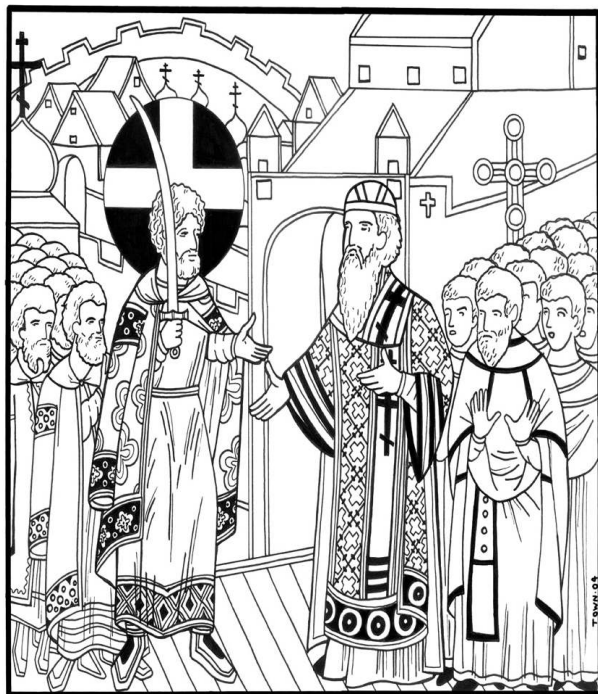
THE REPRESENTATIONAL WORLD

Arcona: This is Svantovit's most sacred site, a hidden pocket on the Baltic coastline marked by four pillars carved in his image. Sometimes a portion of the god's spirit manifests itself here as a white stallion, but at all times this is a place of wild, pagan magics, of storms and starry nights, where oaths made can change destinies, and oaths broken can bring down the fury of the gods.

Chernigov: This is the lair of the Chernigov Beast, a strange and ravaging compound of the parts of many other animals and monsters, who can nonetheless be turned away and calmed by the Virgin Mary's image and prayers, and deliver prophecies to pure-hearted Christians.

The Dragon Ramparts: These huge furrows were thrown up when St Boris first ploughed here, and they are still sacred to him.

Kiev: Kiev is represented by a single, beautiful little church, whose inside is that of a mighty cathedral, within which glitter countless icons. Here saints and angels may be found, pausing on their travels and errands. Even St Vladimir might be praying behind the



In a characteristic piece of political theatre, before setting out to Kulikovo, Donskoi had Sergius formally bless him in the Representational Moscow before repeating this gesture in the Mortal World.

iconostasis.

The Metal Kingdoms: There are three magnificent Metal Kingdoms, all to the south-east of Russia. They are the Copper, Silver and Gold Kingdoms. Each is ruled by a beautiful and clever princess, enslaved by a mighty and tyrannical magical tsar. This is none other than Whirlwind, son of Stribog, aided by his equally magical servants, One-Eye and Lame.

The Morning Tree: This holy Christian tree grows in the site analogous to Volokolamsk. It is said that its branches and leaves can heal the sick and beat away devils, but that only good Christians may gather them.

The Mountain of Gold: This fabled island in the White Sea is made of solid gold – but those who seek to enrich themselves from it, assuming they survive the huge eagles who roost here, are cursed never to enjoy their wealth.

Moscow: Moscow appears from the outside like a classic Christian city, white-walled and golden-onion-domed. Inside, though, while still conforming to Christian iconography, it is darker and less idealised. There are unexpected stains on the streets, like old blood, and darker forms seem to flit round corners up ahead or peek from windows.

Murom: Although the birthplace of St Gleb and the Christian hero Ilya Muromets, Murom is still a hotbed of paganism. Within the Orthodox Representational World it is symbolised by a dark thicket of monster-infested trees and brambles.

Novgorod: The trading city looks like a simple, wooden-walled trading outpost in old-fashioned style, square towered and simple. Inside it is almost all markets, where anything is sold, at prices ranging from silver coins to a mortal's soul.

Rai: Far to the south, atop great mountains, nests Alkonost, the human-headed bird whose song torments the most sinful dead. Although she never ceases to sing to them, somehow she also manages periodically to return here, and can sometimes be persuaded to pass messages to and from the spirits of the dead.

The Rivers of Russia: The mightiest waterways have their own spirits and characters. The **Dneiper** is Christian, and has helped protect Kiev in times past. The **Don** is fickle, charming, tempestuous, and a sucker for beautiful women. The **Volga**, greatest of all, is proud, touchy but ultimately generous – it appears to be both Christian and pagan.

Ryazan: A clean, polite Christian city is here; everyone wonders about its secret, but no one who lives here will tell.

The Swamp of Sinful Excess: In Christian iconography, this swamp – analogous to the Pripyet Marshes – represents both a sinful morass and a source of fecund temptation. It looks more like a chillier tropical rainforest, a place where oversized trees dip into sluggish waterways, while birdsong and animals' cries fill the heavy air. It represents the excesses of life: those



who travel through it often feel unexpectedly strong passions: lust, anger, envy, all the deadly sins seem magnified. However, it is also rich in naturally magical treasures, such as healing mushrooms, and venturing deep into the swamp, heroes may reach the Purest Pool at its heart.

Svyatogor's Tomb: The good giant Svyatogor, friend of Ilya Muromets, was tricked into this huge stone coffin, which closed, never to be reopened, even by Ilya himself. Svyatogor, condemned by his own foolishness, lies here still, and his tears nourish the spring at his tomb's base. Ilya frequently visits here to comfort and pray over his friend, so this is a good place to find him.

Vinograd: A small town to the south, amidst rolling vineyards of unimaginable bounty, where the fountains pour out wine, but those who fall into a drunken stupor become slaves of its prince for a year and a day.

Zagorsk: In the Representational World, all that is here is the ever-smoking censer from which the Boundary World Pillar of Incense begins its winding path towards Heaven.

Other Representational Worlds

Within the relatively small pockets of larger-than-life Romuvan Representational World is a great hilltop flame where **Vilnius** would lie. Stepping through it is a time-honoured way of reaching a fiery Boundary World, Sventaragis's Smaller Fire. **Vilkmergė** exists in the Otherworld, too, as a small wooden town inhabited by talking wolves and hairy humans, ruled by the Wolf Maiden herself. The **God-Mountain** at Voruta is a mighty peak spearing into the clouds, with slippery, near-vertical sides – climbing them is actually travelling into the Boundary World.

The Representational World of the Sibiryaks is constantly reshaped by spirits, and their dreams and wants. As such is it wholly mutable. It is broadly possible to tell if an area reflects a forest, tundra or steppe region in the Mortal World, but even those apparent constants, such as the beds of the great rivers and the mighty cliffs of the **Stone Dragon** (the Ural mountains), are simply created by powerful spirits, Shapes, who will them that way. Thus, a river may seem to be a mass of fast-moving lesser water spirits, but the channel and route they are kept to is defined by the dominant spirit of the whole river.

The Greeks' bright Representational World presents itself as a mix of icon and mosaic, with musky incense and choral music in the air. It is nonetheless still shrinking and underpopulated. Many of the locations here represent past glories or else the distinctive traditions of subject peoples. The **Great City** here resembles a whole screen of icons.

The Mongols' is a realm of the Ancestors and other spirits. Like the Sibiryaks', it is a dream-like state, shaped by the will and memories of the strongest local spirits, although it is nonetheless not quite as fluid and chaotic as theirs. It naturally resembles a barren brown steppe under a bright blue sky: 'rivers', 'mountains' and

the like are just landscape spirits' memories of being, imposed on the Representational World. Particular such locations created by the power of their spirits include the **Broad Dark Water** (the Aral Sea) and the **Mountains of Gold** (the Altai Mountains).

The Catholic Representational World, like that of the Orthodox faiths, appears as a religious document, although in this case as a page from an illuminated manuscript, instead. The main cities and fortresses of the Ordenstaat likewise appear as towns, churches or towers, while **Riga** is instead a clearing in which Christian champions may encounter pagan enemies to trounce (and vice versa).

THE BOUNDARY WORDS

Each Boundary World is defined by its location and also its routes. Most connect to other Boundary regions or the Transcendent World related to its particular faith. Whereas most Boundary Worlds are essentially just connections, those of the Rus' are often realms in their own right, as well as the gateway to other Boundary and Transcendent World locations.

The Aurora Borealis: This bridge of shifting light leads to the join between the Summer and Winter Lands, but it is patrolled by fair and ferocious warrior-maidens who follow the Zoryas.

The Bear's Forest: Far to the north lies this land of mighty pines, trackless snowdrifts and rich, good hunting for Tsar Medved – King Bear – and his subjects, mainly intelligent bears. Although most are still happy to live a simple life of hunting, eating and sleeping, but there are exceptions, such as Mashenka's Dad, who sometimes rescues lost human children and raises them for company before returning them home, the bespectacled scholar Ilet Gramotka (who uses a claw to scratch his ruminative writings onto sheets of slate) and the gregarious joker Brown-Bottomed Bear. This is a pagan realm, where Christians must keep their faith to themselves if they wish to make friends (and return with their lives), and deep within it lies a perpetually-frozen river: skating or otherwise travelling up this river takes the traveller to the Winter Land.

The Chalk Cliff: This white escarpment overlooks the Baltic Sea in the Representational World, but climbing it soon takes one into a Boundary World, in which the spirit of the cliff constantly bombards the climber with riddles, questions and distracting epigrams, which appear in the chalk. A climber who does not 'play' or whose answers are uninspired or displeasing, will be shrugged off, to fall to the jagged rocks below. On the other hand, success may let the hero reach the top of the cliff, from where he may leap onto the Milky Way and thence travel to the Lithuanian god-mountain, or else jump onto the chariot of the sun as it sets off at dawn.

The Deep, Dark Woods: Southwest of the Bear's Forest lie these forests; here the superstitions of the peasantry and the curses of the Christians have combined to create a twisted place of malevolent tree



The kind of leshy one may meet in the Deep, Dark Woods are really unlikely to be worth getting to know, much less inviting them home for dinner.

spirits, half-mad, diseased leshy and cunning paths which twist and turn and then disappear, leaving travellers lost and helpless as night falls.

The Glass Mountain: 'Above' the Metal Kingdoms grows this extraordinary structure, in which is suspended the body of what appears a strange dragon. The body is dead, or near enough, but its spirit is alive and talks with some visitors. It claims to be the last of a race of huge lizards who walked the Earth millennia ago and to remember all that has happened since. Those able somehow to climb this slick structure find themselves encountering the shades of dead peoples and races as they near the Winter Land.

Murom – the Three-Hundred-Step Tower: Passing through the dangerous thicket of Murom in the Representational World, a traveller may find this tall, slender white tower, within which an impossibly long spiralling staircase of white marble heads all the way to Heaven – but not only will non-Christians slip and fall even at the first step or if they try to fly up them, but Christians of anything less than the greatest purity and piety will find each step harder to climb, until they are unable to go further.

The Purest Pool: At the heart of the Swamp of Sinful Excess is this perfectly round pool of limpid water,

which can bathe away sin. Those diving deep within it may, if they are worthy, even find themselves swimming all the way to Heaven.

The Sea Tsar's Castle: The Sea Tsar is not a god, but it's unwise to point that out to him. He asserts and exerts power over most of the seas around and larger lakes within Russia, as well as their counterparts in the Ideal and Representational Worlds. His white stone kremlin, within which those who breathe water somehow live as easily as those who breathe air, is beneath first one lake, then another sea, as his whim decrees. He is capricious, sometimes generous but often selfish, even spiteful. Furthermore, from a pool in his throne room, it is possible to swim to both the Summer and Winter Lands, and the spirits of the drowned pass through here for judgement, before being sent to one or the other.

The Thrice-Ninth Land: North-east of Kiev lies this land, a fantasy of all that Russia could and should be. Here, the princes are honest, fair and loyal, Tsar Afron is wise and fair – if sometimes prone to weakness for a beautiful woman – and his city, the City of Red Roofs and Walls, glitters and gleams in the sun. That does not mean that there are not perils, for monsters seek to plunder its wealth and its people, and even some of the Kam have from time to time battled its silver-mailed druzhinas. Nonetheless, for many this is a veritable paradise. It is predominantly shaped by dvoeverie, despite its location close to Kiev, and one who is solely Christian often has great trouble finding it, and may encounter all kinds of petty nuisances while here: his horse may throw a shoe, the songbird which sang so sweetly to the passing pagan might instead peck at his nose, and so forth. Venturing into the great and unnamed forest at the Thrice-Ninth Land's northern border – a frequent haunt of the Grey Wolf – may take the traveller unexpectedly quickly into the Bear's Forest, even though it is far to the north. Likewise, there are gates in Tsar Afron's kremlin which lead to the Summer Land and Winter Land in the Transcendent World

Zagorsk – the Pillar of Incense: This Christian route looks like a wispy thread of sweet incense curling up 'above' the Trinity Monastery of Zagorsk to Heaven.

Other Boundary Worlds

The **God-Mountain's** icy slopes are the main Boundary World in Lithuania's Otherworlds. These can be climbed with great effort (and sharp nails), but there are also short cuts. It takes strong will, piety and the right secret words and sacrifices not to be consumed in the flames of **Sventaragis's Smaller Fire**, but instead to step through it into a sacred cave half-way up the god-mountain. Likewise, along the **Milky Way** (also known as the **Bird's Way**) float the souls of the virtuous dead on the smoke from their cremations, a route which those able to fly and follow such a difficult way may take to the top of the mountain.

Within the Sibiryak regions, the relatively few Boundary World connections are conduits through which the spirits of the dead ascend into the realms of the Great

SADKO



Sadko was born in Novgorod to common stock and became an entertainer. For a while he found fortune playing his gusli for the noble magnates of the city but then fell out of favour and, saddened, sat by Lake Ilmen and played all day and into the dusk. Then the Sea Tsar appeared in the waves of the lake, thanked him for so regally entertaining him, and in return said that he would be invited to play at a banquet in the city next day. There, when the boyars began to boast, he should claim that he could find a fish with golden fins in the lake.

This came to pass, and three boyars and three merchants, emboldened with drink and scornful of this threadbare musician, wagered their property against his head that he could fish this miracle from the waters. Of course, he did and thus became the richest merchant in Novgorod. He also tuned out to be a very good merchant, continued to prosper, built himself a fine mansion by the river and married the beautiful Lubava.

Life was good, perhaps too good. At his wedding, Sadko held a banquet for all the citizens of Lord Novgorod. There he boasted that he was rich enough to buy up everything for sale in the city. Two other merchants bet him 30,000 silver rubles he could not. For three days, Sadko's men bought everything they could find, but the more they bought, the more goods arrived in the markets from outside the city. Sadko realised his folly in betting against the entrepreneurialism of the Novgorodians.

He paid his debt and loaded up his trading fleet with everything he had bought, to sell it on. From town to town, city to city he travelled, and business was good. Just as the trading fleet turned to return to Novgorod, it was becalmed in the middle of the sea. Small boats which tried to make it to the shore were swamped by unexplained waves, though, and Sadko realised that the Sea Tsar wanted him.

With heavy heart, he had himself cast adrift on a raft – at once the fleet was freed, but Sadko fell asleep and awoke in the Sea Tsar's palace. The Sea Tsar chided him for failing to pay him tribute and playing for him again, but said that he was holding a feast that night and Sadko could redeem himself by playing at it. Sadko hurriedly agreed, and when he played, the Sea Tsar began to dance, ever more frenetically.

Sadko played on, until an old man – whom some say was St Nicholas the West – told him that this was whipping up the seas, and people were dying. Sadko found that he could not stop playing, and did the only thing he could to stop the music, breaking the strings of his gusli.

The Sea Tsar was enraged and had Sadko dragged away to a dungeon. Time passes differently in the Otherworlds, and although that was three hundred years ago, there are some who claim that only three years passed in the palace and the canny Sadko has somehow managed to free himself. Is he now back in Russia? If so, what does he make of it? Christianity was but an obscure southern sect, then, and no one had heard of the Mongols. Still, he is a master of the gusli, a canny trader and a figure of great magic power and sharp wits – there is no way that, if returned, he will not play a role in the shaping of the new Russia.

And is the Sea Tsar still angry with him? If he returns to Novgorod, will the Sea Tsar's curse extend to the city?

Spirits and then flow back down to be reborn. These connections follow nomadic routes of their own, typically counter to the usual movements of the Sibiriyaks: during summer, when most tribes are at the northernmost points of their migratory cycles, the Boundary Worlds are at their southernmost points of the routes. Some of these connections are widely known, such as the **Rolling Rock** (a huge boulder, up which heroes must somehow climb), the **Twisting Dance** (a raging whirlwind of tortured souls) and the **Salmon's Leap** (which moves along rivers, and heroes must either

jump their way up with the spirit-salmon or find some way to ride them). However, most others are still known and understood only by a few shamans, who keep that knowledge to themselves.

The only remaining generally-known Greek Transitional World is the **Klimax Kuriakos**, a gold-edged marble stairway, with no banister, which stretches vertiginously from the Great City towards and even greater city: heaven itself.

There are no Boundary Worlds within the lands of the Ordenstaat, although there are a few gateways to special routes at key places in the Representational World, roughly corresponding to Riga, Marienburg and Thorn. Closed to all but the most pious, these lead to locations within the Transitional World analogous to Italy and Palestine, from which there are further routes to the Holy Gates of Heaven.

Mongol Transitional Worlds are channels through which the spirits of the dead pass on to the land of the Tengri. They are relatively common, but narrow and dangerous, often marked by statues on the Mortal World.



THE TRANSCENDENT WORLDS

No great detail is given for the Transcendent Worlds, “east of the Sun and west of the Moon”, not least because if it should ever be necessary, these celestial realms can appear as whatever seems appropriate. Is the Heaven of the Catholics the same as that of the Orthodox Churches? Their priests may not think so, but at this level, mortal senses and understandings are stretched beyond breaking point. Even Ilya Muromets does not enter Heaven, just stand at its gates and converse with the angels!

These are the preserves of the dead, the divine and the truly extraordinary. **Heaven** is here, along with the Russian pagan **Summer** and **Winter Lands**: in the former, the virtuous dead mingle with gods and heroes in a land of plenty and joy, while in the latter, the evil and the misguided endure gloom and eternal boredom, beyond those especially cursed, who are tormented by Alkonost, whose melodious but piercing song gives them no rest and reminds them of the beauty now denied them. Here are the realms of the Sibiryak Shapers, the highest **Sky-Plains** of Tengri. The top of the Romuvan **God-Mountain** is a Transcendent Realm. Here there is **Dausos**, land of the good dead and **Pekla**, gloomy abode of the rest, while above them, on the mountain’s peak, live Perkunas and the other great deities.



15. THE MONGOLS: THE DEVIL'S HORSEMEN

“From the fury of the Tartars, oh Lord, deliver us...”

They came first some 150 years ago. When the first outriders and raiding parties came from the east, they appeared just one more of the waves of horse nomads whom the Rus' had weathered, defeated or incorporated. Yet why were the nomads on the move? A new power had risen far to the east, under the warlord Temujin. Known as Genghis Khan – ‘Lord of All’ – he had united the steppes peoples of Central Asia into a mighty confederation whose territories would, at its peak in the mid-thirteenth century, cover a quarter of the world's landmass, spreading from southern China to the Hungarian border in Europe, from the arctic wastes of Siberia to northern India.

Kötem, khan of the Kipchaq confederation sought to warn the Rus': “today they have taken our land, tomorrow they will take yours.” Some Rus' princes allied with the Kipchaqs to beat off an initial Mongol incursion in 1223. They were then broken by the main Mongol expeditionary force, but when the invaders failed to follow up on its victory, it was easy for the Russians to feel they had defeated this new threat.

It was not to be. The Mongol army had simply been recalled to take part in a different campaign in the south. Then Genghis Khan died, and all told it would take over a decade for the Mongols to return to the Russias. When they did, though, they did so in force and demonstrated their complete and terrible mastery of the battlefield, just as their spies had already thoroughly infiltrated the Russian cities and assessed their strengths and, above all, weaknesses.

In 1236, the ‘Devil's Horsemen’ shattered the Kipchaqs and during the terrible One Year Freeze of 1237, when ice spirits from Kamchatka in the east to the Arctic

Circle in the north were gathered by Mongol shamans and unleashed upon the Russias. They crossed the Volga and began their conquest.

‘The Mongols,’ ‘the Tatars,’ the ‘Golden Horde’ – they have many names in **Mythic Russia**, but ironically none of them are really accurate in describing this huge nomad empire. The Mongols are just one of the numerous nomad peoples of Eurasia which comprise this confederation, albeit the largest and the dominant. The Tatars, Turkic tribes from southern Siberia, are one more of the constituent steppe peoples of the Great Horde, along with many others, from the Keraites and the Kirghiz to the Ongutts and the Merkits.



Furthermore, just as the Golden Horde was built on nomad imperialism, so too it looks likely to fall to it. From the east is coming a new conqueror, Timur-i-Lenk, Timur the Lame or Tamerlane. His armies are already raiding deep into the Horde's lands, most recently sacking the town of Urgench. One reason why Mamai was perhaps too hasty in his attempt to crush

Donskoi's rebellion, striking before he was ready, was that he wanted to secure his western flank quickly so he could concentrate on the east.

After Kulikovo, Mamai fell and was replaced by Tokhtamysh, who is mustering his armies and ancestral spirits for a punitive mission against the Rus'. What will happen? Will Donskoi once again forge a coalition able to drive the Mongols back? Or will this pragmatic politician reach a deal, using his victory at Kulikovo as leverage simply to increase his standing with the Horde? Or, worse still, will the Mongols shatter the Russian armies and sweep through the lands of the Rus', intent on punishing them for their defiance?



LAND AND PEOPLES

The Mongols are a steppe people, shaped by their life on horseback, their nomadic lifestyle, their relationships with their spirits – and their duty and destiny, laid down by Eternal Blue Heaven, to conquer the world...

HISTORY

The rolling, wide-open steppes of Central Asia was home to numerous tribes and peoples, but they would be bound together into a single confederation in 1206 by Genghis Khan and unleashed on other settled and nomadic peoples alike. An extraordinary warrior and strategist, who incarnated no less than ten ten ancestors within himself, Genghis Khan became the first KhaKhan, or 'Khan of Khans.' He unleashed his Hordes on the mighty empire of China, which was finally subjugated after his death, following 23 years of raid and war. He unleashed them on the Moslem states of the Caucasus and the Fertile Crescent until they eventually reached the Middle East and India. And he unleashed them on the west, driving across southern Siberia until they reached the rich, comfortable lands of the Rus'...

When they conquered the Russians they did so with customary skill, savagery and intelligence. Through the 1230s, spies had been travelling across Russia, spying out the land, mapping routes and spreading disinformation. When they struck, they were ruthless. Riazan, the first city to fall, was virtually depopulated. Moscow and Vladimir fell next. Two things soon became clear: no city could resist the Mongols either in open battle or in the siege. While famous for their horsemanship, the Mongols had learned many lessons in the conquest of China, and their sieges were meticulously planned and massive in scale. The second lesson was that while to defy the Mongols mean doom, fire and sword, they were perfectly willing to accept abject and unconditional surrender.

After subjugating the Russians, the Mongols continued to sweep westward, and were poised to take Vienna when news came of the death of their KhaKhan Ogedei. Their armies withdrew while their commanders travelled east into the Mongol heartlands to pay their last respects and acclaim a new warlord. Europe had been saved – but the Russias were now under the Mongol Yoke.

That said, the Mongols proved surprisingly effective and liberal. They are conquerors, not administrators and were happy to leave much of the actual governance of the Russians to their own princes. So long as those princes accepted Mongol rule, ceremonially abased themselves to their masters and provided the silver and levies the Mongols demanded, they could continue in many ways as before. Furthermore, the Mongols' rule actually reduced the internecine struggles between

THE BOW

The Mongol bow is the weapon which best characterises their style of warfare and hunting, a virtual trademark of these terrible steppe riders. It is a composite weapon, made of layers of horn and sinew on a wooden frame, and can fire an arrow accurately for over 300 m. Mongols use a thumb ring to draw and release the bow and are trained to use it on horseback at the gallop, even over their shoulders (so that they can fire at pursuers or turn at the last minute of a charge).

Mongols carry and use a variety of specialised arrows, from long armour-piercing ones with thin, tapered iron heads tempered by plunging into salt water when still red hot, to viciously barbed ones, as well as ones which whistle in flight (used for signalling) and incendiaries with heads of flaming pitch.

cities, princes and dynasties which had previously ripped the Russians apart.

The Mongols practiced the usual imperial art of divide and rule, playing one city off against another. Over time, though, they began to favour Moscow, finding in the city's Daniilovich dynasty admirably cunning, ruthless and efficient agents to conduct the census on which tax dues were assessed and then raise that silver. That Moscow itself was accumulating money and power in the process did not trouble them, so long as the Russians showed proper submission and the cart-loads of silver kept rolling to the Golden Horde's capital at Sarai.

Now, though, Dmitri of Moscow has turned against them. The battle at Kulikovo has not shattered the Golden Horde and Russia's fate is still in the balance. On the other hand, it has weakened and distracted it, just at the time when it is being pressed by Tamerlane's armies to the east.

THE LAND

The Khanate of the Golden Horde is bounded by the Russian lands to the west, the Siberian taiga to the north, the Caucasus mountains to the south and the Chagatai Khanate to the east.

The steppe may seem a featureless, endless waste to outsiders, but the Mongols and those who dare to travel across their lands know that it is criss-crossed by trade routes, dotted with ritual sites and also anchored by numerous fixed and mobile settlements.



Sarai, close to the Caspian Sea, is the capital of the Golden Horde. Here is still the huge Golden Tent that Batu Khan had raised by the groaning spirits of the Kipchaq dead to mark his new capital. Although the Khan now lives in a splendid fortress-palace built of basalt, the Golden Tent is a magically-powerful place, from which those blessed by their ancestors or mighty of will can step directly into the otherworlds. Though most Mongols still live in their traditional felt tents, the heart of the city is a sprawl of stone, wood and brick buildings, home to traders, labourers, slaves and the courtiers and specialists the Mongols have drawn from their subject peoples. Here one can meet Venetian merchant-spies, Chinese accountants, Arab architects, Georgian slaves... and Russian princes, bearing tribute or seeking a favour from the Khan.

The city of **Azak** on the Don river is a trading hub. From here river boats travel to and from the Black Sea and thence to Byzantium and the Mediterranean. Venice and its trading and maritime rival Genoa share an extensive mercantile quarter called Tana, a seething hotbed of intrigue, rumour, camaraderie and jealousy.

Kaffa in the Crimea, though, is the real centre of Genoese influence in the region. Mamai fled here when ousted by Tokhtamysh and was quietly murdered by his former rivals. The Genoese are making very nice to his successor indeed. Some forty years ago, the terrible plague known as the Black Death ravaged the town, travelling on to Europe on trading ships. Kaffa is still half-empty, a town of abandoned homes and crumbling warehouses, and persistent stories tell of a Rat Khan living in the ruins, sending out spirits of pestilence and horror... and of the debased humans who offer up sacrifices to him to keep him at bay.

The Volga Bulgars lost their capital of Bulgar to Russian raids and had to relocate it to **Bilär**. This was in due course sacked by the Mongols, who have incorporated the Bulgars, and it is now a small town known for its healing waters.

Far to the east is the town of **Urgench**, on the Amu Darya river. Briefly capital of the Khwarazm Khanate until sacked by the Mongols almost two hundred years ago, it was partially rebuilt as a stopping point along the Silk Road trade route linking Europe and the Far East. Tamerlane's forces have recently sacked it again, and although they left its fine Caravanserai Gates undamaged – they stand incongruous amidst the dusty, smoking rubble – there is little here now. It was an important craft centre, known for its smiths, said to be able to call forth the spirits of the metal they forge and beat them to their will, and also fine rug-weavers. Some are now Tamerlane's slaves, some still eke out a living in the ruins, and some have scattered to other cities. Much the same has happened to **Zacitarkhan** (Astrakhan), now marked by a pyramid of bleached skulls stretching some ten man-heights to the skies, surrounded by the wailing ghosts of the massacred townsfolk.

Beyond that, the steppes are scattered with small settlements, typically around oases, mines, fords and places of magical significance. There are also other signs of human life and passage, including stone statues: the balbals of the Turkic peoples (crude forms in the shape of men), the very similar Mongol khoonee chuloos ('stone men') and the more ancient Mongol deer stones, bagan chuloos, carved with the forms of celestial great-antlered deer, galloping through the skies. They are all placed facing east and often mark grave sites or battlegrounds. Most are just stones, but others are the frozen remnants of enemy spirits, guardians keeping graverobbers at bay or are placed in parallel rows marking out paths to the otherworlds.

PEOPLES

The 'Mongols' are, as already noted, really a confederation of steppe tribes, albeit dominated by the true Mongols, who make up around a third of the total.

Genghis Khan's initial confederation also included the Tatars, Kereyits, Naimans, Merkits, Buryats and Tayyichi'ut. On the whole, these peoples shared much of the same belief, lifestyle and appearance of the Mongols.

As they expanded, they incorporated other Central Asian peoples such as the Uighurs and Kirghiz, and before they reached the Rus' they had also swallowed up those survivors of the Volga Bulgars and the Kipchaqs who had not fled before them. These were and are more culturally distinct.

Then there are also members of conquered peoples, such as Chinese, Koreans, Tibetans, Afghans, Arabs, Armenians, Circassians, some Sibiriyaks, peoples from the trading hub of Central Asia (above all the cities of Samarkand, Tashkent and Bukhara) and, indeed, Russians.

In the context of **Mythic Russia**, this probably matters little. More notes are given in the **Playing Mongols** section of this chapter, but to most Russians (beyond those with particular contact with them), there is no practical difference between a Mongol, a Tatar, and a Uighur. On the other hand, it does mean that Mongols may be able to draw on the resources of many cultures (above all, the Chinese contributed much to their administrative base) and also there may be rivalries and tensions within the Golden Horde, especially now that it is in crisis.

The Mongols themselves are still the dominant people – only a pure-blood Mongol may become khan, for example – but except at this exalted level, there is in practice little obstacle to the rise of members of other peoples. One of Tokhtamysh's closest lieutenants, for example, is Elbegdorj the Red River, the Buryat general known for his herd of horse-spirits, fed on milk and the blood of his enemies.



LIFE AND CUSTOM

Even though the conquerors of much of the known world, and some noble families and their retainers may now live in stone houses in Sarai or elsewhere, the Mongols still largely follow a traditional nomadic way of life.

They live either in the saddles of their rugged, shaggy little ponies or else in their tents, their *gers*. This traditional steppe tent is made of several expanding wooden lattices which are fixed together in a ring and then covered and roofed with numerous pieces of heavy, waterproof felt, lashed down with horsehair rope. At the apex of the gently domed or conical roof is a round hole, secured by a wooden ring, to let in light and let out the smoke of the ever-present fire. It takes a Mongol family typically no more than half an hour to erect or dismantle a *ger*, although they also vary in size and complexity. A small one can be carried on two or three horses, but most are generally stowed on ox-drawn wagons for transport. A small *ger* would be perhaps 3 metres in diameter and house a single man, while the largest can be 10 m or even 15 m wide, fit for a



large family.

An encampment might thus be made up of as few as a half-dozen *gers*, around which are the family's herds of animals, either tethered or enclosed in or left to graze under the watchful gaze of a few children and dogs. A more substantial encampment, of a clan, might number several dozen tents. Then there are also small, settled villages, typically at particular locations (a ford in an especially strong river, an oasis in the arid steppelands, a notch in a mountain range) around which temporary encampments grow and disappear, and which tend also to become the home to certain artisans, traders and others who service the wandering nomads.

Their wealth is marked not so much with silver or gold but the size of a man's herds of horses, sheep or goats, the number of his wives and his reputation. Survival and mobility are all. Thus, for example, the Mongols are hardly fastidious in their manners, gladly eating almost anything they find (although meat is always preferred) and considering wasting food a sin. Anything can go back into the stewpot for another day!

THE YAM

In so many ways, the Mongols' apparent crudeness belies a sophistication which allows them not only to be conquerors but also rulers. An example of this is the *yam* express courier network. Primarily intended for the rapid transmission of news and instructions, the *yam* network is serviced by post stations every 40-50 km along key routes, at which authorised couriers bearing a *paiza*, or tablet of authority, can obtain remounts. Such riders either wear a belt of bells or else have a horn which they sound as they approach a *yam* station. A horse will be prepared for them, so that they can simply change horses and ride on without even stopping.

In this way, while normal travel along a *yam* route averages perhaps 25 miles a day, a courier with sufficient skill and endurance can make more than 200 miles. However, it is also worth noting that the institution is also prone to abuse by merchants and travelling grandees or simply embezzlement of the supplies laid in for the couriers. After all, it is one thing to establish such a huge network, quite another to monitor it. Using the *yam* network for personal benefit in this way would entail pitting contacts, Wealth or the like against a resistance of at least 20M – and rather more if an official is in the area or if something especially improbable or immoral is involved.



STORY SEED: TWENTY BULLS

Qori Buka, whose name means ‘Twenty Bulls’, is one of Tokhtamysh’s most able *darugs*, an agent, analyst, advisor and ambassador of skill, daring and great knowledge. Beyond his natural gifts, his secret is that he actually likes the Rus’: he appreciates their way of life, understands their culture, ogles their women and respects the shrewd pragmatism of their princes. That said, he is a Mongol, and would have no hesitation recommending that Russian cities be sacked if that was in the Horde’s interests. For the moment, though, he is travelling through Russia in the guise of a wondering Kipchaq mercenary, gathering information and seeking to come up with some way of bringing the Russians back into the fold short of retribution and massacre.

► **Bring Me The Head of Twenty Bulls.** His mission comes to the ear of a Russian prince who wants to ensure that Donskoi and Tokhtamysh do not come to terms. Perhaps he is a Russian nationalist eager to prevent any backsliding by Donskoi, perhaps he just wants to see the Mongols sack Moscow. Either way, he arranges for a bounty to be placed on Qori Buka’s head, giving the impression that it is being offered by Muscovite agents. The *darug* is a formidable warrior and agent – can he be found and killed? Or will the heroes uncover the plot?

► **Access is Everything.** A Kipchaq ruffian approaches the heroes, knowing that they have good relations with a prince or influential public figure. He says he just wants them to arrange for him to speak with the leader alone and can pay much silver. Is he an assassin or agent provocateur? Of course this is actually Qori Buka. Maybe he hopes to win over the person to broker a peace deal – or maybe he considers him an obstacle to peace and intends to kill him.

► **Jumping Horses.** Twenty Bulls may have been sent to Russia in the hope of averting war, but he knows both that the Russians have taken a step too far to withdraw and also that the tidal wave of Tamerlane’s armies are ready to break upon the Horde. Thus, he is actually looking to find a suitable new allegiance: maybe a Rus’ prince needs a spy or adviser?

They tend to wear tunics of buckram, felt or silk, depending on their wealth or status, typically under a fur or cloth coat – and a silk undershirt not only helps keep in the warmth, it is less likely to leave fibres in a wound if the Mongol is hit with an arrow. Men wear conical, fur-lined hats, although in summer they may instead wear a bandanna-style headband. They usually shave the top of their heads, leaving a small topknot at the front of their forehead and the hair at the sides and the back of the skull. Married women wear full-length tunics and hats or wooden headdresses, while unmarried women may wear their hair long and their tunics shorter.

WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE

Pride is central to the Mongol culture. First of all, they share a genuine belief that they are the toughest, most vigorous and virtuous people in the world, and it is not just their destiny to conquer the world, the great spirits have demanded it of them.

They must also be strong, brave and endure pain and hardship unflinchingly. When his son and successor Ogedei was bereaved, for example, Genghis Khan simply told him: “your son is dead; I forbid you to weep.”

Pride is evident in so many other aspects of their lives. Men typically take as many wives as they can afford to maintain, this being a source of pride, children and labour. Wives are technically bought from their parents or other guardians, but in practice many of these matches are made out of genuine affection. Most Mongol men have but one or two wives, but a might

Khan may have a hundred or more. Even so, adultery is punished by death for both man and woman.

Honour is extremely important to the Mongols. To cheat, kill and steal from enemies is right and proper. However, to steal from within the community is shameful (and also punishable by death): if an animal strays, for example, Mongols will often go to great lengths to return it to its rightful owner. Likewise, Mongols may enter into blood-brother bonds (the word for such a comrade is *anda*) and they will then lay down their lives willingly for the other – and expect the same of him. Likewise, discipline amongst the Mongols is very strong: they are in many ways less a people so much as an army. To disobey your superiors within the Horde would be a rare and shameful thing.

Women in the Horde

Mongol women are hardly simply ornaments for their menfolk. On them much of the essential and often back-breaking work of day-to-day life descends, but they also drive the carts, most can ride and many can use a bow every bit as well as the menfolk. Aigiarn Shining Moon, for example, is accounted one of the most accomplished archers in the Horde, and she has vowed to kill Donskoi with a single arrow from the Three Golds Bow if he again takes to the field against the Mongols.

Their views are also considered important, and it is actively considered foolish for a man not to listen to the wisdom of his wives, even though the final decision is his. Many parents, for example, seek to marry their sons to older women, precisely so that they have wisdom and experience to temper the younger husband’s youthful spirits.



On their husbands' deaths, women inherit their property (typically this devolves to the first wife where there are several, but she also assumes the right to look after the rest), and they may head of the family in this case if there is no adult son. Thus, they can also become powerful, albeit largely as surrogates and guardians. Sorghaghtani Beki, widow of Tolui, a son of Genghis Khan, even for a while became the power behind the KhaKhanate, something widely recognised and accepted.

AUTHORITY AND POWER

Although there is a single legal code, the *yassa*, the Mongol confederation always had to be a relatively loose structure given its size. Genghis Khan famously gave his commanders great freedom of manoeuvre, but his personal authority was such that he could afford to. Over time, though, as the empire expanded and as successive KhaKhans were less able to demonstrate their mandate from Eternal Blue Heaven, it has fragmented into four: the Great Khanate in the Mongol heartlands of the east and China, the central Chagata Khanate, the now-Moslem Ilkhanate in the Middle East, and the Khanate of the Golden Horde which dominated the Rus' and western Siberia.

The building block of nomad society is the family, the *usun*, which typically lives in the same *ger*. They may travel alone but far more usually migrate along with the other members of their clan (*yasun*). The *yasun* typically comprises some 100-200 adults and 30-70 children. Each *yasun* is said to share a single Great Ancestor. Several make up a clan, an *omuk*. Each *omuk* is led by a *noyan*, who is both a community chieftain and a military commander. Together, the *omuk* make up the *ulus*, the Horde.

The Horde is also a military force. Since the days of Genghis Khan, it has been organised on a decimal basis. Ten warriors make up an *arban*, led by a *bagadur*, elected by the squad. This will typically be raised from a single *yasun*. Ten *arbans* make up a 100-man company called a *jagun*, commanded by a *sengun*, who again is elected, by and from the ten *bagadurs*. Ten *jaguns* form a *minghan* under a *noyan*, although this commander is appointed by the Khan. Ten *minghans* form a 10,000-strong *tuman*, the largest element of the Horde's forces, under a *noyan*. Not all *noyans* are equal, though: a *tuman's* outranks a *minghan's*, and an *omuk's noyan* has a rank either between the two or below a *monghan's*, depending on the size of his clan. An army is made up of several *tumans*, and is commanded by an *orlok*, appointed for that task by the Khan. He is assisted by *yurtchis*, officials who manage the organisation of camp, the distribution of supplies and other logistical requirements. Although Mongol armies can and do live off the land on the march, those enemies who presume that they are primitive in their organisation receive a

devastating surprise when it becomes clear just how effective they can be: whether it is regular resupplies of arrows or the administration of a month-long siege, the *yurtchis* have time and again demonstrated their proficiency.

All officials, military or civil, carry a *paiza*, an oval metal tablet which acts as their seal of authority (a *sengun's* is silver, for example, while a *noyan's* is gold).

The Khan of the Golden Horde is chosen at a *kuriltai*, a gathering of its *noyans* – typically this takes place on a Khan's death, whether by natural causes, battle or because his peers have just had him murdered! Rarely, a Khan survives replacement but this is because, like Mamai, he fled before he could be eliminated, as everyone realises that so long as he breathes, a former Khan is a threat to a current one.

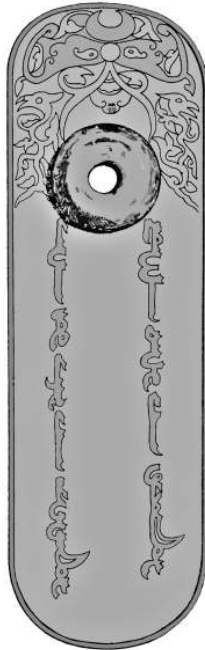
A Khan is assisted by his *beqlar-beq*, effectively his prime minister, as well as a personal circle of allies, generals and kin. He also appoints his *baskaks*, local governors. Their duties are to uphold the Khan's authority, support the *yam* network, raise taxes equal to one tenth the local produce and, when necessary, to gather armies or labourers to do the Khan's will.

Even before Kulikovo, within the lands of the Rus', this practice had fallen into disuse. Instead, Khans had taken to granting their *yarlyk*, their patent of authority, to local Rus' princes, who were expected to carry out a *baskak's* duties. However, the prince could not take this *yarlyk* for granted: he was still expected to travel to Sarai and formally seek the Khan's approval. In some cases, princes have been kept waiting for months or years or even refused (in which case they were lucky to leave Sarai alive). Nonetheless, the Khan does not depend entirely on the princes: he also has his specialist advisors, *darugs*, Mongols with extensive experience of the Rus', who divide their time between travelling across the Russian lands as the Khan's eyes and ears and advising him at court in Sarai.

As is discussed at the end of this chapter, in the uncertainty that has followed Kulikovo, princes are not seeking the Khan's *yarlyk* – but many maintain quiet contacts in Sarai, ready to protest their undying loyalty to the Golden Horde should Donskoi be defeated or reach his own deal with the Mongols, for such are the realities of Russian politics!

Slaves

The Mongols keep slaves, *bogols*, to do the most menial work such as tending the herds and chopping and gathering firewood. They are largely captured in raids and battles, or born into this status, and typically are the property of a family or clan rather than an individual.





They have no rights, but they are considered half-way between property and members of the *yasun*. Those who perform especially great services may be freed, becoming a freedman within the *yasun*. Female slaves may become concubines, although their status is always less than a wife's; one who produces a male child may be favoured with freedom. However, most will die slaves –

although not necessarily for the same family, as slaves are often bought, sold, exchanged, given as gifts or stolen.

FAITH AND MAGIC

Nestorians

The Nestorian Church, also known as the Holy Apostolic Assyrian or Eastern Church, is a Christian sect whose members had fled into Asia to escape persecution in the Byzantine Empire. On the whole it is tolerated by the Mongols. Beyond the occasional passing merchant or missionary, they have essentially been cut off from the Christian churches of Europe. It has been influenced over time by the animist beliefs of the steppes and while still recognisable, it is in many ways a debased form of the original. The Nestorians were once known for their scholarly natures, and there are still many missionaries who maintain that tradition, but more have fallen prey to superstition, spiritualism and a tendency to blur the difference between saints and tenger! There is little formal organisation to this Church: there are bishops, but the distances of Asia and the relatively small numbers of worshippers mean that the Nestorian Church is more a collection of autonomous communities.

Once there was neither heaven nor earth, nor light nor darkness. In the gloomy cloud of primordial possibility, a single spark kindled, throwing a solitary shadow. From this, over time, the unvariegated murk separated itself into light and darkness, the one becoming the sky, the other the earth and the seas. They realised they were alive, and the sky took the name Mongke Tengri ('Eternal Heaven' – he is also known as Köke Tengri, Blue Heaven, or Eternal Blue Heaven) and the earth and the seas Itügen (also known as Yer-sub, Earth-water). From their union came other tenger (the plural of 'tengri', the world also meaning spirit), lesser than their parents, but still mighty and immortal: 44 from the east and 55 from the west. From the 99 tenger, Mongke Tengri took a second wife, Umai, and on her he fathered humankind.

Mongol shamanism is as pragmatic as the Mongols themselves. They worship their ancestors and the greater spirits because it makes sense to do so: this way they can use their powers and be shielded from the evil sendings of others. Therefore, this is a faith about personal and family relationships with spirits rather than built on some core moral code. The tenger demand observance of certain principles including taboos, and Mongols observe them because it is foolish to defy such

powerful beings and thus lose access to their blessings. However, they do not believe that others should follow their ways unless they have also been adopted, nor do they have any objection to foreigners practising their own religions. Why should they? Why should they care what foreigners do – so long as they accept the absolute sovereignty Mongke Tengri has granted them over the wide world?

Thus the fierce, feared Mongols are also, paradoxically, the most tolerant of all the peoples of **Mythic Russia** to other faiths, so long as they do not challenge Mongol authority. They would, for example, pay little attention if a Roman Catholic priest preached his gospel amongst them (indeed, there are Christian Mongols, especially Nestorians); they might even treat his claims that the tenger were demons as foolish ravings to be ignored. Yet they would have no qualms about killing on the spot him if he began preaching that because Mongke Tengri was a demon, Mongol rule had to be resisted.

THE SPIRITS

Mongols worship spirits, incorporeal beings of magic, in a belief system also known as Tengrist Shamanism. Mongols know that when they die, they will become spirits, unless eaten by Erglik the Dark Khan. However, they also know that unless they have been extraordinary in their lives, they will be pallid, almost inconsequential spirits, which will tend to drift into the shadow of a slightly more powerful one who represents their clan or bloodline, one of the so-called '**Little Ancestors**', until it is time for them to drawn to the Transcendental World and cleansed before rebirth.

The Mongols are tied closely to their ancestors, who protect, teach, help, discipline and chastise them, as the need arises. Every Mongol is also linked more directly with one or more of the 'Little Ancestors' and thus the skills or attitudes which characterise a particular family or clan.

The majority also follow one or more **Great Ancestors**, particular heroes of their family or clan. These are Powers, to whom they may initiate or devote.

Perhaps one in three Mongol adults will either worship two Great Ancestors or else follow instead or in addition one or more **Greater Spirits** reflecting the individual's profession, interests or character. These are powerful, primal entities, such as the tenger born of Mongke



Contest: Become a Tengrist Shaman

Abilities: Wisdom of Tengrist Spirits, Respect Ancestors (-10); *Augments:* Relationship to Ancestors, Stories of Ai, Superstitious.

Resistance: 10M.

Outcome: On any victory, the candidate is successful and becomes a shaman. There is no specific ability related to this, but he may spend hero points to acquire abilities from the Priest keyword at 17 *at this time only*. On a tie or marginal defeat, the candidate has failed to make his case, but is considered of promise. He may try again in a year's time. On any worse defeat, he is rejected, and would generally not be able to try again.

Notes: The narrator should feel free to dispense with the roll if the hero is suitably qualified and it fits the needs of the story.

Tengri and Itügen, or even their aspects. To follow a Great Spirit is a mark of great destiny or ambition – and a Mongol who fails to live up to such a boast can expect nothing but scorn from his peers.

THE OTHERWORLD

On passing from the Ideal World to the Mongol Representational World, travellers find themselves in the realm of the Ancestors and other spirits. In many ways, it is a dream-like state, in which the local environment is shaped by the will and memories of the strongest local spirit, and here live those Ancestors whose time to pass to the Transcendent World is not time – typically strong ones, still remembered in the Mortal World.

Its natural state is a flat, barren brown steppe under a bright blue sky. Where there are rivers and forests, these are actually water and tree spirits' memories of being, imposed on the Representational World. The actual nature of each part of the Representational World is thus shaped by the most powerful local spirit. As a 1M2 warrior spirit passes, for a moment the ground may be stained with blood and scattered with broken arrows, the air full of the sounds of battle. Until he wanders past the ger of a 10M2 matchmaker and suddenly he is instead the same figure at heart, but now scrubbed and groomed as to impress a bride's father, stepping across scattered flowers of a wedding to the sound of marriage songs!

There are relatively few exceptions to this mutability – even such key features as mountains and seas only seem fixed because they are produced by truly mighty spirits. For example, Broad Dark Water, as the Mongols call the inland Aral Sea far to the east, appears in the Representational World, but simply because the Old Man of the Broad Dark Water, its spirit, has a might of 15M6, and thus shapes this piece of the Otherworld to his form. However, when Sorghaghtani Beki passed by, such was the strength of her will that its waters became gold-embroidered rugs beneath her feet.

The exceptions are generally marked by balbals and other statues on the Mortal World, and they are simply markers to the thin, treacherous Boundary Worlds to the Transcendent World. These are the channels through which the spirits of the dead pass on to the land of the Great Spirits. This is a land of blinding light and

endless bronze steppe, in which the spirits of the dead are bleached into new energy before rebirth in the Mortal World.

MAGIC OF THE MONGOLS

Special Advantage: Little Ancestors

The Mongols are tied closely to their ancestors, who protect, teach, help, discipline and chastise them, as the need arises. As well as the Great Ancestors, patrons of clans and bloodlines, **every Mongol is also linked more directly with the spirit of some relatively recent ancestor** of more moderate power and achievement and thus the skills or attitudes which characterise a particular family or clan. This provides a standalone magical power, as discussed further below.

All Mongol magic is spirit magic. It may be that the Mongol hero is forcing the innate spirit of an item to do something unusual (using spirit magic to break a stone in two may look like forcing its spirit to manifest, then ripping this into two, like an amoeba splitting, at which point the rock divides likewise), or perhaps adding a spirit to something (like the little fire spirit which leaps onto a Flaming Arrow). For more powerful magics, a spirit may inhabit the hero's body or invade his target's, such as the healing spirit flowing into and sealing a wound or the mighty warrior who partially possesses the hero to grant him strength. Resisting such magic is thus manifested generally as driving away or even (in the case of lesser spirits) actually destroying the spirits.

Spirits involved in such magic are generally visible, albeit translucent, and often audible. They may scream insults at a foe or blow translucent fire into arrows they empower. All but the mightiest spirits do not have feet in the Mortal World; they instead fade into nothing a little way off the ground. They also appear to fly through the air or may even pass through solid matter.

WAYS OF THE MONGOLS

The Mongols' faith is at once simple and comprehensive. Outsiders often regard the Mongols as impious because they have so few religious rites and no real churches, just ovoos, rough sacred rock cairns dedicated to





STORY SEED: NADAAM, NADAAM!

Nadaam is a time to meet friends and size up enemies, pick up the latest gossip, scheme for your master or make a name for yourself. For Mongol heroes or those travelling in their lands, this is a great opportunity to introduce either as a colourful backdrop to other play or else as an active source of new adventure lines. Attending a nadaam is also a convenient way to meet the movers and shakers of the Mongol community rather than having to traipse from ger to ger. Here are a few typical and not-so-typical events and opportunities:

► **An Inadvertent Duel to the Death.** This is a chance for the young men to show their mettle. One such challenges a hero to a good-natured wrestling bout. All goes well, when suddenly he falls, dead. The mood amongst the onlookers turns ugly, his thuggish brothers start pushing their way through the crowd... What happened? Was he cursed by some enemy of his? Or of the heroes? Can the heroes prove their innocence, or must they just try to flee?

► **How Much for the Woman?** A female hero or follower catches the eye of a rich, powerful but hardly especially pleasant Mongol chief, who is eager to make her a wife for one of his sons.

► **The Iron Chef.** Cooking is typically seen as a woman's art, but there are always exceptions. Alp Kuelug the Uighur is proud of his ability to make a fine meal of even the most unpromising meat but he faces a challenger in Jasynja, the Kipchaq warrior-cook. Entertained by this rivalry, Sibani Many Herds, the local *baskak*, offers twenty horses to whoever can come up with the most obscure and unusual meat for them to cook before the end of the festival (and another hundred horses to whichever of the two chefs then performs best).

► **The Travelling Fair.** With such a concentration of heroes and rituals, the site of the nadaam slowly and almost imperceptibly drifts into the Representational World, something which becomes generally clear when ancestor spirits start mingling with the mortals. This is a good time to make spirit allies, but also to strike out into the Otherworld. At the end of the festival, the site returns to the Mortal World – leaving behind any who are still beyond its grounds.

particular local or cosmic spirits. These are found scattered across the steppes and it is customary on passing an ovoo to make an offering of food or drink or else leave a cloth or paper token.

However, this is to misunderstand the Mongols' intimate and constant connection with their ancestors and the great spirits. Every morning when they wake, they ask the *tenger* for another day; every time they return successful from the hunt, they appease the spirits of their prey and thank the ancestors who blessed their arrows. A Mongol has few formal religious rites because his whole life is spent communicating with the spirits.

There are, of course, particular rites and taboos. Births and deaths are special events, and fire is nothing less than raw *tengri*-stuff and thus purifying. When foreigners are presented before a Khan, for example, they must first walk between two great fires in order to cleanse them of evil spirits.

Shamans

The shamans, or religious leaders of the Mongols, are known as *bo'e* or *kam*. They are not community leaders, like Christian priests, but dedicated intercessors between the mortal world and the spirits. Many political leaders keep one or more shamans on hand to practice divination, defend them from magical attack or otherwise carry out specific services, but on the whole they are regarded with reverence but also deep misgivings. After all, they live straddling two worlds, and as such are often erratic at best, dangerous at worst. They may commune with spirits through meditation, but

more often go into ecstatic trances through drumming and throat-singing.

The easiest way to become a shaman is to take the Priest keyword during character generation, but there is much more to it than that. Whereas it is possible in faiths where the priest plays a greater community role, for him to be able to rely on patronage, the support of the people and other abilities, the Mongol shaman will generally be assessed solely on his magical power. It is thus very rare for a shaman not to be devoted to at least one of the appropriate Great Spirits, and almost all are at least initiates of *Ai*, the patron of shamans. Becoming a shaman in play requires either devotion to *Ai* or passing a test administered by another shaman.

Many dress in strange and outlandish ways. Some wear clothes covered with iron rods and chains as protection against evil spirits. Others dress as the opposite gender, to confuse enemy spirits and emphasise that their real identity is in the otherworlds not in mortal society.

Holy Days

True to their pragmatic ways, the Mongols tend not to hold specific days holy – although there are many local practices relating to particular local spirits – and instead consult and attend to the spirits when they want something from them or, conversely, when bad luck or omens suggest that it is time the spirits expect something from their worshippers.

When important acts of worship are necessary, a shaman will seek the highest nearby location, to be closest to the sky, and kneel nine times upon it, head

bare and belt round his neck to signify submission to Mongke Tengri. Fire is the source of life, and so may be used for purification or sacrifice. Alternatively, sacrifices – even whole horses – might be placed on poles high in the sky and left to the elements.

The closest to a regular holy celebration is Nadaam, at once a religious, political and cultural event. It is a three-day festival held in July, running in all Mongol lands. Spirits are propitiated and celebrated in great rituals, dances and songs are offered in their honour and

their tales told and re-enacted. However, the core of the event are the athletic events, as men and women compete in horse races, archery contests and wrestling bouts. Meanwhile, onlookers jeer and cheer, bet, swap tales of the year and eat and drink, favouring tea and kumis, the cold meat pancakes known as *khuurshuur* and fruit.

ANCESTORS OF THE MONGOLS

All Mongols will worship a ‘Little Ancestor’ and most will also follow a Great Ancestor. Only a few will ever go further and directly worship the Great Spirits described in the next section.

‘LITTLE ANCESTORS’

Unlike the worship of Powers, this does not carry with it any particular mythology or permit divine intervention. Indeed, ‘Little Ancestors’ are really little more than the personification of the spirit of the *yasun*; they cannot be worshipped as Powers and do not even have a real personality. If they are encountered by Mongols travelling in the Representational World, they seem strangely diffuse, more like spirit-shaped clouds.

Every Mongol who follows Tengrist Shamanism automatically acquires one or more of these ‘Little Ancestors,’ which provides a magical power and a taboo. Both are acquired at the standard keyword level (typically 17). The magical power is a standalone one: it may be used actively and increased. The taboo is a Character Trait and ought to be roleplayed; should the hero fail to observe it, the narrator may either rule that the power associated with the ‘Little Ancestor’ becomes unusable until some form of propitiation is completed or use its auto-augment value as a penalty to *all* spirit- and ancestor-related magic. Individual or inadvertent breaches of taboos may not have this impact: it is up to the narrator to rule on this.

A few samples are provided below, but players and narrators are encouraged to create their own ‘Little Ancestors.’ Most people in the same family will usually share the same ‘Little Ancestor’ but as there is marriage outside the *yasun* it is not especially rare and certainly not frowned upon to draw power from a different ancestor than the rest of one’s family.



Eljigidei prepares to loose an arrow under the tutelage of Little Ancestor Khadagan the Far-Sighted, who provides the power Shoot-as-Far-as-I-can-See but also demands his descendants accept the taboo Only Fire One Arrow At Any Target.

Extraordinary people may gain the favour of more than one. A hero whose *Relationship to Ancestors* reaches 5M1 may acquire another ‘Little Ancestor’ and thus an additional power and taboo, although extra ones begin at 13 instead of 17. A further one can be gained when the *Relationship with Ancestors* reaches 5M2 and so on.

GREAT ANCESTORS

Most Mongols will also worship one of their ‘Great Ancestors,’ an *ongghon* (plural: *ongghot*), both to do honour to their own bloodline and also to acquire an ally and protector in the spirit realm. Each is unique, and a hero choosing to worship one is encouraged to come up with his own name, abilities and story in partnership with the narrator. Some players will be tempted to try to



Sample Little Ancestors

| <i>Little Ancestor</i> | <i>Power</i> | <i>Taboo</i> |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Tolui | Leap Onto Horse | Never Interrupt a Song |
| Hülegü the Magnificent | Three-Arrows-as-One | Never Apologise |
| Hungry Batu | Eat Rotten Food Safely | Never Fish or Eat Fish |
| Grey Natsagiyn | Call Horse | Never Eat at Night |
| The Third Temür | Smell Fear | Never Kill a Doe |
| Güyük | Neck-Breaking Twist | Never Refuse a Challenge |
| Bayar Burning Arrow | Burning Arrow | Never Pour Water onto a Fire |

create over-powerful ancestors, but in this case the narrator can modify them (perhaps the affinity only provides 2 feats, or else an over-general *Kill Russians*), balance them with some disadvantage or if all else fails veto them.

Broadly speaking, each Great Ancestor will provide 1-2 quite narrow abilities and virtues and an affinity based on his or her life or greatest achievement with 2-3 feats. A few samples are provided, but it is more fun to create your own. The standard Secret is to heroform the ancestor. This process is known as *bogeleku*, inviting your ancestor to take possession of your body.

Entry Requirements: Be descended from the ancestor, by blood or formal adoption.

Abilities: Devotee of [Great Ancestor] or Initiate of [Great Ancestor], Stories of [Great Ancestor's Life], [one or two others as appropriate].

Virtues: [1-3 appropriate ones].

Affinity: [**Appropriate Affinity**] ([typically 2-3 feats])

Secret: **Heroform [Great Ancestor]** (The devotee may take on the ancestor's spirit, acquiring additional powers – see p 98.)

Rites & Representations: Idealised Mongol men and women, but their lower legs fade out of view as they float above the ground.

Worshippers: Members of their bloodline, whose own experiences, interests and ambitions tally with the ancestor's.

SAMPLE GREAT ANCESTORS

Altandei (Rich Man)

To most Mongols, wealth is just a sign of prowess, success and honour, but to Altandei, it became much more. Some despised or resented his acquisitive ways, but he just smiled: he knew that silver could be just as deadly as iron, when wielded the right way. [ALT-an-day]

Additional Abilities: Assess Value, Haggle.

Virtues: Greedy, Pragmatic.

Affinity: **Rich Man** (Count Money in an Instant, Sense Hidden Treasure, Sniff Out Money)

Secret: **Heroform Altandei** (Believe in Mongol Superiority 10ff12, Haggle 20ff12.)

Disadvantages: Traditionalists may look down on followers of Altandei.

Alunegen (Cunning Warrior)

Alunegen was never the largest of his family's warriors, nor even the fastest, but his wits were as sharp as any of his brothers' blades. When the Three Russian Bastards sought to kill their noyan, and arrows and swords splintered against their glittering mail, he was the one who knew how to use subterfuge and misdirection against them, staging a fake retreat to lure them into the wooden tent, which was then burnt down around them. [Al-loo-NAY-gen]

Additional Abilities: Assess Enemy Tactics, Clever Ruse.

Virtues: Cunning.

Affinity: **Sharp as a Sabre** (Think Fast, Trick Russian)

Secret: **Heroform Alunegen** (Clever Ruse 1ff13, Cunning 5ff12, Scan for Danger 10ff12.)

Buru (Talented Artisan)

Although the Mongols will gladly buy or loot more complex and ornate items from subject peoples, they also have their own craft traditions. Buru was a Mongol who was not only a fine hunter and warrior but also a master of the decorative arts. He could make the simplest piece of horse tack or the humble eating knife into a piece both immensely functional and truly beautiful. [BOO-roo]

Additional Abilities: [Appropriate Craft Skill], Attention to Detail, Learn from Others' Ideas.

Virtues: Practical, Pride in Own Work.

Affinity: **Craftsman** (Fine Detail, Fix Minor Break, Reach Into Unreachable Space)

Secret: **Heroform Buru** ([Any Craft Skill] 20ff12, Attention to Detail 20ff12, Learn from Others' Ideas 1ff12, Prepare Raw Materials 20ff12)



Chechegge (Fierce Mother)

Pity the fool who tried to harm Chechegge's children, no matter who, how or when. She stood up to Khan Gürde, when he would have taken her daughter as concubine without giving her a mule in return. She scalped the Sibiryak tribesman who tried to ambush her youngest as he brought home his first deer for the pot. And even now, she returns to the earthly realm when those descended from her are in need. [Che-CHEG-ge]

Additional Abilities: Sense Danger, Whack with Handy Domestic Implement.

Virtues: Fierce, Love Family.

Affinity: **Fierce Mother** (It's Just a Scratch, Leave My Children Be, Scary Scold)

Secret: **Heroform Chechegge** (Love Family 1ff3, Sense Danger 1ff2, Whack with Handy Domestic Implement 20ff2.)

Genghis Khan (The Greatest Khan)

The father of the modern Mongol superpower is worshipped by those who can draw a tight personal lineage to him and have the extraordinary abilities (and confidence) for this not to seem sacrilege and presumption. The Greatest Khan's gifts and exploits were numerous, and no two worshippers seem to share the same – nor will they discuss it with outsiders. Indeed, they seem to represent a private clique or sect within the Mongol peoples, perhaps with an agenda of their own. [CHING-geese Khan]

Guchuluk the Arrow (Keen-Eyed Hunter)

Guchuluk lived for the hunt, whether the headlong dash after the running prey or the slow, patient wait. Two-legged prey or four-, it made no difference to him. [GOOCH-oo-look]

Additional Abilities: Archer, Keen Eyed, Ride Fast After Prey.

Virtues: Patient, Pitiless.

Affinity: **Hunter** (Arrow to the Heart, Find Arrow, Spot Movement)

Secret: **Heroform Guchuluk** (Archer 20ff2, Keen Eyed 1ff3, Patient 20ff2.)

Küchlüg (Well-Travelled Rider)

All Mongols love to ride, but for Küchlüg, this was as a way of finding out what lay over this hill and up that river. In his long life, he had seen sights to amaze, horrify and astound, and he brought back to his family not just spices from India, silver from Scandinavia and silks from China, but tales to tell around the fire. Death just opened up new horizons for him, as he explores the furthest reaches of the Otherworld. [Ker-CHLERG]

Additional Abilities: Endurance in the Saddle, Know Tales of Far Lands, Ride Far.

Virtues: Curious, Wanderlust.

Affinity: **Far Traveller** (Ride a Bit Further, Sense Nearest Clean Water, Stay on Road)

Secret: **Heroform Küchlüg** (Ride Far 10ff2, Riding 1ff3, Tend Horse 10ff2.)

Manas (Kirghiz Folk Hero)

Manas is distinctive, in that he is specifically an ancestral hero of the Kirghiz people rather than worshipped more widely. Destined since before birth to be a hero, he fought all manner of enemies, alone except for the magical animals which served him: a tiger and a lion by his sides, a giant raven above him, a dragon shielding his soul. It is said that some who heroform him gain the protection of those spirits. [MAN-ass]

Additional Abilities: Befriend Fierce Beasts, Savage in Battle, Shrug Off Wounds.

Virtues: Fierce, Proud of Kirghiz.

Affinity: **Lion of the Kirghiz** (Speed of the Tiger, Strength of the Lion)

Secret: **Heroform Manas** (Befriend Fierce Beasts 20ff1, Fierce 1ff3, Savage in Battle 1ff2, Short Tempered 20ff1.)

Disadvantage: Also acquires the flaw Short Tempered.

Otchigin One-Ten-Hundred (Tax Assessor)

When Ch'in ambushers cut off his right hand, Otchigin's first thought – after he had slain them with his left – was that he was of no further use to his people. However, he found a role as his khan's Counter, maintaining the censuses and tallies of tribute, and fiercely pursuing any shortfalls or irregularities in the flow of silver from the subject nations. [OTCH-ee-gin]

Additional Abilities: Estimate Market Value, Memorise Numbers, Numerate.

Virtues: Fiercely Pedantic, Suspicious.

Affinity: **Counting** (Instant Tally, Weigh Silver)

Secret: **Heroform Otchigin** (Estimate Market Value 1ff3, Fiercely Pedantic 20ff2, Numerate 20ff2.)

Qulegu (Loud Drummer)

The mounted musicians who beat the great drums called *naccaras* play a vital role in communicating signals and orders across the battlefield. Qulegu's fame was that he could beat his drums so hard that a whole Horde could hear, a fortress wall could be shattered and an enemy army deafened. [Koo-LAY-goo]

Additional Abilities: Play Drum, Understand Orders.





Virtues: Loud.

Affinity: **Mighty Drum** (Drumbeat of Thunder, Make Drums Talk, Resist Loud Noise)

Secret: **Heroform Qulegu** (Play Drum 1M3, Drumbeat of Thunder 20M2, Loud 20M2.)

Qutlughdai (Blessed Throat Singer)

Qutlughdai was a throat-singer for whom even the spirits would pause to listen. When Great Khan was forced to have that throat cut when Qutlughdai tried to upstage him, even he was saddened and ordered a great funeral which lasted two days and three nights. [Kut-LUG-a-day]

Additional Abilities: Never Short of Breath, Showman, Throat Singing.

Virtues: Flamboyant, Musical, Proud.

Affinity: **Throat Singing Magics** (Never Draw Breath, Sing Away Fear, Sing Away Spirits, Speak with Two Throats)

Secret: **Heroform Qutlughdai** (Never Short of Breath 20M2, Showman 20M2, Throat Singing 1M3.)

Disadvantage: Also acquires the flaw Must Be Centre of Attention.

Sube (Quiet Spy)

Those foreigners who ascribe Mongol victories just to their speed and ferocity fail to understand the cunning which was just an important. As the Great Khan Genghis said, "an arrow becomes a weapon because the archer sees the target." Thus, invasions are often prepared with the help of spies such as Sube, the quiet, simple-seeming Mongol outcast, hunter or mercenary – as the situation seemed to require – who never seemed to pay much attention to anything around him, being content to sit, sleep and drink. Who could suspect that behind this simple mask was a shrewd mind, as able to identify the weakness in a city wall as the divisions in a nation's

rulers? [SOO-bay]

Additional Abilities: Be Ignored, Good Memory, Spot Weakness.

Virtues: Cunning, Patient.

Affinity: **The Spy** (Hear Words on Wind, Understand Tongues)

Secret: **Heroform Sube** (Believe in Mongol Superiority 20M2, Listen 20M2, Spot Weakness 1M3.)

Tegus (Upright Warrior)

Whenever there was blood to be shed, Tegus was at the fore, as indomitable as he was honourable. Even when he perished in the ill-starred invasion of Japan a hundred years ago, as the demon-blown storm called a *tai-fun* shattered and swamped the Mongols' ships, he did not lose his courage or honour, as he died seizing one of the storm devils and dragging it underwater to drown with him. [TAY-gus]

Additional Abilities: Sabre Fighting, Strike First.

Virtues: Honourable, Take Them Down With You.

Affinity: **Spirit-Swordsman** (Grab Spirit, Slash Spirit)

Secret: **Heroform Tegus** (Brave 1M3, Riding 20M, Sabre Fighting 1M3.)

Disadvantage: Also acquires the flaw Fear Drowning.

Ulagan Buriigi (The Red Destroyer)

Wherever there is bloodshed and flame, there will be Ulagan Buriigi; sabre in one hand, burning brand in another. Watch him laugh as he brings fire and fury to your foes; bless Tengri that he is your kin rather than your enemy; and keep him away from anything fragile or flammable when there is no fighting to be done. [Oo-LAGAN Boo-RIL-gee]

THE HUNT

One reason for the Mongols' ability in battle is their training even as young men, not least through a ritualised form of hunt. At the start of winter, for 2-3 months, young soldiers participate in a virtual campaign. Lining up along a 100 km or so frontage, they are sent out along a marked course several hundred kilometres long, driving game before them. Over time, the wings of the army begin to curl round until they form a huge circle, full of driven game. During this time, no warrior is allowed to use his bow, but it is a mark of honour not to let any prey flee, whether a nimble hare or a terrifying wolf. Once the circle is complete, the Khan enters the ring alone and takes his pick of the prey. Then the rest of the army starts to kill; typically by bow, but this is also a chance for soldiers to demonstrate their skill and bravery by riding into the ring, using hand weapons and the like. Jelme Strongarm won his name and riches the two times he strangled Siberian tigers in the hunt; admittedly, the third time it was a tiger who killed him, but his ancestors welcomed such a hero with honour. At the end of the day, elders plead with the Khan for the lives of the remaining animals to be spared, and the Khan graciously agrees.

This is a chance for individuals to win fame and honour (or to lose it, if they allow prey to flee or otherwise blunder). It is also an exercise not just in individual skill but in managing massive, coordinated mounted operations. Messengers and signals keep the army together and moving at the right pace. Officers must maintain the discipline of their troops, including guarding the perimeter of the drive at night. This great hunt does not just feed the Mongols through the winter, it prepares their armies for the wars ahead.



Additional Abilities: Ignore Wounds, Light Fire, Savage Onslaught.

Virtues: Bloodlust, Love Fires.

Affinity: **Kill and Burn!** (I Burn Your Home, Kill Who Hurt Me)

Secret: **Heroform Ulagan Burilgi** (Easily Bored 1M2, Ignore Wounds 1M2, Light Fire 2orM2, Savage Onslaught 1M2.)

Disadvantages: Also acquires the flaw Easily Bored. Even by Mongol standards, those who follow Ulagan Burilgi are considered dangerous, unstable and murderous. And not in a good way.

THE GREAT SPIRITS

These are powerful and primal forces of the Mongol otherworld. Only a minority worship them directly, and those who do are making claims to their own heroic status which they ought to be prepared to back up with their deeds!

All the Great Spirits are represented in dramatic colours, poses and contexts, but what really distinguishes them from the lesser spirits in both representation and when encountered is not just their auras of raw power, it is their feet. Mongol iconography often does not represent spirits directly, but when it does, almost all have no feet. That the Great Spirits are 'intact', in contact with the earth, symbolises their power, that they are in contact with – and thus, any good Mongol would say, ruling – both the mortal and the otherworlds.

AI THE PREDICTING

The Predicting Moon

The Moon is both to be loved and feared: a beacon in the night, but also changeable and capricious and thus also a patron of those who do not fit well into Mongol society, including those who refute their gender roles or even sample both. This aspect of Ai concentrates on his role as a diviner, predicting the future through a variety

of means.

Ai is the special patron of shamans, and teaches his magics only if his followers also indulge his unpredictable and often downright dangerous whims. On the night before initiation, a worshipper will have a vivid and bizarre dream, which he will recount to the shaman or other figure conducting his initiation and from this will be interpreted both an unusual behaviour he must exhibit and a personal taboo he must observe. Ai will demand he maintains both. These will be acquired at 17 on initiation, and may be raised in the usual manner through the use of hero points.

One or the other of these (but not both at once) can be used to auto-augment the hero's *Devotee/Initiate of Ai* or *Stories of Ai* abilities. Furthermore, as well as counting towards the abilities which must be brought to 1M2 for a devotee to learn Ai's secret, they *also* augment for this purpose *Stories of Ai*, so that if, for example, a devotee had the relevant behaviour and taboo at 1M2, and *Stories of Ai* at 13M, he would be able to learn the secret, because they would provide a combined auto-augment of +8, bringing the effective rating of *Stories of Ai* to 1M2. Thus, the more the worshipper exhibits these bizarre traits, the closer he is to Ai.

Narrators should feel free to create their own behaviours and taboos. They should generally be inconvenient, may well be entertaining, but ought to be neither catastrophically problematic nor easy to ignore. Sample behaviours include: Collect Foes' Scalps, Drum All Night, Hoard Shiny Objects, Howl at the Moon, Spare Foes. Sample taboos include: Never Draw Blood, Never Let Sunlight Touch Your Skin, Never Ride a Horse, Never Talk to Men, Never Talk to Women, Never Walk Forwards Through a Door.

Devotees of Ai are always considered to be shamans by Mongol society. However, this is a social convention only: if a hero becomes a devotee during the course of play, he does not just by that acquire the other abilities, relationships and the like of the shaman keyword.

Entry Requirements: None may worship Ai unless already at least an initiate of another Mongol Power and also have Relationship to Ancestors of at least 5M.

Abilities: Devotee of Ai or Initiate of Ai, Disconcerting Manner, Sound Convincing, Stories of Ai.

Mongol Divination

The Mongols are extremely superstitious. They believe that the spirits regularly try to warn them of dangers, alert them to opportunities and otherwise try to guide them through subtle and opaque signs and portents. They also believe that the future is predictable, even if they also assume that they can change that future. This may sound like a contradiction, but it is not one to worry them: after all, they are the chosen of Mongke Tengri!

They use a wide range of methods for predicting the future. They include randomly firing arrows into the air and reading the future from their fall, watching the patterns forming in clouds or rising smoke, or simply interpreting dreams. However, the most common method used is to cast the shoulder-blade of a sheep into a fire and then withdraw it: the future is predicted based on the pattern of cracks produced by the heat.



Virtues: Capricious, Portentous, [Personal Taboo], [Unusual Behaviour].

Affinity: **Lunar Wisdom** (See Truth in Moonlight, See What Moon Sees)

Secret: **Prophecy** (Using a favoured method – see box – the devotee may predict the fate of people in his presence. It is up to the narrator and player to resolve this, but see the notes on destiny in the **NARRATING** chapter.)

Rites & Representations: Ai is never portrayed as anything other than a stylised moon. [AYE]

Worshippers: Generally, shamans and would-be shamans, of either (or uncertain) gender.

Disadvantages: Shamans of Ai are powerful and useful, but rarely liked or trusted.

AI THE UNPREDICTABLE

The Unpredictable Moon

This aspect of Ai emphasises not only his capricious nature but his deeper mastery over the spirits. All the rules above on unusual behaviour and personal taboos apply, and if the hero is already a worshipper of the other aspect of Ai, he must still acquire an additional one of each on initiating to this one. Likewise, devotees of this aspect of Ai are also considered shamans, regardless of whether they actively play this role.

Entry Requirements: None may worship Ai unless already at least an initiate of another Mongol Power and also have Relationship to Ancestors of at least 5M.

Abilities: Devotee of Ai or Initiate of Ai, I Do As I Please, Talk to Spirits, Spirit Lore, Stories of Ai.

Virtues: Capricious, [Personal Taboo], [Unusual Behaviour].

Affinity: **Lunar Power** (Blind with Moonbeam, Scare Away Spirit, Send Nightmares)

Secret: **Steal Spirit** (The devotee may capture others' magical powers. If a magic feat is used against him – whether spirit magic or any other – the shaman may choose not simply to resist it, but to try to steal it. In this case, he only resists with the secret's rating, without any other augments or the like. On any victory, he is not affected by the attack, and on a Major victory he acquires a single use of that feat at its original rating or the shaman's Steal Spirit rating, whichever is lower. On a Complete victory, the shaman also has the option either of wrenching that magic away – in which case he loses it, and must learn it again from scratch – or else, by spending 1 hero point, acquiring it as a standalone magical power. In the latter case, it is not lost to the caster, and the shaman acquires it at its original rating or the secret's rating, whichever is lower.)

Rites & Representations: As above.

Worshippers: Generally, shamans and would-be shamans.

Disadvantages: As above.

ERGLIK

Something Black

Erglik is the terrible master of the Underworld, who visits natural disasters upon the mortal realm to force its people to offer up sacrifices to appease him. He represents power without responsibility or heavenly mandate, power exerted for its own sake. Even saying his name outside sacrificial rites might bring misfortune, so he is instead referred to as 'something black.' He does not rule the souls of the dead (so he would prefer to cause misery and fear than actually kill victims, at which point they are lost to him), but instead his underworld realm is home to all kind of vicious and spiteful spirits.

Abilities: Devotee of Erglik or Initiate of Erglik, Sense Vulnerability, Spread Malicious Gossip, Stories of Erglik.

Virtues: Destructive, Heartless, Selfish.

Affinity: **Misfortune** (Crack Pot, Deepen Misery, Inflict Pain, Sour Drink)

Secret: **Eat Misery** (The devotee may feed on the fear, pain and misery of others. Broadly speaking, this provides a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating at any time someone present is suffering greatly as a result of the devotee's actions.)

Rites & Representations: A powerful old man, with soot-black hair, including a forked beard stretching to his feet. He has twisted horns sprouting from his head and bears a black mace of office. His rituals are carried out at night and underground, and typically involve the sacrifice of injured or malformed animals.

Worshippers: Many appease Erglik, but his doctrine that might makes right and his disregard for laws and custom appeal to some Mongols.

Connections: Erglik's sons help him rule his gloomy realm; his promiscuous daughters seek to lead mortals – and especially shamans – astray.

Antagonisms: Erglik is a tengri and child of Mongke Tengri, but nonetheless his malicious intrigues offend Gujir Tengri, whose worshippers may well react accordingly.

Disadvantages: Shamans and the more powerful devotees of Erglik are generally feared and mistrusted, but precisely because it is felt they are most effective in appeasing him, they are considered to play a useful role in society. By contrast, the general assumption is often that initiates and even some devotees follow him simply because they are troublemakers, and they may be treated accordingly, especially as and when bad luck strikes.



GESAR KHAN

Vigilant Star

Sulde Tengri's lieutenant, a warrior and guardian of the all-important horse herds.

Abilities: Alert, Devotee of Gesar Khan or Initiate of Gesar Khan, Riding, Stories of Gesar Khan, Straightforward Tactics, Tend Horse.

Virtues: Vigilant.

Affinity: **Star Warrior** (Blazing Comet Blade, Bright Glowing Helm, Celestial Mail Armour, Shooting Star Arrow)

Secret: **Great Defender** (The hero receives a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating when defending his property or people.)

Rites & Representations: A tanned warrior whose helmet glows like the sun, his shield like the moon and his mail like the stars. His sabre is a comet, glowing balefully in the night. [GAY-zah KHAN]

Worshippers: Warriors of every kind, and those who believe defending what they have is as important as gaining more.

Connections: Gesar Khan is a subordinate of Sulde Tengri, and his worshippers may find that those following Sulde Tengri try to treat them as underlings – it's up to the individual if he chooses to accept this role or make a stand.

GUJIR TENGRI

White Lightning Heaven

This tengri represents the blazing savagery of the heavens, irresistible and glorious, and as such is the active lord of all under the ineffable Mongke Tengri.

Entry Requirements: Only men may worship him.

Abilities: Devotee of Gujir Tengri or Initiate of Gujir Tengri, Fiery Gaze, Stories of Gujir Tengri, Shrug Off Lightning, Wolf's Howl.

Virtues: Ferocious, Love Storms, Never Take No For An Answer.

Affinity: **White Lightning** (Bright White Flash, Burning Lightning, Eat Fire, Strike Like the Lightning)

Secret: **Warheart** (The devotee surrenders himself to the frenzy of White Lightning. He becomes a blazing, whirling, snarling killing machine, intent only on death. He gains a bonus equal to ½ the secret while in battle, but cannot pause to take stock, heal or regroup, cannot speak intelligibly and finds it hard to stop killing. When all his enemies are dead, he will turn upon his allies unless he or they can use a Relationship or similar ability to prevent himself, pitting it against the secret's rating. This may be attempted

each simple contest or round of extended combat.)

Rites & Representations: A mighty warrior-khan, riding a white horse, bearing a staff of white lightning which writhes like a serpent. Sometimes he is also represented as a great, ferocious wolf, often with a white pelt. [GOO-jeer TENG-gri]

Worshippers: Gujir Tengri is especially beloved of nobles, leaders and those who also have such ambitions.

Disadvantages: For an underling to devote himself to this spirit may be interpreted as a challenge by his present leader.

SULDE TENGRI

The True Man

Sulde Tengri is the True Man, the tengri who above all represents the Mongol masculine idea: indomitably proud and brave, handsome in his martial finery, a warrior, hunter and rider. He is also the master of the *sulde*, the spirits which unite and protect Mongol armies, manifested in their horsehair banners.



Entry Requirements: Only men may worship him.

Abilities: Archer, Devotee of Sulde Tengri or Initiate of Sulde Tengri, Falconry, Raw Charisma, Ride Horse, Stories of Sulde Tengri.

Virtues: Brave, Proud.

Affinity: **Essence of Man** (Irresistible in Battle, Laugh at Misfortune, Look Good Regardless, Master Mount, Master Woman, Scent of a Man)

Secret: **Awaken Sulde** (This is a ritual to awaken and empower a sulde spirit to protect and support an army. Details are not given, as this is beyond the usual scope of play, but this is a complex, lengthy and even dangerous task which, if successful, gives an army greater morale and cohesion. However, the secret may also be used to augment other military leadership abilities and magics.)

Rites & Representations: A strong warrior-khan, richly dressed in gold and jewelled armour, with



a tiger-skin quiver for his arrows and a panther-skin case for his bow. He rides a horse, but is accompanied by a tiger and a white lioness, while an iron falcon perches on his left hand. As well as sword and bow, he bears a three-pointed bamboo staff, symbolising mastery of earth, sky and heaven. [SOOL-day TENG-gri]

Worshippers: Warriors, hunters, riders and red-blooded men of every stamp.

Connections: Gesar Khan is his lieutenant, so any self-respecting worshipper of Sulde Tengri will try to assert his authority over those who follow him.

THE GREAT BEAR - DOLUYAN EBUGEN

Old Man Bear

While Mongols hunt the bear, they also regard it as the most dangerous prey, not least because it can sustain mortal wounds and keep fighting. Old Man Bear is a constellation in the sky and the patron of all bears, who knows when to eat, when to sleep, when to kill and when to die. If Mongols kill a bear, they make an offering to the Great Bear, lest he come and rend them apart and crack open their bones to nourish his cubs. Old Man Bear does not mean mankind harm – so long as they know their place.

Abilities: Bear Lore, Devotee of Doluyan Ebugen or Initiate of Doluyan Ebugen, Imitate Bear's Calls, Not Feel Cold, Placate Bear, Sleep Well, Stories of Doluyan Ebugen.

Virtues: Enjoy Sleep, Implacable, Respect Bears.

Affinity: **Bear** (Bear's Strength, Crack Open Bone, Sleep Warm, Tear Limb From Limb, Terrifying Roar)

Secret: **Become Bear** (The devotee wraps himself in a bear fur coat or cloak and assumes the form of a large bear – see page xx for its abilities, and the Large and Strong ratings are automatically augmented by the secret's rating, so a devotee with the secret at **6m** would actually be Large **18m** and Strong **13m**. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In bear form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which seem appropriate. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Rites & Representations: A burly, hairy –positively bearish – old man wrapped in a great fur coat. [DOL-oo-yan EBB-oo-gen]

Worshippers: Hunters, wanderers and any who understand the power of bears.

TSAGHAN EBUGEN

The White Old Man

For all his cheery manner, the White Old Man is among the greatest of the tenger, Lord of the Mountain, master of sea and earth and thus also of fertility. He is a prankster and joker, but also master of life and death: anyone hit once by his dragon-headed staff will not survive the year, unless then also hit a second time.

Abilities: Devotee of Tsaghan Ebugen or Initiate of Tsaghan Ebugen, Irritating Cackle, Practical Joke, Sense Imminence of Death, Stories of Tsaghan Ebugen, Walk Up and Down Mountains.

Virtues: Prankster.

Affinity: **Life and Death** (Kill the Near-Dead, I Will Die Now, I Will Not Die, Lusty Loins, Quicken Stillbirth, Reflect Death Magic, Restart Heart)

Secret: **Beat to Life** (The devotee may bring back to life someone who has recently died, by beating them with a stick carved in the image of Tsaghan Ebugen's. The subject must have died from violence, poison, disease or similar unnatural cause, and his body largely present and together, if not necessary intact. The devotee must belabour the body with the stick, while loudly berating him for his laziness and telling him to wake up and not play the fool. The resistance is **20m**, +1-20 if the body is damaged, plus the relevant duration penalty if the death has not just taken place. If successful, the subject revives, although extremely sore and weak, considered Injured. If not, the stick breaks and the subject is beyond further attempts at revival.)

Rites & Representations: A puckish, white-bearded old man, also dressed in white, bearing a dragon-headed staff. [Tsa-GAN EBB-oo-gen]

Worshippers: Any who understand that life is death and vice versa; or who like a joke.

UMAI

Mother Fire

Umai, second wife of Mongke Tengri and mother of mankind, lives in the heavens, from whence her powers reach down like beams of radiance. She is thus also Ut-Ana, 'Mother Fire', and fire burns away evil spirits and maintains life. Umai kindles the spark which resides in the heart of every living being, and protects the child in the womb from evil spirits.

Entry Requirements: Only women may worship Umai.

Abilities: Devotee of Umai or Initiate of Umai, First Aid, Light Fire, Stories of Umai.

Virtues: Maternal, Respect Fire.



Affinity: Fire of Life (Bright Glow, Burn Away Bad Magic, Burn Away Evil Spirit, Burn Away Disease, Keep Fire Burning)

Secret: Living Hearthfire (The devotee may awaken the hearthfire she tends. So long as she tends it, and for as many hours after she has left equal to the secret's rating, the hearthfire is inhabited by a spirit of might equal to the secret's rating. It cannot leave the fire, but can has the *Fire of Life* affinity and the above feats, and may also support the devotee or anyone else as a follower.)

Rites & Representations: Fat is poured into a hearthfire as an offering to Umai, along with scented wood and drinks. At the age of 6 months, many children are commended to Umai's protection: the greater the offerings made and the magic of the presiding worshipper of Umai, the greater the blessing upon the child (and honour to the father). [OO-mai]

Worshippers: Umai is a popular Great Spirit among all women.

PLAYING MONGOLS

The Mongols are in many ways a 'superpower' of **Mythic Russia**, even if potential ruin is looming at Tamerlane's hands. In the lands of the Rus', though, while Mongols are hardly an uncommon sight – despite Kulikovo, money live in and travel through Russia – they are also aliens, possible threats and spies.

YOUR FIRST MONGOL HERO

Here are some questions to consider when creating a Mongol hero:

- ❑ **Man or woman?** This is an important matter for all cultures, but especially amongst the Mongols. Women can be warriors, politicians and shamans, but they will have constantly to struggle against being regarded as trophies and supporters of their husbands rather than heroes in their own right. That said, a woman able to stare down a man or deck him with a punch may be an embarrassment to her father or husband but will be cheered by the rest of the clan.
- ❑ **Who are you?** Are you actually a Mongol, or a member of one of the other steppes peoples. It may make no difference in terms of abilities and the like, but does affect the hero's likely prospects (only Mongols may rise to the very highest ranks in the Horde) and also his motivation.
- ❑ **Where do your loyalties lie?** Are you a staunch believer in the Mongol destiny of global domination and prepared to sacrifice all to than end, or are you actually more interested in your personal or family prospects? With the prospect that Tamerlane's armies may shatter the Horde, many Mongols are beginning to consider their options: when push comes to shove, will they join this new conqueror, drift eastwards back to their traditional lands or find a new haven in Russia or elsewhere?
- ❑ **How true are you to your austere roots?** Many Mongols have become softened by the life of a conqueror, coming to appreciate living in a building that is more substantial than felt, having slaves to do the hard work and not migrating throughout the

THE KIPCHAQS

The Kipchaqs, also known as Pechenegs or Cumans, were a steppe people originally pushed west by the Mongols and then defeated and assimilated within the Horde. However, they have a long history of association with the Rus' – for several centuries, Kipchaq mercenaries or auxiliaries were a feature of many Russian armies, providing highly-skilled lighter cavalry. The so-called 'Black Hoods' were a military elite who became semi-permanent mercenary allies. Although the institution of the 'Black Hoods' has fallen into disuse by the time of **Mythic Russia** and most Kipchaqs have either been assimilated into the Rus' or, more usually, into the Horde, some Kipchaqs may cling to the old ways or resent the fate of their people and support the enemies of the Horde. Kipchaqs can be constructed using the Mongol keywords.

year. Others – many – still hold to the old ways and frequently feel contempt for their more comfortable kin.

Occupations

The standard occupations for the Mongol keyword (are:

- ❑ **Cavalry Soldier** (Courier, Regular, Skirmish): The Mongols are a horse-borne people and while their armies will include foot soldiers of many kinds, these will be levies from subject peoples: the Mongols themselves almost invariably fight mounted. Skirmish cavalry will typically use bows, drawing their swords only when they must. They do not wear much in the way of armour (often just a heavy coat in winter), they depend more on their speed and agility for protection. On the other hand, about a third of Mongol horsemen are heavy cavalry, wielding spears and maces as easily as bows and wearing long coats of lamellar armour, made up of many overlapping plates of metal. Couriers are battlefield messengers and scouts or else work in



The Horse

The Mongols largely ride their shaggy little ponies rather than European-style warhorses. Fast and above all hardy, these horses will take them across Siberia, and survive largely by grazing in the wild. They are trained to bite and kick in battle, to bring a wounded rider out of battle and to follow him during the march. After all, a typical Mongol warrior will have two, three or even four, to allow frequent remounts, and can thus keep moving throughout the day.

A horse is a valued friend and companion-at-arms. A successful warrior will decorate his mount's harness with silver and plait its mane with ribbons. When he dies, a favoured horse may be killed and buried with him.

White horses are favoured by the ancestors and reserves for princes and the like. However, there are also the magical **Ten Ten Spirit Stallions**. Powerful and sentient, these great horses can ride on the wind and through the veils between the Otherworlds, have the wisdom of an elder, the bravery of a warrior and the cunning of a Khan. They choose their riders and typically groom them for greatness (a greatness often won through a splendid death). For an interesting change of pace, one of these horses would make an interesting hero, with the rider considered his follower!

the *yam*, the Mongols' extraordinary express postal network.

- ❑ **Child:** The children of the Mongols need to be able to travel with the family and help in the chores, and they will start to learn to ride almost as soon as they can walk, but there is still time to play.
- ❑ **Crafter:** The Mongols may be a tough warrior people, but they respect and appreciate

craftsmanship, whether in weaving rugs or embroidering clothes. They actively support artisans in the lands directly under their rule such as northern China, exempting them from labour taxes. However, Mongols who become artisans will tend to specialise in something of direct practical value to them, whether as bowyer or tent-maker.

- ❑ **Entertainer** (Dancer, Morin Khuur Player, Throat Singer): The Mongols' nomadic lifestyle means that their entertainments are typically those which can be enjoyed in the saddle or involve little storage or preparation. The morin khuur is a horse-head fiddle, with two strings made of horse-hair, played with a bow. More distinctive yet is throat singing, the art of being able to sing more than one tone simultaneously, typically a low droning hum as background and a high-pitched over-melody like a flute or whistle.
- ❑ **Healer:** Mongols are tough, but not stupid. Where there are wounds, diseases and mishaps, there need to be those who can heal them and drive out the offending spirits. The professional healers at court and with the troops tend to be Chinese or Persian physicians, but there are also Mongols who have learned healing arts.
- ❑ **Hunter:** All Mongol men are hunters, but this occupation is appropriate for those who specialise in this pursuit – it could also be used for the most skilled light cavalry scouts.
- ❑ **Noble:** Every Mongol knows he is noble compared with other, lesser peoples! However, this keyword is appropriate for Mongols of the highest social standing, the family and circle of khans and the like. Some will still be true to their Mongol ways, riding, hunting and leading armies, but others exposed to wealth, power and foreign influence will have become softer and more sedentary, surrounding themselves with trinkets and comforts. They may have become weak and self-indulgent, or they may be as ruthless and dangerous as their forerunners.

Do Mongol Armies have no Infantry?

Of course they do, although this is a common misconception. Indeed, while especially famous for their high-speed cavalry attacks, they also proved ruthless and meticulous masters of siege warfare. However, the infantrymen, sappers, bearers and other footmen of a Mongol army are drawn instead from subject nations (and, in the case of labourers, slaves). To crush the murder-cult of the Assassins in their mountain stronghold, for example, the Mongols brought in a thousand engineers from China to build artillery and construct siege works. At Kulikovo, Mamai fielded Ossetian and Circassian light infantry from the North Caucasus mountains, as well as mercenary Genoese pikemen, against whom the Russian attack almost broke. He was, however, relying also on the Lithuanians to provide him with footmen, and their absence helped ensure Mongol defeat.

Thus, there is scope for non-Mongol warriors to find gainful employment with the Horde, either raising or commanding infantry or simply serving for their silver. More generally, Mongols are not only backed up in battle by auxiliaries and levies from subject peoples and cities, they also draw on other kinds of specialists: Arab, Chinese and Persian doctors are highly prized, for example, as are Arab and Tajik traders, while Korean labourers are regarded as especially diligent. Mongols' belief in their own cultural superiority and divine mandate does not blind them to the achievements of other peoples – nor does it mean that they do not recognise individual talent in others. After all, it was they who recognised the distinctive talents of the Daniilovich princes of Moscow...



- ❑ **Nomad:** This is the default Mongol occupation, the tough and self-sufficient nomad who can hunt, herd and fight as the opportunity requires and with equal facility.
- ❑ **Priest (shaman):** The shamans of the Mongols are fortune-tellers, guardians against evil spirits and the voice of the ancestors. As such, they are respected and protected, but also feared and often mistrusted.
- ❑ **Scholar:** It may seem strange to think of the rough, nomadic Mongols having their own scholars, but this is a race of conquerors, whose empire has spanned a continent and which has learned much from the more civilised and sedentary peoples it has conquered, especially the Chinese. The scholars of the Mongols maintain the census, from which tax dues are assessed, and the records of tribute provided by subject princes. As such, these apparently mild and bookish souls can unleash murderous Mongol retribution on those who shirk their responsibilities to the Khan.

MONGOLS AS NARRATOR CHARACTERS

Discipline may be a primary Mongol virtue in the field, but the Golden Horde is no monolith. Instead, it is a confederation of peoples, clans and families, united by their faith in their superiority over everyone else, but otherwise riven with all kinds of rivalries and differences of opinion.

Until it is time for war and Tokhtamysh musters his forces, most Mongols are not especially exercised by Kulikovo. As far as they are concerned, the Russians are still their subjects, but they have little interest in the nuts and bolts of everyday Russian life. There are Mongol hunters, mercenaries, travellers and adventurers across Russia, as well as those who have settled, either in service or because they have married locally. In Moscow, for example, Mongols and those who

look Mongol thanks to mixed ancestry number probably around one in five of the population.

That said, there are also Mongols who are directly involved in the struggle between the Horde and those Russians who want to see the Mongol Yoke thrown off. The Mongols have an extensive network of spies, agents and provocateurs, and while many are local hirelings and allies, plenty are also Mongols. When and if Tokhtamysh marches against Donskoi, he wants to know exactly against whom he fights, the lie of every potential battlefield and the state of every battlement. You can also be sure that any Rus' prince who is vulnerable to assassination, blackmail, bribery or blandishment will have been targeted.

MONGOLS IN YOUR WORLD

The Mongols can be considered the looming and alien threat to the east, an evil empire of murderous conquerors from whose dominion the plucky Russians are trying to extract themselves. Or a neighbouring culture with its own values and virtues, whose control actually limited the murderous, internecine conflicts which were ripping Russia apart, and whose decline is simply creating opportunities for even more vicious and ambitious home-grown dictators. Both perspectives are true in their own terms, after all.

Mongols and Russians

The relationship between the Horde and the principalities of the Rus' is a complex one. All the Russian princes have in their time been to Sarai to request the *yarlyk* and played the games of Horde politics; most, indeed, owe their positions to a Khan's favour. Furthermore, Mongol rule has not been too onerous and has given them ample opportunities to prosper.

Thus, not only are there many Mongols in Russia, but there are still numerous contacts. This is most evident in Moscow – Donskoi may now be the standard-bearer of the struggle against the Golden Horde, but he and his

ELJIGIDEI OF THE INVISIBLE HERDS

The young Mongol hunter Eljigidei was both blessed and cursed by his birth. Blessed to have inherited his father's mastery of the bow and quick wits and his mother's stubborn good cheer and closeness to the spirits. Yet cursed by his dead parents' wanderlust, their refusal to conform to the traditional roles and ambitions of the Mongols. Eljigidei wants to wander, to explore rather than to conquer. He wants to meet with different peoples, to talk with them and hear their stories, rather than to enslave and subdue them. He learnt the arts of wrestling and running both as ways to avoid beatings as a child, but now relies on his strong arm, deadly bow and sharp tongue. He gained his mocking nickname from sceptical elders, who felt that he would never gather the herds which would mark him out as a figure of wealth and consequence, but he does not care, not so long as there is another bright dawn, another journey to be made. In this, he is a true follower of Küchlüg, whom he is destined to meet three times – once to pay homage, once to crave a boon and once to make a challenge...

Mongol Hunter 20M, Relationship to Ancestors 8M, Little Ancestor: Khadagan the Far-Sighted 8M, Little Ancestor: Grey Natsagayn Devotee of Küchlüg 18M, Ride 19M2, Wanderlust 1M2, Deadly Archer 20M.



dynasty prospered precisely because they were such willing, able and unscrupulous agents of the Khans. He turned against Mamai above all because he understood that the Mongols were in decline, and saw in his defiance a chance to reinvent himself as a Russian patriot and to build himself a new role as tsar of *all* the Russias. He is a prudent man, though, and maintains his backo-channel contacts with the Mongols. Who knows how many Mongol agents, emissaries and henchmen are in Moscow now?

Mongol influence in Kiev is far less, both because of the memories of the devastation they wrought and also because it is a weaker, poorer, fading power and thus of little interest to them. Novgorod was never formally conquered by the Horde – it wisely surrendered – and as the main source of silver coin, it has a degree of economic independence. Instead, Mongol influence is now strongest in those lesser cities such as Ryazan and Vladimir, who may fear Moscow as much as (or more than) their familiar Mongol masters, and who may hope that Tokhtamysh and Donskoi will tear each other apart and that they fast on the pickings!

Tamerlane

Tamerlane is coming, a cunning and ruthless warlord from Central Asia in the mould of Genghis Khan, empowered by a militant Islamic faith and supported by his own steppe tribe alliance of Mongol and Turkic peoples. Quite what this means for your Russia – if anything – can be one of the axles on which a whole campaign revolves.

In the real world, Tokhtamysh sacked Moscow and forced Donskoi and other Russian princes to pledge their allegiance (and pay him off handsomely) thanks to armed support from Tamerlane's forces. This would, however, be a brief and entirely pragmatic alliance and soon fell apart. Tamerlane progressively squeezed the Golden Horde and in 1395 finally smashed its armies in battle. Sarai was sacked and burned, its artisans and craftsmen marched away to Tamerlane's capital of Samarkand and the Silk Road trade routes redirected south via the Caspian Sea to deny their wealth to the Golden Horde.

In your **Mythic Russia**, of course, things might be different. Perhaps...



Tokhtamysh will accept Tamerlane's rule and the Russians will be faced with an invigorated and formidable new empire in the east, one eager to reassert the Yoke and perhaps use Russia as a springboard for further conquest into Europe.



In the face of Tamerlane's advance, Tokhtamysh might seek a partnership with the Russians, offering a formal acknowledgement of their independence in return for a wholehearted military alliance against this new threat.



Tamerlane will prove far less of a threat than people think (and some hope), and Tokhtamysh will soon be free to concentrate his forces in Russia, posing a serious threat the all the peoples and cities of the Rus'.



Tamerlane is even worse that people realise: his approaching horde is nothing less than the Kam, finally manifesting themselves on the Mortal World by possessing nomads and turning them into vessels for their own evil powers. They come not to conquer, but to destroy. Can the Russians and Golden Horde find common cause against them?

Donskoi, ever the pragmatist, will send emissaries east, through the lands of the Golden Horde, to try to make a deal with Tamerlane to squeeze the Golden Horde between them, or just to try and foment early hostilities between them to keep Tokhtamysh occupied.



16. SIBIRYAKS:

THE SLEEPING LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

“In Siberia, the winter lasts twelve months – the rest is summer.”

Siberia: the name comes from *sibir*, a Mongol word for ‘sleeping land’, and its seemingly infinite lands define the eastern edge of the Russian world. Indeed, part of the awe and terror with which the Rus’ greeted the invading Mongols was precisely because they have subjugated and crossed this waste.

To the north is barren tundra, largely treeless, smoothed by the constant wind, shattered by the frost. For much of the year, it is shrouded in snow and ice, with the short summers seeing a thaw which reveals the green of simple lichens and grasses. They cling to the thin soil, which rests upon the ever-frozen permafrost, and help sustain such hardy animals as voles, deer, squirrels – and the predators which prey on them. In the centre, the taiga [TIE-GA], swampy pine forest which freezes in the long winters and squats in humid and mosquito-swarmed foetor in summer. Only far to the south does the forest begin to give way to the grasslands of the steppes, where the Mongols hold sway.

The scattered indigenous tribes who live in these climes in many cases number no more than a few thousand members, typically nomads or scattered in small, primitive villages. The Russians and Mongols alike consider them impoverished and primitive, even though many actually surprisingly live well considering their environment: a rich Evenk chief might own herds of thousands of reindeer, for example, while a Chud chieftain’s warband may be armed and armoured in metal, and earn gold and silver aplenty as mercenaries. Nevertheless, even to the Rus’ this is a land of opportunity because it offers them two key resources: furs and land.

Furs, whether trapped or bought from the Sibiryaks, are much in demand, not just across Russia but in Europe. That trade in what is called ‘soft gold’ earns much of the silver which Russian princes need to pay their tributes to the Mongols.

Land is almost as valuable, not so much because it is good land – only a central swathe of Siberia is any good for farming, and even then it must be cleared and will rarely be more than adequate – but because it is free land. Free from the Mongols, who claim dominion over most of Siberia but do not bother collecting taxes systematically from this huge region. Instead, they rely on occasional demands to the larger tribes for furs, labourers or warriors, and simply demand money or service as they pass through. Free from the Russian princes, with their tax collectors and laws and their gentry, who also demand both deference and labour. Free from the established Church, just as rapacious a landlord as any. Thus, there is a steady trickle into Siberia of Russian and Cossack adventurers hoping to carve themselves out petty kingdoms, and peasants looking for a little land they can call their own.

In the future, this will be one of the engines behind the eastward expansion of the Russian state, as it seeks to regain control over those who fled its reach. For the moment, though, only Novgorod has made any real claims in Siberia, but even then this is largely exerted at arm’s length. It has founded a network of small towns, fortified monasteries and stockades along its main trade routes, but beyond that works through tribal leaders, granting them virtual autonomy so long as they pay tribute and leave the Russians be.

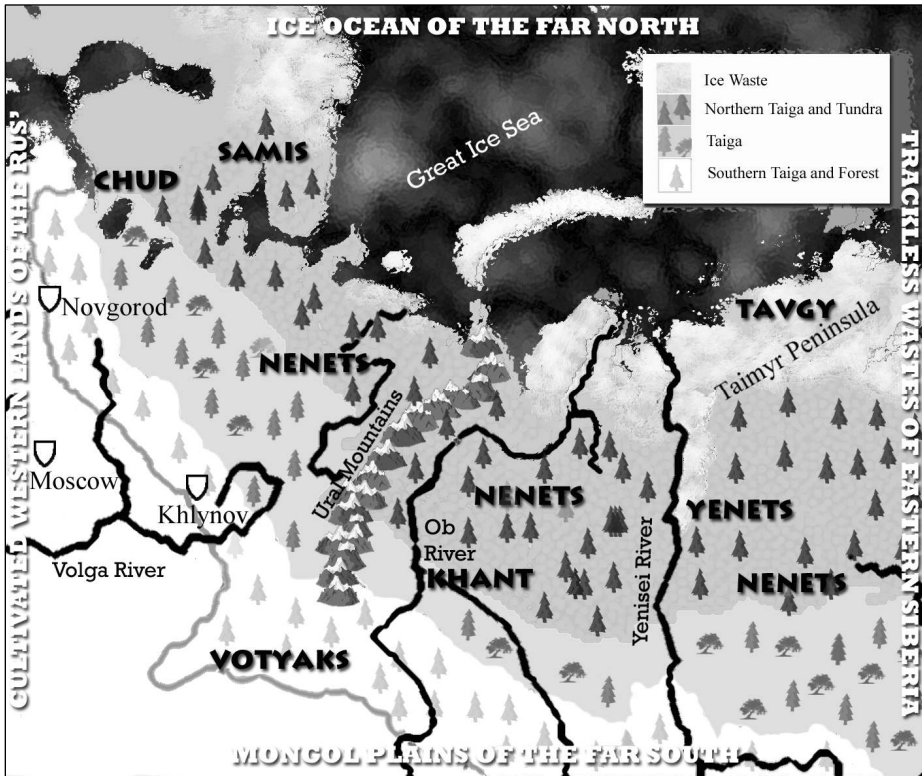


THE SIBIRYAKS

There are many different Sibiryak tribes and peoples – indeed, they themselves do not use the term ‘Sibiryak’ which is just a Russian collective expression for them. In general, they are stocky, with high cheekbones and dark, narrow eyes. The further to the south-east their lands, the more they look like Mongols or other steppe peoples,

while the further to the west, the more Scandinavian their look. Nonetheless, they share more than they differ, with a common approach to life shaped by the harshness of their land and a common set of religious beliefs dominated by reverence for the spirits all around them.

The Khant



Seven peoples are listed here, but this is just a small sample of the Sibiryak peoples with whom the Russians have contact. There were many others within their immediate environs, and far more further east and south, from widespread Sibiryak 'nations' such as the Evenks to micro-cultures such as the Moslem Buihalji of the Caucasus mountains, who number perhaps a half-dozen villages. Although there are cultural, religious and linguistic differences, for the sake of the game the easiest thing to do is pick one of the existing peoples which most closely mirrors their habitat and perhaps slightly tweak the keyword. For example, other peoples living to the north-west of Novgorod such as the Karelians can also be treated as Samis or Chud, swapping perhaps a skill or character trait.

The Chud

Of all the Sibiryak peoples, the Chud are best-regarded by the Russians, not least because Chud warriors helped Vladimir found Kiev, although they often also confuse them with Estonians, considering them largely the same people. However, this same regard means that the Russians also consider the Chud more dangerous than other Sibiryaks, all the more so since Chud levies served the Teutonic Order during its invasion of 1242. They have been driven back over time from their old lands east of Estonia (and thus close to Novgorod) to the environs of Lake Ladoga. They are among the most warlike of the Sibiryaks, one of the few tribes with a substantial quantity of specialist warriors who wield axes and javelins, although most are fishermen and gatherers.

Living along the great Ob river, the Khant are hunters on land and on the water, famed for their mighty bows, as long as a man is tall. Their packs of trained, hardy dogs are used to herd reindeer and hunt squirrels and birds, while they paddle leaf-shaped dug-out canoes along the river to fish or, more often, to spear their prey from the water. In winter, they shelter in crude wooden huts, roofed with sod, or else buried in the earth and accessible only by a hole in the roof. In summer, though, they live a nomadic life in their hunting grounds, taking shelter in simple bivouacs or hide tents.

The Khant have a rich and in some ways contradictory worldview, at once artistic and pragmatic, but also concerned with minutiae. The nettle-cloth tunics they wear are often embroidered with intricate patterns, sometimes telling whole folk epics, while they use the jawbone of a pike to tattoo their bodies, typically with abstract waves and spirals. Their five, cognate languages, though, demonstrate a passion for fine detail: there is no word for 'fish', for example, but different ones for every breed, while 'sitting on a log' deserves a separate word for 'sitting on a stump.' When the Russian missionary-diplomat Yuliya of Khlynov wrote her first *Missive on the Khants*, she reported with astonishment that they even had a distinct word for the sound a brown bear made walking through cranberry bushes!

This carries through into their attitude to life: Khant are



Porum of the Khant shows his frustration at once again getting the word for 'gathering kindling' mixed up with 'collecting dead wood.' What a faux pas!

interested in detail, not the big picture. As hunters, they are meticulous in their preparations, accurate in their aim, but they may ignore the Cossack raising party closing on their village while they track a prime deer. Likewise, in battle each warrior is brave and skilled – but they all fight as individuals rather than as a unit.

THE NENETS

The Nenets are one of the largest Sibiryak tribes, whose lands stretch from the Taymyr peninsula down to the taiga forest line. Their lives are shaped by the migratory cycle of their reindeer herds, moving from the coastal regions to the forests in autumn, where there is plentiful firewood and slightly milder winter conditions, and then back in spring. While the Nenets also hunt and fish, their expertise as reindeer breeders and herders is unparalleled (some also ride them). They also have their own written script of sorts, a pictographic language of shapes and symbols which nonetheless helps their shamans bind spirits to their use.

Short and swarthy, even for Sibiryaks, they are more often mistaken for Mongols, and the size of their tribe means not only that it includes larger communities with more formal leadership structures (including chiefs) but also that both Novgorod and the Golden Horde have paid more attention to it than most Sibiryaks. Communities to the east and south pay tribute to the Horde, those to the north and west fall under Novgorod. However, the number of emissaries and traders from Novgorod travelling amongst the Nenets has increased steadily, and it seems clear that as the Horde's authority wanes, Novgorod intends to extend its control over the Nenets.

THE SAMIS

Known as Lapps to the Scandinavians and Lithuanians, the proud but melancholy Samis live to the north-east of Russia, especially in the Kola Peninsula. They are mainly nomadic reindeer herders, who supplement their diet and economy with gathering and hunting. They have a very cooperative approach to life. They usually form communities of several extended families known as a *siida*, which work together in winter under a single leader and elected council, going their separate ways in summer as they follow their respective reindeer herds. They also form hunting and fishing groups, especially for major enterprises such as taking down a bear, in which each member gets an equal share of the proceeds.

The Samis regard themselves as favoured of Erlik – their name for First Life, the Great Spirit which brought fertility to the world – and this is manifest in a quiet determination to retain their traditional ways. While they have, for example, just as many opportunities as the Chud to earn metal and money as scouts, mercenaries or bearers for the Lithuanians, Russians and Teutons, they very rarely do. Indeed, those who do



A Sami like Gjurvere here has spent too much time abroad; with his coat of mail and his airs and graces, you would hardly think he was one of Erlik's chosen. Why, he could even be a Lithuanian, ancestors forbend!

may find themselves ostracised by their former friends, ignored completely.

THE TAVGY

The Tavgy who live on the far northern wastes of the Taymyr Peninsula are one of the Samoyed tribes, although they call themselves simply *nganasans*, 'people.' They are perhaps the most isolated of all the Sibiryaks, for who would want to travel to their land, where even in high summer the temperature never rises above 13°C (55°F), while the *average* temperature in winter is below -30°C (-22°F)? Nor would anyone realise why they call the permafrosted tundra of the southern peninsula the 'warm lands' – until they saw the featureless waste of the frost desert of the north.

Nonetheless, here the Tavgy live, hunting and herding reindeer on foot and by dog-sled, as well as the occasionally shaggy Taymyr mammoth. They do not engage in more than minimal trade with others, so everything they use or eat is the product of their own efforts. The Tavgy do not have a written language, they are an illiterate people whose histories are all embodied in stories told in the family tent during the long winter night. When they die, their bodies are left out in the



tundra, with a sledge and all the other necessities of a new life, just in case they never make it to the spirit worlds. On the other hand, a child's death is untimely, so his or her little coffin will be tied high in a tree, to be closer to the spirits.

THE VOTYAKS

Whereas most of the tribes live at least part their lives on the tundra, the Votyaks are people of the forest, living in the central Siberian taiga. They are thus more dependent on farming. They live in larger villages, growing rye, oats and other crops through slash-and-burn agriculture, whereby they clear land of trees, burning the felled trunks and using the field for a few years until its fertility begins to wane, then clearing more land. This is supplemented by cattle-herding, bee-keeping and hunting. Contact with Russians depends largely on the latter: the traders of Khlynov pay well for mink and squirrel pelts – indeed, their word for money actually means 'price of a squirrel.' The Votyaks are

LIFE AND CUSTOM

Siberia is hardly an easy place to live, and humans who survive there do so generally by adapting themselves to their environment rather than hoping to be able to master the 'Quiet Land' themselves. Most of the Sibiryak peoples covered in **Mythic Russia** are nomadic. Spring is a time to migrate northwards, often following reindeer herds, avoiding the hotter temperatures of the southlands, and the way the thawing permafrost turns the land to swamp and the air fills with swarms of mosquitoes and other noxious insects. These migrations take familiar routes, and the tribes return to old campsites, living in dugouts or easily-dismantled and – carried hide tents. Typical of the latter is the simple, conical family tent of the Tavgy, the *choom*, made of furs stitched together with reindeer gut, tied over a wooden frame, within which the family will cluster round an open fire.

Summer is a time to hunt, to fish and to stock up on food for the winter. It is also a time for marriages and for trade. Often the two are one and the same, as wives are sought in other families and tribes during trademeets so as to replenish the bloodline.

As autumn brings a fall in temperatures, it is time to return to the wintering lands, generally to the south. The swamp will be freezing, the mosquitoes dying, and while some live in tents all year round, in other tribes, dugouts will be abandoned for more permanent wooden huts, often roofed with sod to insulate them as well as possible. Although there is still scope for some hunting during the winter, on the whole these are times for the community to turn inwards, a time for politics and teaching, for story-telling and crafting goods.

Such a life does not allow the Sibiryaks to be sentimental. Their kinship bonds are as important as

more settled than many other Sibiryaks and famed for their songs and the rich red embroidery of their clothes. They have a reputation for being placid. However, when aroused, the placid Votyak is equally infamous for screaming bloodlust, and several times alliances of villages have tried to storm Khlynov for some slight or infraction of a taboo, and only been driven off once the walls were red with Sibiryak blood.

THE YENETS

The Yenets live a nomadic life along the eastern bank of the Yenisei River, a permafrosted tundra in which they hunt and herd and gather food and wood in summer to see them through the winter, using a few domesticated reindeer as draft animals. They find wives from among the neighbouring Tavgy and Nenets, although they still regard the latter as 'newcomers' to their region, as they only arrived on the Taymyr peninsula a thousand years ago!

those of any other peoples – indeed, perhaps even more so, as a family or larger community must be able to work together and rely on each other to survive. However, this is tempered with pragmatism. Especially in the north, when one falls sick or becomes too old to fend for himself, he may well request a quick death by the knife or strangulation – or might even have such a death forced upon him. Better than being left outside at night, for cold and the wolves to do their work.

The same pragmatism applies to gender roles. Men perform most of the hunting and women raise the children, but there is no bar to women herding, farming and even fighting. If they possess the strength or skill required, then it is best for the community that they use them.

Concentration on survival leaves little room for war, nor do their scattered communities have the surpluses to sustain many specialist warriors. The Sibiryaks fight when they want or must, but these will tend to be brawls, personal combats or small-scale skirmishes over especially important resources. Then they are hard-nosed and merciless. Not for them formal challenges, an etiquette of combat or a culture of chivalry. Instead, if they can defeat their enemy by an ambush, an arrow in the back or a knife in the night, then so much the better. Flint- and bone-tipped arrows, javelins and spears, bone knives and sharpened antlers are their usual weapons, although a metal axe-head or helmet is not uncommon, especially in those regions with more contact with Mongols or Russians. Amongst the Chud, axes, swords and metal-bladed spears are the norm among warriors and even owned by some hunters and farmers.



Sibiryak Languages

As is discussed in the **NARRATING** chapter, the question of languages is often best ignored, except when it fits the need of the story. However, it is worth noting that the Sibiryak languages tend to fall within two broad schools sharing common roots and can be crudely understood by others. A Sibiryak language can be used to communicate simple concepts in one of the cognate ones, at a rating half its original, and no more in any case than 17.

Samoyed languages: Nenets, Tavgy, Yenets;

Finno-Ugric: Chud, Khant, Sami, Votyak.

AUTHORITY AND POWER

Further east are greater Sibiryak peoples such as the Buryats, who have become true members of the Mongol Empire. They have princes, herds of horses numbering thousands and their own towns and established migration routes. The western Sibiryaks, though, live scattered lives; there is a sense of tribal identity, expressed through common language, custom and culture, but not much political organisation. In most cases, the extended family of 20-40 adults is the largest meaningful unit of society. During the winter, several may settle together in a favourable location, and for that

time they will cooperate to survive, with one or more elders assuming titular authority, but his role is really to broker agreement between the families rather than to give orders. Amongst the Chud and Nenets, there are tribes of up to 400 adults, typically led by a chief, but these are still relatively uncommon.

Shamans, the religious leaders, are feared and respected in almost equal measure and relied upon to interpret omens and the will of the spirits. As such, they expect their voices to be heard, and almost always they are. However, they do not have formal authority and all they can try to do is persuade, intimidate and cajole a community to follow their advice.

SIBERIAN SHAMANISM

According to the Sibiryaks, the world around them is just a physical reflection of the real world, which is a roiling mass of spirits (this is the Representational World, as discussed below). After all, everything has a spirit, from the simple, petty one of a flower to the mighty, age-old one of a mountain. Their magic is thus all about their interactions with these spirits: placating them, binding them, resisting them or embracing them. As a result, although there are religious figures – shamans – on the whole this is a faith built upon an individual's and a community's relationship with the spirits.

When a person dies, his or her spirit lingers with the body for a variable length of time. Sometimes, the spirit will remain in the Mortal World for generations, protecting its descendants or haunting those who wronged it, but most will, over time, rise into the skies and thence pass through into the true spirit realms. They will often wash back and forth within the Representational World, slowly losing their identity, until they are drawn higher still, into the Transcendent Realm of the Great Spirits, the mightiest primal forces. There they will be cleansed and reshaped and eventually they will flow back down into the Mortal World to be reborn, whether as human, animal, plant or force of nature, with no knowledge of their previous lives. Just as with every aspect of Sibiryak life, there is also a cycle to their deaths.

ALL SPIRITS GREAT AND SMALL

Spirits must be respected. However, that no more means that Sibiryaks will shy away from killing or destroying their mortal forms than that they are pacifists. Instead, it means that they appreciate that everyone is just playing their role in life. Some spirits are so weak that they can be safely ignored. (Although Dulsymyak the Faceless, the eccentric but undeniably powerful shaman of the Tavgy is so named because he wears a mask to avoid breathing in insects and has his followers sweep his path to avoid stepping on any either.) Otherwise, though, the Sibiryak responds appropriately: a bird is thanked before being roasted on the fire and a tree splashed with drink as an offering before being felled. Greater spirits require greater propitiation. Killing a bear, for example, becomes the focus of a grand rite detailed below, while killing another human means the killer must be cleansed to avoid being haunted by his victim's spirit. Amongst the Chud, this takes the form of a boasting and mocking rite in which the spirit is so denigrated by the killer's community that it retreats in shame, while in most of the other tribes, the spirit is misled. Some Nenets communities, for example, dress a wooden dummy with the killer's clothes, then ritually 'kill' and burn it, so that it believes its death is avenged.

Beyond the spirits of the world, large or small, are the Shapers and the Shapes. The Shapers are also known as





the Great Spirits: these are the mightiest of all, the primal forces ensconced in the Transcendent World who made the world and reform dead spirits into their new forms. The Sky, for example, or First Life. The Shapes, on the other hand, are still powerful but much more comprehensible to humans. They represent archetypes: there are many bear spirits, for example, but only one Bear. These archetypes may also be the spirits of especially important locations. There are myriad river spirits, and the Yenisei river is a torrent of different ones, but there is only one spirit which is the representation of the Yenisei river as a whole. The Shapes are the Powers of the Sibiryak faith, the specialist entities with which those of confidence and power may deal, placating and treating with them to borrow some small measure of their power.

Icons and Places of Power

There are many places which have unusually powerful or useful spirits. Some are huge, like the Stone Dragon, others are small, like the individual trees the Khant regard as protective and close to which they like to camp.

The Sibiryaks do not rely on physical representations much, though. As the whole world is a representation of the true form of spirits, why try to use one crass material form to represent another? There are a few exceptions, often when tribes have taken on outside influences, and the Chud have begun to create a few stone column-like idols, apparently following Rus' and Lithuanian practices. More often, particular sacred locations and forms – rocks, trees and the like – will be marked with potent symbols, hung with cloths, ribbons and noise-makers and painted. Alternatively, the Nenets create places at which to leave sacrifices to the gods by assembling mounds of reindeer antlers.

Lesser spirits can be forced or persuaded to take up residence in a form, though. Among the Nenets, Tavgy and Nenets, families may have one or more *hahe*, small wooden idols which house various spirits of the household and the family. They are transported carefully wrapped in cloth and skins on a special sled, the *hahengan*, until their services are needed. Then they are unwrapped and erected, their mouths smeared with oil, blood or spring water, food and drink placed before them as an offering, and a respectful request made. Some are meant to bring luck, others fertility, and *hahe* with healing powers are always favoured.

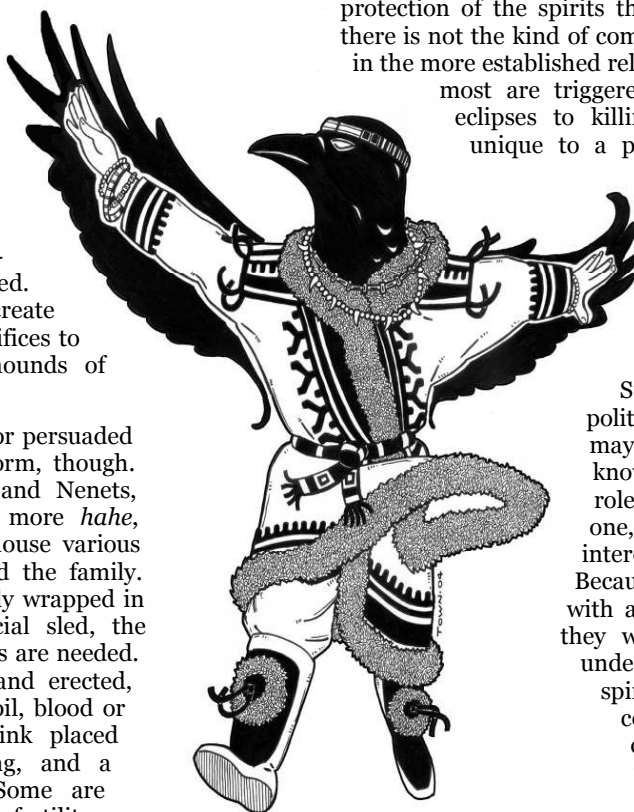
The Stone Dragon

To the Sibiryaks, the entire Urals mountain range is one beast, with one extraordinary spirit. This is the Stone Dragon, a creature of indescribable shape and indefinable whim. It lies there keeping the Earth from the Sky: if it left its post, they would mate again, and the worlds would become too overcrowded with spirits. Sibiryaks in the Urals mountains find its presence almost too much to bear, an oppressive sense of looming power and menace, and thus if they must cross them (as Nenets, for example, do to contact their kin on the other side) they do so as quickly as they can, and having first sought protective fetishes from a shaman.

To sleep within the range is to invite dream-walks to strange and disturbing lands and court nightmares at best, raving madness and possession by hostile or alien spirits at worst. Sometimes would-be shamans unable or unwilling to be recognised by their peers, deliberately come here to commune with the Stone Dragon. Most will never be seen again, but a few will stumble down from the mountains, at once shocked by unvoicable insights and empowered with a new authority and strange spirit allies.

Rites and Rituals

Siberian spirit-worship is full of rites and taboos, both large and small. The Sibiryak's day will often start with a simple rite of purification and end with a prayer for the protection of the spirits through the night. That said, there is not the kind of common calendar of rites found in the more established religions of Russia and Europe: most are triggered by specific events (from eclipses to killing a bear) and many are unique to a particular tribe, community, family or even shaman.



Tedyuz the Crow Shaman, in mid-transformation

SHAMANS

The shamans are the priests and wise men and women of the Sibiryaks. They may be political leaders or advisors, they may be healers or seekers after knowledge: there is no single role they play beyond their key one, of being the community's intercessor with the spirits. Because they can communicate with and even control the spirits, they will be asked to bless new undertakings, interpret the spirits' views on possible courses of action, interpret omens and break bad fortune (which will tend to be the result of a curse or else someone offending a spirit).



Contest: Becoming a Siberian Shaman

Abilities: Know Stories of the Spirits; *Augments:* Devotee of [Great Spirit], Drum, Respect Nature Spirits.

Resistance: 20ff.

Outcome: On any victory, the candidate is successful and becomes a shaman. There is no specific ability related to this, but he may spend hero points to acquire abilities from the Priest keyword at 17 *at this time only*. On a tie or marginal defeat, the candidate has failed to make his case, but is considered of promise. He may try again in a year's time. On any worse defeat, he is rejected, and would generally not be able to try again.

Notes: The narrator should feel free to dispense with the roll if the hero is suitably qualified and it fits the needs of the story. The actual name for shaman varies; the Samis call them *noyda*, for example, the Chudo *tuno*, but for the sake of simplicity, shaman does for everyone.

They do so through ecstatic ritual. They take narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs, they fast, they chant and dance and drum and sing, and they drive themselves into a state of mind in which they can interact with the spirits more easily. Of course, a truly accomplished shaman can see the spirits around him all the time and can slip into the requisite state of mind in an eye-blink, but the showy rituals help provide focus as well as awe the rest of the community.

The principal tools of the shaman are his (or her) drum, his ritual costume and his dance, song or chant. The drum is typically oval, and its beat not only helps the shaman focus, it is believed to scare evil spirits away. Powerful shamans may travel the spirit realms on their drums, or use them to block hostile magics. When a shaman dies, his drums often shatter, but if not, they are broken (typically by being impaled on the branch of a tree near his burial site). The ritual costume represents the shaman, his spirits and all sorts of other ritual issues. To the east, shamans tend to wear long coats festooned with bone and metal pieces and ribbons. To the west, shamans may wear more conventional clothes, but again usually with designs stitched upon them and perhaps ribbons and tassels attached to them. Those who understand these things may be able to discern a shaman's spirit affiliations from his costume: a shaggy bearskin hood is pretty obvious, admittedly, but wide, white-lined sleeves which billow out when the arms are waved violently may show mastery of snow clouds.

A life spent in both Mortal and spirit realms takes its toll. Normal people often regard shamans as worryingly unpredictable, not least because the way they risk accumulating Flaws means that they may be exceptionally antisocial and erratic in their habits. It is very rare for a shaman not to be a devotee of at least one Shape: the Sibiriyaks expect their religious leaders to be able to pull their weight!

THE MAGIC OF SIBERIA

As with the Mongols, the magic of the Sibiriyaks manifests through spirits, but they rarely appear independently, but instead briefly possess or manifest within existing forms. In other words, if a shaman casts wolf-spirit magic, while he does so, he will take on attributes of the wolf. Perhaps his shadow becomes a wolf's, or his voice shifts from a human chant to a bestial

howl. In extreme cases, his head, limbs or whole body may become as a wolf's. Likewise, if a Sibiriyak is calling on a spirit to lend his arrow power and accuracy, then the magic will become clearly visible in the missile. Perhaps in mid-flight it will become alive, twisting towards the target and then burrowing deep into its flesh. Shamanic drumming and chanting will often be heard while Sibiriyak magic is in play, and it is also associated with chilly temperatures. This is unlikely to be noticeable in their homelands, but Sibiriyak magic practiced in more temperate parts of the world of **Mythic Russia** may well be accompanied by gusts of icy air and even a short-lived residue of frost.

Given that all magic in **Mythic Russia** uses the same common set of rules, it is tempting to assume that they are all invoked the same way. However, it is important to realise that with spirit magic, the rating a hero has in an affinity or standalone power represents not just some raw magical potential so much as a *relationship* with a Shape or lesser spirit. 'Casting' the magic is about forcing, persuading or even bargaining with the spirit to manifest itself in the Mortal World or within the caster or a target.

The majority of Sibiriyaks neither devote not initiate to any Great Spirits. Instead, they acquire lesser spirit relationships, which manifest as standalone magical powers. This is the Special Advantage of Siberian Shamanism, discussed in the boxed text overleaf.

THE OTHER WORLD

The Otherworlds of the Sibiriyaks seem very strange to outsiders. The Ideal World is relatively straightforward, as the usual exaggerated version of the objective reality, but it is aggressively and rapidly seasonal. A typical day in the Ideal World will cycle through a year's climate: early morning is bitterly cold winter, with icy winds that coat everything with frost thick enough to impede movement. An hour after dawn, and it is spring: the snow thaws rapidly, leaving fertile, swampy mud and insects begin to become a problem. By midday, it is summer, and in many parts of the region, the clouds of insects are lethal to those who do not have some physical or, better yet, magical protection. Remember, these are magical insects, and a swarm is best characterised as a single entity with the attribute *Swarming Biting Stinging Bloodsucking Insect Cloud*



Special Advantage: Bind Spirit

Sibiryaks can bind or ally with minor spirits to gain relatively simple and specific powers – this is the most usual kind of magic most Sibiryaks use. They are standalone Natural Magical powers like feats. Thus, a hunter might have, thanks to minor spirits, the power of *Talk to Arctic Fox* or *Spot Movement on Ice*. These powers can be bought up as usual with hero points. These are very minor spirits, who flow into and around the hero; they are scarcely sentient, certainly not free willed. A Sibiryak hero will generally start play with one such spirit power at 17 automatically, without needing to include it within his narrative.

In most cases, these powers are gained through the intercession of a shaman at a ceremony or, more rarely, on encountering a friendly, major spirit prepared to lend the hero part of its own power or the services of one of its follower spirits. This may happen during the story or as the explanation as to how a hero acquired some magical ability by spending hero points.

However, a hero may also gain such powers through resisting hostile magic. When a Sibiryak hero successfully resists a magical attack using as the primary resistance his Piety (*Worship Great Spirits*) with a Complete Victory, which also in some way harms the caster. This represents wrenching away all or some of the enemy's magic (manifested purely in the harm it causes him), and the spirit will thus reflect all or some aspect of the attack.

If successful, the hero gains a specific spirit under his control. Even if the hostile magic was not animist, this is how it will manifest now, albeit somehow clearly alien to those who can see or communicate such things, with a peculiar form, strange accent, etc.

Appropriate Ability: Know Stories of the Spirits.

Typical Modifiers and Augments: Worship Great Spirits; relationship to Shaman [if during ritual].

Resistance: The strength of the magical attack.

Complete or Major Victory: The hero binds the spirit, acquiring an active, standalone magical power at 14, at a cost of 2 hero points or a single-use power at the attack's full rating, as below, for free.

Minor or Marginal Victory: The hero partially binds the spirit, gaining a single-use standalone magical power at 14 (be sure to mark this limitation).

Tie or Marginal, Minor, or Major Defeat: No spirit gained.

Complete Defeat: The hero leaves himself open to minor possession; he acquires a Flaw appropriate to the attack, of the same magnitude.

Example: Ayeou the Chud craftsman is scavenging in the woods for shed deer antlers to carve into tools and utensils when he comes across two Lithuanian renegades digging into a Chud burial ground. Enraged, he rushes forward, shouting curses and trying to drive them away. One falls back, but the other calls on his foreign spirits to *Blow Enemy Down* 2M. Having no more appropriate defence, Ayeou relies on his *Worship Great Spirits* 20. He is fortunate enough to win a Complete Victory; the Lithuanian staggers back, blasted by the winds he tried to control. Ayeou decides to try to bind the spirit, pitting his *Know Stories of the Spirits* 1M against its 2M. Unfortunately, this is where his luck fails: a Complete Defeat. He obviously swallows some of this foreign spirit without having controlled it, and gains the Flaw *Loud and Frequent Burps* 2M.

10M. By mid-afternoon, though, the temperatures are falling, and the insects rapidly begin to disappear as autumn sets in, and by sunset, it is winter again.

The Representational World, though, is very different. It is a foggy dreamland shaped by spirits and their raw powers and desires. There is no 'ground' as such, just a carpet of the small and simple spirits of grass and moss and earth and snow, and the air is thick with spirits of wind and bird and insect and cloud. It is as easy to travel in any direction, so long as the traveller can cope with passing through these spirits and either moving them from his path or forcing or convincing them to make way for him. Here the Shapes may sometimes be found, looming through the spirits. In this respect, movement is more like swimming through a sea of spirits than conventional travel. This, in the Sibiryak perspective, is the *real* world.

There are several small Boundary World regions which link the Representational to the Transcendent Worlds,

through which flow spirits back and forth, as the dead and destroyed pass upwards into the care of the Great Spirits, before passing back down to be reborn. These Boundary Worlds move with a similar migratory cycle as the Sibiryaks themselves, but at the far side. In other words, during summer, when most tribes are at the northernmost points of their migratory cycles, the Boundary Worlds are at their southernmost points. Many Sibiryaks have heard of some of them, such as the Rolling Rock (which appears as a great boulder, up which heroes must somehow climb, even as it turns, to reach the top) and the Twisting Dance (a raging whirlwind of screaming and tortured souls). However, detailed knowledge of them and their routes is a closely-guarded secret amongst those shamans who have learned them.

SPIRITS OF SIBERIA

Most Sibiriyaks never initiate or devote to spirits. They worship the Great Spirits as communal members of their Faith, but otherwise they confine their interactions with the petty spirits they can bind. If course, heroes are not 'most Sibiriyaks' and they may initiate or devote to Shapes.

What follows is just a small sample of the most widely-worshipped Shapes. Each has its own name in each of the appropriate languages, but a simple descriptive title is used instead of listing all the numerous local variations. In many, the *Entry Requirements*, *Worshippers* and *Rites & Representations* entries are omitted, because the answer to the first two is 'anyone who uses or relies on this Shape' and the last is 'it is represented as what it is'...

Associated Characteristics

In every case, devotion to one of these spirits involves acquiring a Flaw (which starts at 17). To a Sibiriyak, these are not flaws as such, simply reflections of the way tying your spirit to that of something much more powerful inevitably means that you take on some of its attributes. If the hero already possesses the characteristic, then it instead receives a +5 bonus.

These can be bought down normally with the use of hero points, but for each point one of these Flaws is reduced, the hero loses one from that spirit's Affinity and his *Devotee of...* ability because he is in effect shutting out the Shape from his own spirit. The *Devotee of...* and affinity can then be bought back up with hero points. As these Flaws reflect a degree of integration with the Shape, they may be used to augment *Devotee of...* or the like in suitable situations.

BEAR

Bear is the essence of nature: mightier than man, but sometimes able to be defeated. Eventually, though, Bear always wins. Worship of Bear is especially strong among the Khants.

Abilities: Bear Lore, Devotee of Bear or Initiate of Bear, Ignore Cold, Stories of Bear, Strong.

Virtues: Proud.

Affinity: **Bear** (Lethal Claws, Sleep Safely, Terrifying Roar, Thick Fur)

Secret: **Don Bearskin** (The devotee throws a bearskin over himself and becomes a bear – the kind is dictated by the skin – of typical mass. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In bear form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which seem appropriate. For example, *Keen Sight* will transfer, but *Archery* will be rather beyond the shape's capabilities. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Sleepy Through Winter*.

BOW & ARROW

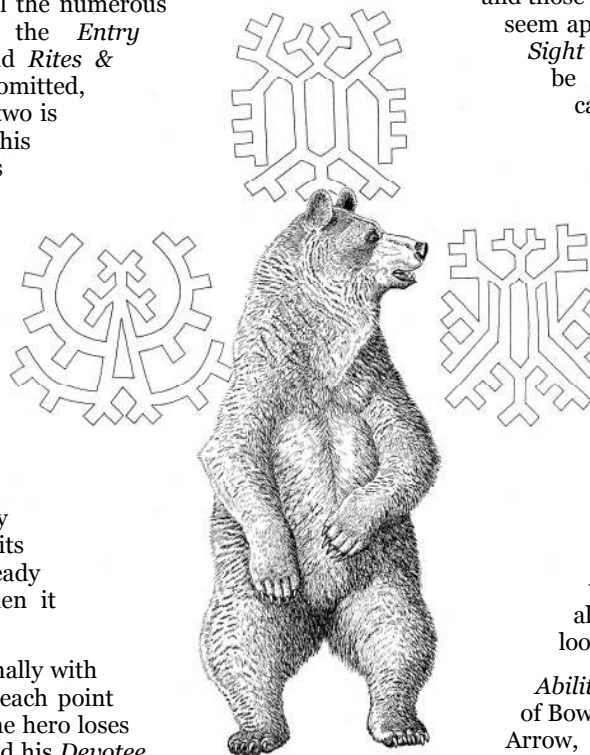
Bow and Arrow (they are seen as the same Shape) represents rightful death, in the hunt or in war, but this is also a weapon more easily loosed than controlled.

Abilities: Archer, Bowyer, Devotee of Bow & Arrow or Initiate of Bow & Arrow, Fletcher, Stories of Bow & Arrow.

Virtues: Bloodthirsty, Impatient.

Affinity: **Bow & Arrow** (Dodge Arrow, Killing Arrow, Protect Bow, See from Arrow's Head, Shoot as Far as the Eye Can See, Unerring Arrow)

Secret: **One with the Bow** (The hero enters a trance-like union with his bow. While this is in effect, he gains a bonus to his Archery equal to the full secret's rating. However, he will continue to fire so long as he has arrows to hand – in his quiver or within reach – and once he has taken down all enemies or prey, he will start shooting at neutral and friendly targets. He remains in this trance until he runs out of arrows or is overpowered or knocked unconscious. Well-prepared devotees carefully count out an appropriate number of arrows, or keep an





assistant to feed them new ones or snatch the surplus away, as circumstances require!)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Shoots Before Thinks*.

CANOE

This is the Shape of riverboats of every kind, from the one-man kayaks of the arctic tribes to the six-man dugouts with which Votyaks ply the rough waters of the Vyatka.

Abilities: Boating, Build [Boat], Devotee of Canoe or Initiate of Canoe, Stories of Canoe, Swim.

Virtues: Adventurous.

Affinity: **Canoe** (Bless Canoe, Keep Canoe Afloat, Find Paddle, Keep Paddling, Paddle Against Current, Seal Leak, Shoot the Rapids)

Secret: **Awaken Canoe** (The hero may awaken the spirit of a boat he has made himself. It becomes a sentient ally, with a rating equal to the secret's, which it may use to augment any appropriate action of the hero's or resist damage. Only one such boat may be awakened at any one time.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Never Turn Down Challenge*.

CROW

Crow is clever and quick, a Shape which also represents sharp wits.

Abilities: Clever, Devotee of Crow or Initiate of Crow, Lie Well, Quick Reactions, Stories of Crow.

Virtues: Loves Puzzles, Mischievous.

Affinity: **Crow** (Eat Carrion Safely, Sense Real Motive, Smell Presence of Death, Think Quicker)

Secret: **Crow's Form** (The devotee may become a large but normal-looking crow – see **BEASTS, HEROES & SPIRITS** for a bird's abilities. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In crow form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which seem appropriate. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Think You're So Clever*.

DARKNESS

Darkness is a huge monster which fills the skies with its winged bulk. It represents not just the absence of light, but a hunger that cannot be satisfied, for every month it tries and fails to eat the moon.

Abilities: Devotee of Darkness or Initiate of Darkness, Keep Eating, Sense Way in Darkness, Stories of Darkness.

Virtues: Dislikes Bright Light, Greedy.

Affinity: **Darkness** (Blind, Blot Out Light, Digest Anything, Open Jaws Wide, Sniff Out Food)

Secret: **Eat Light** (Provides the secret's full rating as a bonus to augment the Darkness affinity or resisting light-based magic. The devotee must eat after each use of the secret.)

Rites & Representations: Darkness is never represented as anything other than a black circle.

Worshippers: Darkness is an evil, dangerous Shape: it may be worshipped to keep it under control, or by those who revel in its powers.

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw for devotees is *Constantly Hungry*; a hero with this Flaw at a high level and a lack of balancing self-discipline could, if presented with enough food, eat himself to death.

DOG

Dogs are vital to many Sibiryak tribes and Dog represents not just the animal, but loyalty and teamwork.

Abilities: Devotee of Dog or Initiate of Dog, Dog Lore, Stories of Dog, Train Dog.

Virtues: Love Dogs, Social.

Affinity: **Dog** (Bark, Dog's Nose, Heal Dog, See Through Dog's Eyes, Talk to Dogs)

Secret: **Dogskin** (The devotee may become a dog of equal mass, which will generally mean a Very Large Dog. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In dog form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which seem appropriate. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Cannot Abandon a Friend*.

FIRE

It is fire which turns the felled logs into nutrient for the soil to allow farming in the Siberian wilds, fire which can harden a stick's point until it becomes a spear, it is fire which keeps the wolves and the cold at bay. Fire is life.

Abilities: Devotee of Fire or Initiate of Fire, Find Firewood, Light Fire, Stories of Fire, Tend Fire.

Virtues: Passionate, Reckless.

Affinity: **Fire** (Heal Burns, Defrost, Fire in the Loins, Start Fire, Warm Home)

Secret: **Burn!** (The devotee can make anything burn, even ice. The resistance is 14 for naturally-



inflammable material, such as wood – even if green and wet – but other materials will resist with a higher resistance depending on how non-flammable they are and their size. For example, a gold coin or a snowball would have a resistance of 17, while a stone bridge would be 1112. Flammable materials will burn normally, but to keep non-flammable materials burning, the devotee must also take a duration penalty – see page xx. Items will be damaged as they burn, but generally last at least a minute, even that snowball would last a while before melting. Prolonged burning will melt metals and leave stone brittle and crumbly.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Lustful*.

FOREST

A forest is full of trees, but has just one Shape.

Abilities: Devotee of Forest *or* Initiate of Forest, Know Sounds of the Forest, Know [Particular Forest], Stand Still, Stories of Forest.

Virtues: Patient, See Big Picture.

Affinity: **Forest** (Barkskin, Heal Tree, Leap into

Tree, Stand Tall, Unnoticed in Forest)

Secret: **Friend of the Forest** (The devotee gains a bonus equal to ¼ of the secret's ability when in a forest.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Slow to Reach a Decision*.

GOOSE

From the white Snow Goose of the arctic to the Swan Goose of central Siberia, the region is home for part of the year to these great birds. As autumn approaches, they fly south and east, in great flocks that can blot out the sun, until they fly straight off the edge of the world and into unknown spirit realms. Thus, this Shape also represents the unknowable and journeys into the unfamiliar.

Abilities: Devotee of Goose *or* Initiate of Goose, Know Riddles, Know Tales of Distant Lands, Stories of Goose.

Virtues: Enigmatic, Territorial.

Affinity: **Goose** (Alarming Honk, Find Way Out, Goose Flight, Travel Unknown Path, Unexpectedly Sharp Peck)

STORY SEED: A TORRENT OF FUR AND TEETH

Siberia is rich in mink and sable, but suddenly the prey of the hunters has become predator. In ones, two, tens, then hundred and thousand, sable and mink, as well as kindred beasts such as wolverines and polecats, are flooding westwards from the deep forests. Hunters have succumbed to this tide of fur and teeth, then whole villages. Not only does this pose a direct threat, it risks destabilising a regional economy based on 'soft gold' – and raises the disquieting question of just what could be driving them westward. Sibiriyaks and northern Rus' alike (especially Novgorodians) have a very real interest in bringing this to an end.

► Over time, even Shapes can form, rise and fall. The importance of the fur trade and the energies being devoted to it have empowered a new Shape, Fur. Fur not only stands for all these animals, it represents natural wealth. Fur now has mobilised its mortal subjects, seeking to force those who depend upon it to recognise it and provide due reverence. It is looking for its own shamans – and will richly reward the first who realise its presence and devote themselves to it.

► Feofanov Grachev thought that his wizardry could repair the fortunes of his family's trading house, and researched a spell to ensure that mink would flock to their hunters' traps. Needless to say, it went terribly wrong, summoning a horde of angry beasts. What Feofanov does not realise is that they are looking for him, in Novgorod, and if not checked they will swarm the city. Would his death solve the problem?

► Nganabutumu is angry. This Tavgy shaman has seen even Sibiriyaks become corrupted by the Rus', turning hunting – once simply part of the natural cycle of life – into a means to gain wealth. It is time to teach these tainted peoples a lesson, and scour the Silent Land of them. For eight years, eight months, eight days and eight hours, he has worked a mighty ritual, which is driving the beasts to the west. He is now trapped in the Representational World, screaming in silent agonies as the magics kill him yet will not let him die...

► A combination of the three above; cast at the same time, Nganabutumu's rite and Feofanov's spell together have created something neither intended, empowering a new Power, Fur. Fur, though, is trapped in the process of birth, in the same agonies as the wizard and the shaman, and his resonating spirit-screams are driving his animal kin mad with anger and pain. How can Fur be released and propitiated, and what will the creation of a new Shape mean for the world?

► They are not attacking, they are fleeing. A terrible new threat is on their heels – whether an army of the Kam, or a wave of mutating chaotic energies, or angry leshy raising legions of awoken trees, it must be extraordinary to drive the animals before it.



Secret: Be the Goose (The devotee may become a large but normal-looking goose. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In goose form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which seem appropriate. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability associated with the form, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Must Travel in Winter*.

Ice

Ice is the Shape of death: the immobility of the frozen corpse or the lethal precariousness of the slippery slope or thin frost over a chilling lake.

Abilities: Assess Thickness of Ice, Devotee of Ice or Initiate of Ice, Move Safely on Ice, Skate, Stories of Ice.

Virtues: Pitiless.

Affinity: Ice (Crack Ice, Freeze Corpse, Hurl Icicle, Thicken Ice, Thin Ice)

Secret: Ice Breath (This magical attack, if successful, freezes its animate target solid. He is still alive, albeit insensible, and if carefully thawed will survive, although running the risk of frostbite or other damage. However, a rapid thawing will be fatal, and human icicles are vulnerable to deliberate or accidental breakage.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Makes Babies Cry*.

IRON

Most Sibiriyaks do not know iron well enough fully to understand this Shape, which is largely confined to the Nenets and Chuds. Iron is unyielding strength and unnatural death.

Entry Requirements: Only men may worship Iron.

Abilities: Devotee of Iron or Initiate of Iron, Sharpen Weapon, Stories of Iron.

Virtues: Merciless.

Affinity: Iron (Deadly Blade, Sharp Edge, Unyielding Will)

Secret: Killing Iron (When the hero, using an iron weapon empowered by any of the Iron affinity feats, drives an enemy below zero AP in an extended contest or achieves a Major or better victory in a simple one, he may seek to draw upon Iron's life-hunger to kill the target, who may resist as usual against the secret's rating. However, the wielder of the Killing Iron gains a bonus equal to the number of AP the target has been driven below zero.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Aloof and Unemotional*.

MOSQUITO

Mosquito is only worshipped by the Sibiriyaks of the taiga, such as the Votyaks and Samis, and even then only in the hope of propitiating the Shape of biting insects and keep them from people and herds.

Abilities: Cope with Insect Bites, Devotee of Mosquito or Initiate of Mosquito, Stories of Mosquito.

Virtues: Persistent, Selfish.

Affinity: Mosquito (Bloodsucking Bite, Irritating Buzz, Quick Dodge, Sense Body Warmth, Swat Insect)

Secret: Propitiate Mosquito (Insects will not willingly approach the devotee, clearing an area with a radius of metres equal to the secret's rating.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Finds it Hard to Sleep at Night*.

RAIN

Rain is sometimes irritating, but brings fertility and healing.

Entry Requirements: The worshipper cannot also initiate or devote to Iron.

Abilities: Dance in the Rain, Devotee of Rain or Initiate of Rain, First Aid, Sense Imminence of Rain, Stories of Rain.

Virtues: Caring.

Affinity: Rain (Call Rain from Cloud, Fertilising Rainfall, Make Rain Cure Illness, Make Rain Heal Wound)

Secret: Rain of Life (The devotee ties another out on a wooden frame and then waits for rain – it cannot be magically induced. This rain can then be used in a ritual to carry out Great Healing on the target. Alternatively, it can engender extremely fertility, such that the next time he or she has sex, so long as it is within a week, pregnancy is assured.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Irritating Chatter*.

(NAMED) RIVER

Each of the main rivers running through Siberia has its own Shape.

Abilities: Boating, Devotee of [River] Spirit or Initiate of [River] Spirit, Fishing, Know [River], Stories of [River] Spirit, Swim.

Virtues: Love [River].

Affinity: Power of the River (Breathe River Water, Make Fish Leap Into Hands, Paddle Fast, Right Capsized Boat)



Secret: Friend of the [River] (Gives a bonus equal to ¼ of the secret's ability when on or in the named river.)

Rites & Representations: The Ob is a kindly old man, the Yenisei an imperious river-chief, the Dvina a cold and demanding woman and the Pechora a mischievous young man.

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Cannot Keep Still*.

REINDEER

The reindeer is central to the lives of many northern Sibiriyaks, and its Shape represents survival in harsh climes.

Abilities: Devotee of Reindeer *or* Initiate of Reindeer, Drive Sleigh *or* Ride Reindeer, Reindeer Lore, Stories of Reindeer.

Virtues: Respect Reindeer.

Affinity: Deer (Be Sustained Eating Moss and Lichen, Grow Antlers, Headbutt, Pull Sleigh, Resist Cold, Swim in Icy Waters)

Secret: Be A Deer (The devotee dons a hat or headdress bearing antlers and becomes a reindeer. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In reindeer form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and appropriate physical characteristics. The secret's rating can be used to augment any of the form's natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely. Also, while in reindeer form, the secret's *entire* rating can be used as a bonus to attempts to resist the cold. Thus, a character with *Arctic Survival 5m* and *Be A Deer 5m* would actually have the equivalent of *Arctic Survival 10m2* in deer form!)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Aggressive in Autumn*.

SNOWSTORM

The snowstorm is more than just wind, or snow, or cold, but a dangerous combination of all three and thus deserving of a Shape to itself. It is worshipped above all to placate it – and as a weapon against your foes.

Abilities: Devotee of Snowstorm *or* Initiate of Snowstorm, Smell Imminence of Snowstorm, Stories of Snowstorm, Survive Snowstorm.

Virtues: Fervent.

Affinity: Snowstorm (Bitter Chill, Blind with Snow, Call Down Snow, Part the Snowstorm, Swirling Wind)

Secret: Ride the Storm (The devotee may fly through the air on the winds of a snowstorm. The normal resistance of 14 applies, increasing the more persistent or formidable the actions the devotee wants to carry out. Swooping down on a

wind, striking a foe and then swooping away, for example, would have a resistance of **5m**. To fly more than an hour in a day adds a cumulative +10 per hour, checked again per hour. Combat while flying incurs a penalty of -10, as the hero is being buffeted and blown about by the very snowstorm which bears him. Only very serious failures actually mean the devotee falls from the sky; usually they simply reflect an inability to ride or control the winds, a mishap such as dropping something, or else that the storm has dispersed.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Cannot Stop Fighting Until All Foes Dead*.

SPEAR

A spear is a weapon, but it is also a hunting weapon and a practical tool (a Sibiriyak's spear may as often be pressed into service as the carrying pole onto which to lash a dead reindeer or a makeshift tent pole). As such, the Shape represents man and man's tools.

Entry Requirements: Only men may worship Spear.

Abilities: Craft Tool, Devotee of Spear *or* Initiate of Spear, Make Spear, Spear Fighting, Stories of Spear.

Virtues: Self-Reliant.

Affinity: Spear (Make Spear of Stick, Sharp Point, Strong Shaft, Thrust Deep)

Secret: Man's Work (This secret allows a number of men equal to half the secret's rating men to combine their abilities more effectively while carrying out some extended task such as cutting trees or building a hut. Augmentation is *doubly* effective when directed towards this task. However, this only works so long as no women are in sight or earshot.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Inordinate Pride in Own Tools*.

THAW

Outsiders may think the thaw simply a by-product of spring, or heat, or rain, but all Sibiriyaks know that it is a Shape in itself, symbolising the hope but also the danger in change, as embodied in the fertile forests and dangerous swamps and insects released by the end of winter.

Abilities: Devotee of Thaw *or* Initiate of Thaw, Move Safely Through Swamp, Stories of Thaw.

Virtues: Impatient, Optimistic.

Affinity: Thaw (Banish Insects, Clear Snow, Melt Ice, Raise Hopes, Slushy Ground, Thin Ice, Warm Glow)

Secret: Change (This secret can be used to provide a bonus of ¼ its value to any ability used to enact positive, life-affirming change. Thus, it could boost chances of persuading a recluse to see his



estranged family or heal a wound, but not kill an enemy.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Feels the Cold*, quite a problem for a Sibiryak.

WOLF

If Bear is the chieftain of the animal world, Wolf is the hunter, respected as well as feared.

Abilities: Devotee of Wolf or Initiate of Wolf, Stories of Wolf, Tireless Lope.

Virtues: Social, Predatory.

Affinity: **Wolf** (Coordinate with Pack, Run for Days, Savage Bite, Terrifying Howl)

Secret: **Wolfskin** (The devotee may throw a wolfskin over himself and become a wolf of equal mass, which will generally mean a Very Large Wolf. The devotee must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In wolf form, the hero retains all mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which seem appropriate. For example, *Quick Thinker* will transfer, but *Cross-Country Skiing* will be beyond the shape's capabilities. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Disadvantages: The associated Flaw is *Picks on the Weak*.

PLAYING SIBIRYAKS

Sibiryaks are the most 'barbaric' of the peoples of **Mythic Russia** – that does not necessarily mean that they are crude or violent. If anything, they are often more moral than their Russian, Mongol and European neighbours. However, it does mean that Sibiryak characters will have a very different outlook and can make an interesting change of pace.

Indeed, a player new to the world of **Mythic Russia** could usefully choose to play a Sibiryak venturing west for the first time in his life. Thus, his lack of knowledge of the background will not be an obstacle but a feature of his adventure, and player and character can learn about this new world together.

YOUR FIRST SIBIRYAK HERO

Here are a few questions to consider when creating a Sibiryak hero:

- ❑ **Who are my people?** The tribes covered in this chapter are only a small fraction of the total, and they are loose cultural and linguistic units rather than sharply-defined nations. It is thus entirely appropriate for the player to come up with his own tribe or community if he wants.
- ❑ **What kind of barbarian am I?** There are many ways to envision barbarians. A taciturn 'noble savage' whose simple nobility and unparalleled wilderness skills humble the 'civilised' people around him? A bloodthirsty savage? A comic-relief primitive who thinks a castle is a mountain and, when offered a bed, sleeps underneath this 'wooden choom'?
- ❑ **What are my spirits?** Does your hero seek a relationship with Shapes, or is content with binding minor spirits?
- ❑ **What am I doing out of Siberia?** The Sibiryaks are specialised in their skills, insular in their

outlook. Why is your hero venturing out into the strange, unnaturally warm lands of the west, where people complain of being cold in what to you are balmy, comfortable days, where there are no reindeer to be seen, and where the spirits are ignored or treated as saints or gods? Were you driven from your home or has something called you here?

Bearfeasts

The bear is a special and sacred animal, possessed not just of great strength, but also magic and wisdom. When one is killed in the hunt, its spirit must be placated lest it return to wreak revenge. Typically, the carcass is brought back to the village in a procession, then offered food and drink, entertained with stories (including exaggerated accounts of its prowess) and music, sometimes for days and nights on end, before being carefully butchered and eaten. (In some tribes, they will check its stomach, first; if there is any sign that it has eaten a human, then they must burn the whole carcass, instead.) Its skull will then be used as a totem, either set upon a pole to watch over a village or fixed into a cairn to mark tribal lands or routes.

Occupations

The indicated occupations for the Sibiryak keyword are:

- ❑ **Child:** Sibiryak children must learn the ways of survival at an early age, but are children nonetheless.
- ❑ **Crafter** (artisan): The Sibiryaks may appear primitive peoples, and on the whole they do not mine or work with metal, but nonetheless they have their own distinctive crafts, working furs, skins, bone, stone and gut with great skill.



- ❑ **Entertainer** (Drummer, Singer, Storyteller): The entertainers perform vital roles. They are the repositories of history, preserved in stories, songs and dances, told and retold during the winters. They play key roles in magical rituals, appeasing the souls of animals the community hunts, trees they cut down. Finally, their entertainments help fill the long winters, when otherwise close confinement and scarce rations might turn brother against sister, parent against child.
- ❑ **Farmer:** Most Sibiryak tribes do not engage in much farming, as the soil and climate does not allow, but the further south their lands, the more likely this is. Farmers are therefore more likely actually to be gatherers, collecting natural bounty from the area or as they travel, whether berries and roots or wood for the fire. This keyword can also be used for fishermen who use nets and lines.
- ❑ **Healer:** Healers are vital to any community. If they follow a Shape, it will generally be Thaw or Rain.
- ❑ **Hunter:** Hunters are important figures within most Sibiryak tribes, and the growing Rus' market for furs is only making them more so. The community depends on them to hunt for food and material and also as defenders, the skilled and silent masters of their rough lands. Most use spears or bows, and many also work with trained dogs. This keyword can be used for fishermen who spear their prey.
- ❑ **Priest** (shaman): The shaman is a vital link between the community and the spirits all around them.
- ❑ **Nomad:** This is the default occupation, one who knows a little hunting, a little herding, perhaps even a little crafting or farming, but in essence does whatever is required to survive.



- ❑ **Warrior:** Specialised warriors are rare amongst the Sibiryaks, amongst whom everyone must play their part in bringing in the food and the firewood, and will generally either be chiefs or their personal followers. They typically fight like hunters, with spears and bows, but some may have acquired weapons and even armour from Mongols, Rus' or other travellers.

TEDYUZ THE CROW POET

While all good Sibiryaks respect Crow's cunning, the Votyak shaman Tedyuz regards them as the closest spirit-kin to humans. In her long poems, she tells of the epic journey Crow made from the Transcendent to the Mortal World, being teased and tested, broken and beleaguered by the Great Spirits, until she won through and demonstrated her immortal quality. Tedyuz travels far in human or crow shape, and is happy to help others, so long as they share their stories and riddles and listen to her poems. The shortest takes five hours to recite, the longest four days...

Votyak Shaman 15m2, Devotee of Crow 1m3, Enjoy Riddles 20m, Long-Winded Poetess 10m2.

SIBIRYAKS AS NARRATOR CHARACTERS

Sibiryaks are outsiders, even in the Russian north. As discussed above, they may be played as noble savages, wise in their own lore. They might be ignorant bumpkins on whom the Russians may look down. Yet they can also be used as 'wild cards' – the Rus' really have little idea of their ways, magics and beliefs, and given their ability to find and ally with all kinds of spirits, a Sibiryak character can be an unpredictable ally or enemy, with strange magical powers genuinely beyond a Russian hero's ken.

SIBIRYAKS IN YOUR WORLD


Because of their marginal lifestyle and scattered, fragmentary distribution, the Sibiryaks do not represent much of an active player in the politics of **Mythic Russia**. They are largely a reactive force, facing and as often as possible ignoring attempts by the Russians and others to tax and control them. However, it need not be that way, and here are a few options to give them a more significant and central role:



The Sibiryak Messiah. Politically fragmented they may be, but the Sibiryaks are nonetheless united by a common belief in the Great Spirits. From the depths of the taiga comes a man, tall and strong and bearing on his skin the marks of power and destiny. The Sky blesses him, the Sun looks upon him



with honour and the Broad Earth blooms where his feet fall. Around him swirl spirits whose names are unknown and whose shapes are unclear, and he speaks every Sibiryak language and none they have ever heard. He brings a message of hope and fear, and behind him the Sibiryak peoples unite as they have never before, a terrifying host of ice-hardened zealots finally given a great cause of their own. So what is his message? Perhaps he knows that the Great World Winter is coming, when ice will stretch from one horizon to the next and the Sibiryaks must push south and west to find new lands? Or is the Wakening Time coming, when the spirits will show themselves and the Mortal World will fade away, revealing the Representational World beneath? Or is he twisting the true powers of the Shapes to his own ends, using them to raise a maddened, blinded horde to carve himself an empire?

 **Fire in the East.** In 1908, a great explosion over the Tunguska river in eastern Siberia flattened 80 million trees and laid waste to 2150 square kilometres of taiga. What if this were not the first such event? In the cities of the Rus', in Tsargrad, perhaps even along the Baltic coast, a bright flash illuminates the eastern horizon, following by the faint echoes of a mighty explosion and a rolling shock wave? What has happened beyond the Ural Mountains? Some say that an angel has fallen from heaven, leaving in its pyre its sword, forged by God. Others talk of Perun's final struggle with Zmei Gorynich and of a battlefield

strewn with broken dragon's teeth and the molten remnants of Perun's thunderbolts. Mongols mutter of the loss of Gesar Khan's Blazing Comet Blade – an omen of ill fortune for the Horde as a whole, but a great opportunity for whoever finds it. Whatever the truth, the result is a series of rival expeditions to trace this site and plunder its remains – but are the Sibiryaks right that this was not something falling from the sky, nor was it behind the Urals, but the awakening of the Stone Dragon, alerted to some threat from beyond the known realms?



Tamerlane's Northern Way. The Golden Horde is, as is discussed in the chapter on **THE MONGOLS**, being pressed by a new enemy rising from the east, one more dangerous than any Russian army: Tamerlane, leading a mighty nomad host. Historically, he ignored the tundra and taiga, following the well-travelled routes along south-central Siberia as he carved a new nomad empire. What if he or some ambitious lieutenant such as Ulugbek the Fiery Arrow decided to open a separate front by sending an army across the top of Eurasia one summer? Thanks to great rituals, the sacrifice of twenty thousand prisoners and the powers of Tamerlane's ancestral spirits, a cavalry army could thunder across the wastes before the deep winter snows, to fall like a sabre on Russia's exposed northern cities. Unless, that is, someone found a way to raise the Sibiryaks against them or, even more spectacularly, the mightiest spirits of the 'Quiet Land'...



THE SLEEPING LAND: ADVENTURING IN SIBERIA

The environment in Siberia is so extreme that it deserves mention on its own, although much of this section also applies to parts of Russia, too.

THE TUNDRA

The further north the tundra regions lie, the more they suffer long winters in which the sun scarcely rises and the days are dim and grey, and summers in which the sun never sets.

Winter in the tundra is eerily quiet. Snow spreads and deadens sound, and many animals have either flown or moved to warmer climes or are hibernating. In this quiet, the hiss of the Northern Lights or the squeal and groan of distant ice is all the more striking. During the days, the sky is often clear, though, and the sunlight casts a dazzling glare off ice and snow. This may even cause snow blindness.

These are permafrost regions: even in the height of summer, the ground thaws to no more than a man's length in depth, often much less. Below, Ice lies waiting, brooding and implacable, and those able to hear the

SIBERIA BY THE NUMBERS

Here are some rough figures for quantifying the harshness of conditions encountered in Siberia. The real challenge is in knowing how to use them. By all means pit them against the heroes' survival skills, but treat failure or success with equal regard for the story. A failure, for example, could mean some mishap, or that the heroes were forced to turn back to shelter. It could mean that they find themselves in a terrible plight which opens up new adventure opportunities, perhaps realising that they will not make the journey in time to foil their enemy's plot, unless they get help: how can they convince the local Sibiryaks to assist them?

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Deep winter in the tundra | 1112 |
| Summer in the tundra | 20 |
| Deep winter in the central taiga | 1511 |
| Summer in the taiga | 14 (+10-20 for the mosquitoes) |
| If you need a separate figure for nighttime conditions, add 10-20. | |

spirits may still catch the chilling and impatient whispers of Ice's children below. Attempts to dig below the surface soil will soon hit frozen earth.

THE TAIGA

The taiga may be to the south of the tundra, but conditions can be just as harsh in their own ways. The winters are long – some areas remain frost-covered for ten months of the year – and Ice is not countered by the warming Wind liberated by Sea. As a result, temperatures can drop even lower than in the tundra.

Most of the taiga is swampy, and while this freezes in winter, it means that in autumn there is the risk of falling through thin ice into cold waters, while in spring the thaw creates a thick and sticky mud which makes travel very difficult. In the summer, though, Mosquito holds sway. High summer can be hot and humid, and the air is thick with insects. Travellers need thick (and thus hot) clothes or magic to pass, while animals can literally be eaten away, one mosquito-full of blood at a time.

RAIN & SNOW

If rain falls in very cold conditions, it may either form a sheet of hard-to-spot black ice, very treacherous under foot, or even freeze as it falls, coating everything with a scatter of glistening ice crystals.

Snow clouds are dark and may blot out the sun. Gentle snow fall is one thing, but a

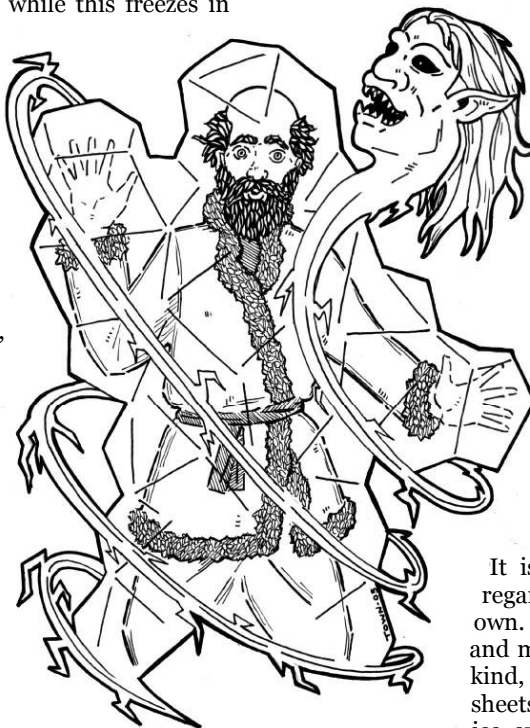
snowstorm – in which the snow is being blown by Wind, quite possibly seeming to blow almost sideways – can not only blast snow into your eyes and deep into your clothes but be very disorienting, with visibility dropping to a man's height or so.

Even once the storm is over, a snow-clad landscape is often hard to recognise. The snow drifts and blows into hollows, flattening out existing contours and creating new ones. In very low temperatures (below -20°C), snowflakes will be small and hard, more like icflakes. The resulting snowdrifts are more like fine dry sand, shifting around easily, refusing to pack except under pressure, squeaking and crunching underfoot.

Walking through snow is very tiring, which is why Sibiryaks and some Russians use snowshoes to allow them to walk on its surface. Snow in cold conditions can freeze quickly, leaving an icy crust on top of soft drifts. This may be thick enough for children and small animals to cross, it may even sustain adult men, but it is almost impossible to know which. A miscalculation can send you sinking hip deep into the soft snow underneath.

Ice

It is no wonder that the Sibiryaks regard Ice as a spirit Shape all its own. Ice creaks and groans as it shifts and moves, and forms shapes of every kind, from treacherously smooth sheets to ridges and shards. Indeed, ice expands as it cools, so in frozen lakes and rivers the pressure may eventually start pushing up ridges of ice along the middle of their area. Any



Ice spirits are no friends of the warm-blooded...



STORY SEED: GO EAST, YOUNG MAN

Vadim Gerasimov, spoilt and hot-headed son of a Novgorod trading magnate, was sufficiently peeved when his father refused to sanction his proposed marriage to a pretty but impoverished serving girl than when it was suggested that a trip into Siberia would both give him a chance to cool off and experience in the family business, he took it to extremes. In the middle of the night, over a year ago, he saddled up his favourite horse and galloped east, and beyond occasional reports from traders and travellers, he has not been heard of since.

His father is now seriously ill, possibly near death, and for the family business to survive, Vadim needs to be home, soon. The heroes may be associates of the business, hirelings or others with some reason to bring him back, but as they follow clues from his last sighting (passing through Khlynov), this provides an excuse for the narrator to send them on a grand tour of the Sleeping Land. Of course, there must always be complications...

► **Pride.** Finding a ragged and half-starved Vadim is one thing, getting him to return to Novgorod is another, until they can come up with some way to salve his ego and let him feel that he is returning a hero, not a feckless brat.

► **Envy.** Vadim's half-brother, Balach, stands to gain control of the business if Vadim can be proven to have died. Balach is actually a punctilious, efficient and resourceful figure, who would do a far better job. He thinks so, too, and so has set out with his own retainers to make sure that Vadim is found dead.

► **Gluttony.** You can be a glutton for all sorts of things: drink, food, even self-pity. Vadim is so far gone on his personal martyrdom kick that he sees no reason to return to the family which so ill-treated him...

► **Lust.** He's still a sucker for a pretty face: Vadim has fallen for a Sibiryak girl. The trouble is, she is married, to a powerful Votyak chief.

► **Anger.** Vadim burns with youthful self-righteousness and is gathering an army of hunters, renegades and bandits to wage war against his family's interests in Siberia, to conquer or destroy what he is due to inherit.

► **Greed.** Vadim has heard tell of a whole mountain of silver somewhere in the east, more money than his father made in his whole life. Going on a shred of map, and a fourth-hand story from a drunk traveller in a Khlynov tavern, he's on his way to make his fortune. He's sure of it.

► **Sloth.** Having chased red herrings, the heroes eventually find that Vadim has settled into a life of sorts in Khlynov as a simple labourer, spending what little he earns of enough vodka to remain in semi-permanent inebriation. He has lost his fire, his spirit, and can't be bothered returning to Novgorod, especially not to face the hard work of running the family business.

Sibiryak knows that this is nothing less than the labour pains of a new ice spirit being born, and ice spirits are dangerous.

THE COLD

Siberia is often, but not always cold, but it is generally a dry cold, making even low temperatures more bearable than winters in wetter climes. That said, low temperatures have their own characteristics and dangers. Temperatures of -10°C (14°F) may sound cold, but are relatively congenial for those who are well-wrapped and know what they are doing, so long as there is not too much wind and they keep moving to stay warm. Any warmer, and snow melts on clothes and the body, leaving them wet and cold. Of course, as temperatures drop, or the wind brings its own chill, conditions soon become more difficult. After all, a strong wind can reduce the effective temperature down by 5°C, 10°C or even 20°C.

By -20°C (-4°F), the cold flows into your lungs with every breath and frostbite begins to become a real concern. Leather clothes become stiff and unwieldy and

if skin touches metal, it may bond and need to be carefully removed in warmer water.

As temperatures fall below -30°C (-22°F), then only the widest and fastest-flowing rivers (or those kept flowing by their spirits) remain unfrozen. In these temperatures, trees and logs crackle and groan when under stress and are also easier to split.

By -40°C (-40°F), your nasal hairs freeze as you inhale, your eyelashes may freeze together and your breath freezes and falls to the ground with a rustle the Sibiryaks call 'the whispering of the stars.' In these kinds of temperatures, even stranger effects are possible. Trees may spontaneously explode with a sharp crack as water and sap within them freeze. These are truly extreme conditions, and those without the right skills, clothes and magic are in serious danger if they seek to do more than dash from one fire-heated building to another.

SURVIVAL

Woollens and similar knitted clothes let the cold in too easily and become heavy and cold when wet. Thus, even Russians know to use furs or skins instead, and





Sibiryaks also know that hoods edged with fur create a small, warmer 'bubble' around the face. However, there are particular hazards associated with working, hiking long distances or otherwise exerting yourself in truly cold temperatures. Sweat can be a real problem, as it can become dangerous as it cools and draws heat from the body, so if possible, strip layers off while working to avoid sweating – but not so much as to court frostbite.

Frostbite is a serious danger: frozen skin which becomes white or blue, waxy and hard to the touch and may blister or simply die away. Watch your friends' exposed skin as they watch yours for the first telltale signs, and treat frostbitten skin by immersion in warm water or warm cloths. Prolonged exposure to the cold may lead to hypothermia as the victim's body temperature drops, leading first to listlessness and eventually a comatose sleep in which they slip gently to death.

If caught out in the snow without shelter, Sibiryaks (and most Russians, for that matter) remember that the surface layer of snow is the coldest. One way to survive a night in the open is to dig a mound of snow and letting it freeze, then tunnelling in and hollowing out the inside. With a small opening to allow in fresh air, your body heat should keep your little nest around 0°C.

The Beauty

Siberia can be terrible, but these conditions can also be beautiful. In the northern regions, on clear winter nights, the skies are dominated by the dancing sheets of light some call the Northern Lights (or aurora borealis), but which the Sibiryaks know is just the bleed-through of the spirit world into our own. The tundra has a sharp-edged beauty of its own, just as a spring morning in the taiga, with the crisp wind scented by a million pine trees, can be a magical evocation of the first sunrise of the world. As the Sibiryaks say, 'a sharp life is a sweet one' – and life in the Silent Land is undoubtedly sharp.

17. LITHUANIA: THE LAST PAGAN REALM

“Soil and Sky and Rain and Sun – Our Land”

The Baltic lands of Lithuania are as distinctive for their treacherous swamps and deep, dark forests as the fierce, proud spirit of those who live in the basins of the Niemen, Neris and Vilnya rivers. Lithuania has the distinction of being the last pagan country in Europe, although it too is close to accepting the onward march of Christianity, as much for political as religious reasons.

This is, after all, a country at a crossroads. Its pagan traditions, the faith known as Romuva, has for centuries provided a unifying principle for various tribes which were only really united by Grand Duke Mindaugas 150 years ago. Even then, this did not create some single, unified people. They came together because of an external threat, as this was the only way they could resist the encroachments of the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (whose army was shattered by the Lithuanians in 1236, forcing them to join the Teutons). While fighting the Ordenstaat shoulder-to-shoulder, families, communities and tribes still cling to their distinctive traditions and identities.

While the nobility is Christian, the mass of the population clings to its pagan ways. However, they too

face conversion, a conversion by decree, and again the impulse if essentially external security. Facing a renewed threat from the crusading zealots of the Teutonic Knights, Grand Duke Jogaila believes that the only hope for Lithuania’s survival lies in a political union with neighbouring Roman Catholic Poland, and the Poles are demanding conversion as part of their price.

Besides, Jogaila – who has just murdered his uncle Kestutis in order to take sole power – is an ambitious man. He aspires to the hand of Polish Queen Jadwiga, and dreams of a mighty dynasty which will dominate eastern Europe. Pragmatic to the end, the Lithuanians look set to abandon their old faith for a new union.

Meanwhile, the Lithuanians are no peaceable victims of Teutonic aggression. Tough peasant-warriors, theirs is a culture of raiding and slave-taking, and an aggressive policy of expansion which under successive Grand Dukes has seen Lithuania extend its influence and control into the westernmost lands of the Rus’. As the power of the Golden Horde wanes, there are those in Lithuania who see this as simply opening up glorious new opportunities for plunder and conquest to the east.



LAND AND PEOPLES

THE LAND

This is a land of *wildnis*, of lake and river, hidden deep within dark forests and guarded by treacherous swamps. The fertile lands of the Niemen, Neris and Vilnya basins are well protected behind these natural defences, as well as by the legendary ferocity – and stubbornness – of their inhabitants, whether human or animal (especially the boar, wolf and aurochs).

This is also a land of fortresses, from the simple *garadas*, wooden stockades which command many hilltops and river passages through to the handful of

brick-built castles – ironically, raised by German engineers – intended both as bastions against the Teutonic Knights and also symbols of the power of the Grand Duke.

The main regions of Lithuania are Aukštaitija (the highlands, and the original power base of Mindaugas), Dzukija to the south-east, Suvalkija to the south-west and the western lowlands of Žemaitija, which the Grand Duke ceded to the Teutonic Order in 1382, in what is another temporary nod towards pragmatism. All told, the country is divided into 21 counties, each under its own *kunigas*, sometimes translated very loosely as ‘duke’.

Aukštaitija includes the capital, **Vilnius**, a heavily-fortified city rich in magic and history. For centuries it has been the resting place of princes, whose bodies are burnt at the nearby sacred flame ('Sventaragis's Fire'). The only man-made temple in Lithuania is here, dedicated to Perkunas, and the surrounding countryside is dotted with sacred groves and pools. The temple is within the walls of Shvintorog, one of the two large, stone-walled castles in the town, which also serves as the Grand Duke's residence. The other lies atop the Crooked Hill, smaller but with a tall brick tower from which keen-eyed watchers scan the surrounding lands. To the east of Shvintorog is the Russian Quarter, to the south the German Quarter, in which is a Catholic church and many traders associated with the Hanseatic League.

North of Vilnius is the sizeable wooden fortress of **Voruta**, Mindaugas's stronghold. Although backward by the standards of later bastions, it is both culturally important and magically strong. The region also includes other key towns, such as **Kernavė**, under the gloomy gaze of a sprawling wooden hilltop fortress which also dates back to the days of Mindaugas, and the cross-roads town of **Vilkmergė**. Built in a wide clearing amidst a forest that is dark and deep even by Lithuanian standards, it sits on the main roads from Vilnius to Upitė and Kaunas to Daugavpils. The town is built around the usual hilltop wooden fort, but its greatest defensive asset is the local forest spirit, after whom the town is named, the Wolf Maiden.

Dzukija is largely forested, a region of villages more than towns. Nonetheless, it contains the Russian town of **Grodno**, famous both for its Russian Orthodox Church of St Boris and St Gleb and its Jewish community, as well as **Volkovysk** ('Wolf Howl'), still haunted by the unquiet ghosts of two notorious bandit chieftains, Volek and Vysek, killed three centuries ago. Kestutis was building a new stone fortress being on an isthmus in the Galvė lake at **Trakai** which Jogaila has now taken for his own. When completed, it will be the most formidable stronghold in Lithuania. Kestutis was strangled in the dungeons of **Krevo** castle, also in this province.

Suvalkija is a region of flat, fertile plain and pasture, dotted with small villages, each behind a stockade in



case of Polish or Teutonic raids. Its main city, **Kaunas**, has a new-built red-brick castle at its heart, the only double-walled keep in the country, controlling the confluence of the Nemunas and Neris rivers. The previous fortress here held out against the Order for three weeks until falling to them in 1362, and the present, even larger and stronger castle with four separate towers was built on its ruins.

Beyond this, there are also the Lithuanians' sizeable Rus' territories. These include **Polotsk**, the city once ruled by the magician-hero Vseslav Charodey and the trading town of **Minsk**.

HISTORY

This region was settled by migrating tribes two thousand years ago; the name 'Lithuania' emerged only 400 years back. However, the Lithuanian nation as a political unit dates back to the reign of Grand Duke Mindaugas (1236-63). From his lands around Vilnius, he united the tribes by conquest, alliance and exiling or murdering any potential rivals. In the hope of gaining support from the Teutonic Knights, he even had himself baptised in 1251. He later repudiated this conversion of convenience. His



murder led to a violent seven-year interregnum, but he had established the foundations of a new state. The next main phase took place under Grand Duke Gediminas (1316-1341), who began Lithuania's expansion eastwards into the lands of the Rus' and founded both the city of Vilnius and also a new dynasty, the Gedimids.

Lithuania is a rough-and-ready mix of European feudalism and traditional tribalism. The office of Grand Duke is hereditary, but limited by his relationship with his aristocrats, still at heart the old chieftains of pre-unification Lithuania. The Grand Duke has limited lands of his own – only a few villages in each region are directly held by him or his vassals – and instead depends on his authority over the aristocracy, the *kunigai*. They in turn depend upon their gentry, the *bajorai*. The *kunigai* and *bajorai* are above all mounted warriors and commanders of mustered warbands, half Western-style knights, half tribal chiefs.

This structure depends on personal loyalties, which is one reason why the Grand Duke spends much of his time travelling around the country, collecting taxes but also reaffirming personal connections. However, as much as anything else these ties are built and maintained through success in winning plunder and slaves by raiding neighbouring lands. Raids take place throughout the year, though less so during those times when all hands are needed to bring in the harvest.

Relations with Livonia and Teutonic Prussia were bad enough. Then the Ordenstaat declared crusade against the Lithuanians in 1339. Since then, they have been locked in on-off hostilities, characterised less by major

campaigns than cross-border raids: a few days looting the enemy's villages and herds and then retreat with plunder and captives. The crusader *reisen* are more frequent, but this has been an even struggle. Most summers, the Grand Duke will gather an army and launch a major raid, with the aim of levelling some fort or otherwise carrying out some specific objective. Just as the crusade has given the Order a new lease of life, so too it has been the making of many Lithuanian warriors and chieftains. One make a name for oneself raiding the Christians or fighting off their attacks, and captured knights can be sacrificed to win the affection of the gods or ransomed. Many a petty *bajoras* now sports Milanese plate armour or has decked his wife with silk thanks to some European knight who came to hunt pagans and found himself hunted instead.

This constant pressure has forced the fractious Lithuanians to accept the growing authority of the Grand Duke, but it has also limited the scope for Lithuanian expansion east and west. Successive Grand Dukes' need to find new land with which to buy off land-hungry chieftains and reward personal vassals has driven them to expand into the Rus' lands to the south-east. Grodno fell to them in 1250, but since then the Lithuanians have been increasingly active players in local Rus' politics. Polotsk, Vitebsk, Minsk, Turov and Pinsk are all minor Rus' city-states now under Lithuanian dominion.

These are still Rus' territories. The Grand Duke may impose princes onto these cities, but the Rus' are, after all, used to princes coming and going, often at others' behest. The Lithuanian appointees must learn to work

VSESLAV CHARODEY

Vseslav Bryacheslavovich Charodey, the eleventh-century prince of Polotsk, was a terrible and extraordinary figure. He was born with a caul (a foetal membrane still around his head, like a hood), during a solar eclipse. When the caul was removed it left a strange and disturbing mark, which for his whole life he concealed from others beneath a helmet, circlet, band or crown. He was clearly marked for greatness, becoming magically powerful as well as a mighty warrior and fearsome hunter. His greatest accomplishments, though, were always at night, and there were those who claimed he could assume the form of a wolf and others who said he became a black falcon. He was a scourge of the nomads who preyed on Polotsk and sought to make his city the equal of Kiev or Novgorod, bringing in architects from Byzantium to build the city's first stone cathedral. He expanded his lands into Lithuania, led a successful raid on Novgorod, besieged Pskov and even became prince of Kiev, crowned in the dungeons in which he was being held after the princes of the Rus' combined to bring an end to his exploits. He returned to Polotsk, but was regarded with awe rather than affection, and his death in 1101 was met with a degree of relief on the part of the Polotsky.

Prince Vseslav may be dead, but Vseslav Charodey still lingers in the shadows and in the night. The secret of his power – and his eagerness for the field of battle – was that he was an *upyr*, a vampire. During his 'life' he largely managed to resist the bestial side of his condition, drinking blood from enemies on the battlefield or foreigners and peasants during his nocturnal hunts. His dreams for Polotsk gave him something on which to focus, but as it became clear that this provincial little town was not destined to become a new Kiev, he could feel that he was losing that focus and so staged his 'death' and withdrew from public life.

He is now both more and less than the old prince. His vampiric nature has grown stronger, and with it his powers and his hungers. He has seen Polotsk decline and then be conquered by Lithuanians. The old prince, his humanity waning every year, is still torn between his love for the city and his hatred and disappointment towards the Polotsky, a people who, in his mind, have failed to live up to his dreams...

Russian Prince 2011, Upry 1114, Love Polotsk 5112, Hate Polotsky 2011, Tortured Soul 2011, Dark Magics 1113, Hunter in the Night 10112.



Faith has become an issue which can divide families: Kristina tries to persuade Steponis to renounce his new-found Christianity, but neither her characteristic glower or the family's statue of Dievas can change his mind, Grandpa always did call her brother 'stubborn as a Latvian horse.'

with the local Rus' grandees and customs, or face rebellion, assassination or simply sullen foot-dragging and passive resistance. Vitebsk and Vladimir, for example, were conquered, but Grand Duke Gediminas made a point of ensuring that the sons he assigned to rule them married into important local Rus' families. In most cases, the Lithuanians do not bother appointing rulers, though – so long as the regular tributes of silver, wax and furs continue to arrive.

THE PEOPLE

This is an agrarian society of hunters, farmers and warrior raiders. A typical village community is made up of 5-8 homesteads in the hands of a single extended family, sometimes scattered along a valley or hillside, but more often clustered together on a hilltop behind a palisade. A family typically lives together in a wooden longhouse, surrounded by byres for their animals and vegetable gardens. As well as the longhouses (and perhaps the larger, multi-roomed houses of the richer families), a well-established village will generally have a smithy, a bakehouse or perhaps a smokehouse (in which to preserve meat and fish). Although the cities are

beginning to see growing numbers of stone and brick buildings, in the countryside almost all construction is still with wood, or in some cases wattle and daub (using a mix of mud and dung, dried onto a framework of staves and withes).

Lithuanians typically wear clothes that are simple in cut but often richly coloured or embroidered, or overlain with sashes, scarves, shawls or similar accessories. Men will typically have beards and long hair, often tied back during the day. Women typically wear their hair long, in plaits or breads, although only unmarried women leave their heads uncovered outside the home or other than during the more adventurous religious rites. Short hair is typically the mark of a widow or a warrior who follows Junda the Fiercest Woman.

Slaves will usually wear simple tunics and wooden shoes. They may be bound at night, but are generally simply locked in an outbuilding. They are not branded or otherwise marked beyond their hair being kept cropped. On the whole, a fleeing slave is obvious enough through hair, dress and accent; besides by definition anyone found out and about who so clearly has no place, connections or means is fair game to be enslaved. (And a slave who has fled once will generally be treated harshly.) Unless foolish or desperate, most slaves endure their hard lot, because to flee is to invite pursuit, violence and perhaps an even worst master.

Villages owe obligations to a local nobleman, a *bajoras*, whose hilltop fort controls up to a dozen villages or even more. He is due hospitality, honour and food rent in return for protection and access, where available, to that precious resource, a watermill to grind corn, bone or flint. A *bajoras* will have his own warband, a retinue of warriors to protect his villages and leads them and levies and volunteers from among his peasants on the regular raids which bring back slaves, cattle, silver and other booty. A bad *bajoras* risks arousing the anger of his peasants, who might be slow in coming to his side in battle or even driven to rise against him and burn him inside his wooden hall: the Lithuanian saying is that a 'even the loudest chieftain has only one voice.'

Villages are exogamous: they marry outside their own communities, with daughters going to live with their new husbands. In this way, the bloodlines are renewed, and villages establish connections with their neighbours. That does not preclude their raiding them, though: the raid is every bit as central a theme in Lithuanian country life and farming.



LIFE AND CUSTOM

Lithuanians live lives of constant uncertainty but predictable hardship. The winters can be savagely cold, the spring and autumn drenched with so much rain that even the wooden logs used to surface the main roads in the largest cities sink into the embracing mud within a week. Teutonic raids can happen almost anywhere and at any time, from a major invasion to a stealthy incursion which can leave a family dead in their beds, throats dripping blood. Even the village next door will try to raid you if you seem weak or they are poor, and while this is more likely to be resolved with bruised bodies and broken limbs rather than bloodshed, the loss of a cow or a sheep can mean the difference for a family between a lean or a comfortable winter.

As a result, they are changeable and passionate, living life to the full. They can be brave and enthusiastic, and as quickly melodramatically depressed or angry. They value emotions over mere goods, but on the other hand, a slave captured in battle (a slave is, after all, just property) or a goblet given in friendship becomes important not for what it is, but what it represents.

Raiding

Lithuanians still raid each other; this is seen as normal and a valuable opportunity to hone the skills of the warriors and peasant levies. However, there is an etiquette of sorts when raiding other Lithuanians: blood ought not to be shed, and the take ought to be proportionate. To steal another village's whole herd of cattle would be tantamount to condemning it to starvation, but to steal half is an act of cunning and daring. Lithuanians raiding other Lithuanians rely on speed, stealth and cunning, wielding clubs rather than the weapons they use when travelling outside their lands: the sword, the spear and the *sudlice* (sud-LEE-shay), that characteristic Lithuanian long-hafted weapon with a spearhead, hook and edged blade, similar to the weapon known as a *guisarme* in Europe. This is often wielded from horseback by Lithuanian warriors, but is also used by foot soldiers, who can use it to hook riders from the saddle.

If a raid does transgress these admittedly vague bounds, then the respective *bajorai* and even *kunigai* become involved, a. Feuds are usually settled through public apologies and the payment of blood-prices in cattle or silver.

The Leiciai

The *leičiai* are personal vassals of the Grand Duke, largely tough highlanders from Žemaitija. Technically, the term can include anyone directly owing loyalty to the Grand Duke, so it includes the serfs toiling on his farms, but in practice it is used for his personal henchmen and allies. A fortunate, loyal and efficient *leitis* can become rich, even if of common birth or a foreigner – indeed, more than a few are ennobled and become *bajorai* or even *kunigai*.

AUTHORITY AND POWER

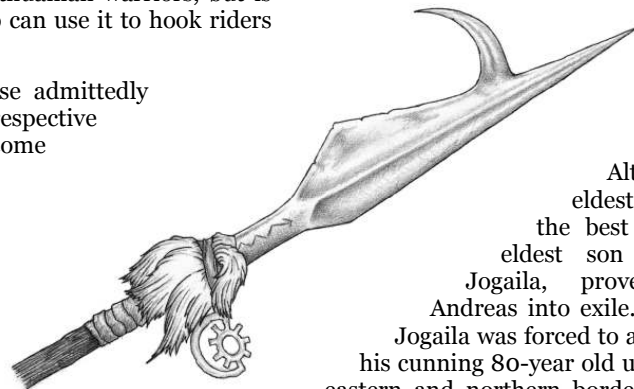
Lithuanians are a proud, fractious people. Power over them must be won or bought rather than demanded. The Grand Duke rules by virtue of his authority amongst the *kunigai*. A *kunigas* is a local ruler, at once warlord, lawgiver and priest. In peace, he – and sometimes she, about a quarter are women – must rule his tribe justly; in times of war, he must gather and lead its soldiers; and at all times he may be required to lead the religious rituals demanded by season and circumstance.

In many cases they are now Christian, but even so rarely interfere with the pagan rites, and may even attend them. This is not an issue which – so far – undermines their political and moral authority to a serious degree. The bulk of the lesser nobles who serve the *kunigai*, the *bajorai*, are still predominantly pagan. Not all *kunigai* are equal: there are the senior figures who rule larger areas, generally blood kin of the present Grand Duke, whom outsiders often call dukes, and the lesser *kunigai* who swear fealty to them.

Coup and Counter-coup

On the death of Grand Duke Algirdas in 1377, Lithuania descended into a violent crisis little short of civil war.

Although Andreas, Algirdas's eldest son by his first wife, had the best claim to the throne, his eldest son from his second wife, Jogaila, proved triumphant, forcing Andreas into exile. However, the 27-year old Jogaila was forced to accept effective co-rule with his cunning 80-year old uncle Kestutis, who held the eastern and northern borders. Jogaila was ambitious, though, and Kestutis used to power: this arrangement could not last for long.



With characteristic pragmatism, Jogaila learned a lesson from Mindaugas, forging an alliance with the Teutonic Order, promising to embrace Christianity and cede Žemaitija in return for military assistance. The ageing Teutonic Grand Master, von Kniprode, was persuaded to abandon Andreas. While using his friendship with Kestutis's son Vytautas to feed his rival misinformation, Jogaila prepared a coup. Kestutis struck first, arresting Jogaila, but Vytautas persuaded him to release him. Jogaila showed more energy than gratitude: when

Kestutis left Vilnius to quell an uprising to the south, he mustered his forces and seized the capital, while inviting the Teutonic Order to take Žemaitija. Kestutis and Vytautas were invited to parley, at which they were captured. Kestutis was murdered, but Vytautas has just escaped from the dungeons of Krivias and is said to be making his way to the lands of the Ordenstaat, with plots of his own...



Grand Duke Jogaila

Grand Duke Jogaila

A daring, cunning and energetic man, Jogaila is defined above all by his ambition, which drives him day and night. He can laugh, dance, joke and pass idle gossip, if that is what is needed to put people at their ease, but it is all a game.

Only hunting gives him anything like the rush and release he gets from politics. Anger, sorrow, friendship and joy are all just masks, to be donned when the script requires. A formidable man, but Kestutis probably had it right when he observed of his nephew and nemesis: 'his talents are second only to his ambitions.'

Lithuanian Duke 1112, Cunning Schemer 15113, Ruthless 10112, Ambitious 20113, Huntsman 20112.

FAITH AND MAGIC

While politics appears to decree that Lithuania will become a Catholic nation, the most powerful faith in the country is the distinctive form of paganism known as Romuva. It takes its name from an ancient Prussian pagan holy site, but instead has come to mean safety and a sense of place in general.

THE ROMAN CHURCH

An increasing number of Lithuanians are turning to the Roman Church, whether out of faith or opportunism. This is, however, still largely confined to the towns and the nobility, and while Catholics as such are not especially ill-regarded by the pagan majority, it is inevitable that Catholic strangers appearing unannounced and unvoiced-for in a village, especially near the borders, will be treated with suspicion, as possible spies or outriders of the Teutonic Order.

Heroes following the Roman Church can follow the saints and use the rules in chapter 19. They cannot combine active Catholicism with Romuva. In other words, while – like Mindaugas – they may be baptised and profess to follow Christianity, they may not remain members of Romuva while practicing any Catholic magic (which includes calling for Divine Aid or using Piety as magic resistance).



History Lessons

There is very little hard and reliable evidence, documentary or archaeological, for many of the details of Romuva. Most of the documentary evidence comes from Christian sources ignorant of differences between various Baltic and Nordic faiths or else engaged in active disinformation. For example, the Teutonic Knights' chronicler Peter of Düsberg – who had an obvious axe (sword?) to grind – claimed in his Chronica terrae Prussiae (1325) that there was a Lithuanian 'pope' in blasphemous opposition to the true Pope of Rome whose authority all the pagans heeded. An obvious attempt to justify the Knights' brutal northern crusades, but nonetheless an example of the dangers in taking sources at face value. The deities here are as close as I could get to what seemed an accurate (or at least plausible) list, but I freely admit that many of the incidental details are based on the flimsiest of evidence or simply made up!

ROMUVA

Romuva shares many of the same deities and practices as other Baltic religions and, indeed, the Rus' themselves, but it is nonetheless distinctive and self-contained. Under the pressure of Christianity it is also

becoming the expression for a form of distinct Lithuanian identity which could even be described as nationalism.

The gods of the Lithuanian are not worshipped in temples, nor is their worship led by priests. There are no temples beyond that to Perkunas in Vilnius, within which a twelve-tiered alter sits under the open sky. Instead rituals take place in sacred places known as *alkos* (the singular is *alka*) – groves, fields and springs dedicated to the gods and thus safe from being fished, felled or ploughed. Here the great rituals are held, the dead are cremated and the most auspicious marriages celebrated, to the sound of *dainas*, traditional songs.

THE OTHERWORLD

The Ideal World of Lithuania is shaped by paganism, and is largely a trackless land of deep, dark forest through which cut streams of limpid, swift-running water which seem to writhe between the trees, never following the same route twice. Its people are heroes, men and women blessed by the gods and brought here for their purposes, and talking animals.

The Representational World is largely found in the deeps of the forests or atop its hills. The only cities with a presence in the Representational World are Vilnius and Vilkmėrgė. Vilnius is not a city here, but a great, hilltop flame, a manifestation of Sventaragis's Fire. Those who know the secret words and the right sacrifices can step through it into a sacred cave on the side of the god-mountain. Vilkmėrgė is a small wooden town, where talking wolves and hairy humans live side-by-side, under the capricious and viciously benevolent protection of the Wolf Maiden herself. Kaunas used to have a presence, too, but with Teutonic occupation it faded from the Representational World. It is no secret that the Order would love to re-conquer the city and consecrate a cathedral, hoping to create a small piece of Christian Representational World.

This is still largely a naturalistic Otherworld, but everything is exaggerated and its inner spirit clearly manifest. A tree may be as high as a dozen men on each others' shoulders, but it can also talk and think (slowly) and move (even more slowly). One river may be a chattering, bustling friend, another a sly foe, ready to sweep an unwary traveller into its depths to drown.

While Žemaitija is under Teutonic control, the impact on its Representational World is still only minor. In the valleys and towns

under the Order's control, there are places where the vivid colour washes out, the spirits are struck dumb and the epic landscape begins to look more like a *picture* of epic landscape, but typically unless in the presence of a large party of Christians or near one of their shrines or churches, good Lithuanian patriots can blink a few times, mutter a prayer and the otherworld resumes its rightful form. For now. To the south-east, in Rus' lands dominated by the Lithuanians, the characteristic iconic style soon asserts itself, but the landscape depicted is much more intricate than is to be found elsewhere in Russia, and the palate of colours much more green and blue than red, brown and gold.

The Otherworlds are dominated by the god-mountain; wherever you are, it is visible as a spear of icy stone roughly analogous to Voruta. In the Ideal World, it is visible, but hazily, and can no more be reached than the end of a rainbow. In the Representational World, though, it has a real presence. This slippery, improbably-steep peak reaches through the clouds to the very sky. This is the only Transcendent World within the Lithuanian Otherworlds, its precipitous lower sides are the Boundary World.



The Wolf Maiden, magical mistress of Vilkmėrgė, is certainly a wolf spirit, but just as certainly no maiden...



STORY SEED: GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

Every year, at Vėlinės, the spirits of the dead are invited to dinner. This time they come. Throughout the village, the shades of the departed appear and help themselves liberally to the food and drink on offer. It does not disappear, but is drained of its essence; loaves of bread turn into ash, mead into murky water; roast meat, grey tissue. The ghosts largely converse with each other, although every hero present is at some point addressed directly by a shade, with some advice, comment or message. (A good opportunity for a Narrator to plant seeds for future stories.) At the end of the day, they all return to Dausos and Pekla, bar one. This powerfully-built, massively-bearded ghost angrily berates the villagers – and all Lithuanians – for becoming so soft and weak that they gave the Teutons Zemaitija. He tells them he is Petras Rėksnys (‘Peter the Shouter’), an ancient hero who fell in battle in Zemaitija. He demands that they sacrifice a young man that he can inhabit the body and lead Lithuania’s warriors back to victory. Meanwhile, he stomps around the village, insubstantial but all too audible, criticising everyone he meets, and every meal turns bad as soon as people are about to eat. The village’s *bajoras*, Mykolas Longlegs, is a Christian; he has banned human sacrifice.

- ▶ A slave is sacrificed. Is Petras really the great hero he claims, or an empty braggart or, worse still, an evil wizard scheming to return to the land of the living? If so, can the heroes undo the harm – and prevent an angry Mykolas from punishing the village, too?
- ▶ A young man steps forward to be sacrificed. His sweetheart or his parents, distraught at the thought, beg the heroes to travel to Zemaitija and see if they can find out the truth of Petras’s claims.
- ▶ A suitably strong devotee of Sovijus could banish Petras without offending the other ghosts, but they are few and far between. Finding one before the village starves or must disperse is a job for a hero.
- ▶ Mykolas arrives with his warriors and a priest from Vilnius, intent on exorcism. While the villagers are fearful of Petras’s presence and the blight it brings, such an exorcism would be a terrible slight to their ancestors. Hotheads are talking of armed resistance. Will the heroes lead this resistance, betray it, or find some way of averting conflict?

Perkunas lives at its peak. Dausos, the land of the good dead, is on its upper slopes, to which the souls of the virtuous are borne as smoke after their cremation, or to which they find their path by following the Milky Way (also known as the Bird’s Way). Those who are less virtuous but nonetheless have avoided Pekla, the land of the sinful dead, must climb the slippery peak with their nails (or else obtain claws from some animal), which is why the nails of the dead are not cut and those expecting soon to die often grow them long. However, for all their efforts, those who show insufficient virtue will slide down the mountain to Pekla, a gloomy realm lying in the ground directly below it (which nonetheless – for the ‘geography’ of the Otherworlds is not that of the mortal realm – is still part of the god-mountain and the Transcendent World).

THE MAGIC OF ROMUVA

Around one in five Lithuanian adults who follow Romuva initiates, although levels of devotion are one in twenty at most, largely at the margins of the country. Devotion is rarer among townfolk, more common in the wilder regions, including Žemaitija.

The sensible effects tend to be more abstract than many other pagan faiths. Sometimes, the effect is directly representative: the *Lightning Arrow* of a devotee of Perkunas will look like a bolt for lightning, for example. More often, though, the magic manifests itself through the natural world around the worshipper. A follower of Queen Bee Austėja will, for example, become surrounded by a swarm of bees or simply a deep, almost

subsonic buzzing. The winds will whip around a devotee of Bangputis the Storm and the air will be sharp with the spray and the tang of the sea breeze, even leagues inland.

ROMUVA’S WAYS

Priests

There is no general priestly caste. Rituals are led by appropriate civic and community figures. Traditionally,

SPECIAL ADVANTAGE: TIED TO THE LAND

Romuva is inextricably linked with Lithuania, its land and shores. **Initiates and devotees receive a bonus to all magic and magic resistance while on Lithuanian soil** (Žemaitija still counts) or if at sea within sight of the Lithuanian shore. This bonus manifests itself in the ability automatically to receive an augment from *each* Romuva affinity, even if caught by surprise or otherwise in a situation in which that might not usually be possible.

Furthermore, worshippers of Romuva using their Piety as magic resistance can always auto-augment this with their Love Lithuania ability, when resisting non-Romuva magic. This applies wherever they may be.



the kunigas was the first choice for most rituals, but now that more and more are turning to Christianity, communities must find alternatives. After all, the level of dedication and social status counts for more than formal religious office, and a well-known warrior and devotee of Perkunas might well find himself being approached to lead a ceremony in the local *alka*. The main function for which a separate body of priests is definitely required is to keep alight the sacred flames across the country (there are twelve in total, including Satrija Hill in Žemaitija).

Sacrifice is important, though. It is appropriate for a victorious chieftain to sacrifice a third of the spoils of battle, for example, and as well as objects and animals. On rare occasions even humans might be offered up in thanks or propitiation. Typically, these will be burned in sacrificial pyres.

Holy Days

The main life-cycle rituals include Krikōtas, the naming celebration of a new-born baby, the three-day-long Vestuvės wedding festival and Ėrmenys, the cremation

rites for the newly dead. Others are linked to the annual cycle. The Winter Solstice is celebrated as Kalėdos, while the start of spring is heralded in the noisy festival of Užgavėnės, when celebrants dress in bizarre costumes and enact chasing the spirits of winter from their fields with vigorous dances, loud shouts, practical jokes and laughter. The Spring Solstice is Velykos, while two other spring holidays, Jorė and Samboriai, celebrate the first fruits on the trees and then the sowing of the fields.

All-night vigils are held during the rather more contemplative celebrations of the Summer Solstice, Rasa. Herbs are gathered at night and the morning dew is saved for sacred and medicinal use. Much of October is devoted to Vėlinės, a celebration and remembrance of the dead. The spirits of the dead are toasted and invited to dine with the living and take shelter for the winter in the rafters of the family home. The year ends with Kūėios, Winter Solstice eve. This is a time for reconciliation, for the settling or forgetting of the year's disputes and also a traditional time in which generous creditors (or those eager to display their piety) write off debts they are owed.

THE GODS OF ROMUVA

The gods and goddesses of Romuva are many and varied, but as Lithuania is not central to the setting of **Mythic Russia**, only a few will be detailed, largely those whose followers are more likely to be travelling outside their homeland or of particular importance or novelty. A summary of other important deities is supplied at the end of this section.

Dievas

Heavenshine

Known as Deywis to the ancient pagan Prussians and Diews to the Latvians, Dievas is a distant and unfathomable presence, who created humanity accidentally by his spit and cares little for them one way or another now. He is a being of transcendent light, who lives in an enclosed realm above the god-mountain, accessible only through three silver gates. Occasionally, he may predict the future, but always in cryptic manner. Otherwise his main practical role is as a guarantor of great oaths. Still, he occasionally walks the mortal world in the guise of a beggar, rewarding those holding to the virtues of honesty, hospitality and mercy, cursing those who do not with bad luck or transformation into animals.

Abilities: Devotee of Dievas or Initiate of Dievas, Mythology of Dievas, Perceive Inner Virtues, Read Omens.

Virtues: Honest, Hospitable, Merciful.

Affinity: **Traditional Virtues** (Bless the Generous, Force Liar to Speak Truth, Seal Oath, Sense Liar)

Secret: Knowledge Beyond (The devotee receives a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating in all attempts to travel to, from or between otherworlds, and to all magic when within them.)

Rites & Representations: There are no specific holy days or rites dedicated to Dievas. He is represented by open firepits, which are kept constantly alight, and on which animal sacrifices are occasionally thrown. [DYE-vahs]

Worshippers: All followers of Romuva acknowledge and respect Dievas, but he is directly worshipped directly only by visionaries, lunatics and those who see any lesser deity as below them.

Connections: All the powers of Romuva owe Dievas fealty. Dievas is attended by the Dievo Sunelai, his unnamed sons.

AUSAITIS

Healing Hands

God of health and healing. He heals with herbs and medicines when he must, but prefers directly to encourage the patient's own spirit to heal its body, his sensitive hands feeling out inner pains and strengths.

Abilities: Devotee of Ausaitis or Initiate of Ausaitis, First Aid, Mythology of Ausaitis, Recognise Symptoms, Sensitive Hands.

Virtues: Caring, Encouraging.

Affinity: **Good Health** (Close Wound, Drive Out Disease, Encourage Natural Healing, Sense Inner Pain)



Secret: Great Healing (The devotee may heal and physical or psychological injury, even bringing back someone from a state of Dying.)

Rites & Representations: Ausiatis is very rarely portrayed directly but is more often represented as a pair of hands or a dog. [OW-show-tis]

Worshippers: Those who would heal, whether professional healers or simply the compassionate.

Disadvantages: An initiate or devotee of Ausiatis may not reject a plea for healing assistance, even from a foe. The worshipper need not be suicidal, though: if the bandit who a minute ago was trying to kill you needs to be healed, you may bind him first, for example.

AUSRINE

The Morning Star

Known as Auseklis in Latvia, Aušrine is brilliant, beautiful and selfish. She leads the way for Saule's golden carriage and presages great events, but hers is a dangerous attraction which can lure the foolish or the besotted to their doom. After all, her lover the moon god Menuo is broken in two by Perkunas every month for betraying his daughter Saule to dally with Aušrine.

Entry Requirements: None, although it is rare for men to join the cult.

Abilities: Beguiling, Devotee of Aušrine *or* Initiate of Aušrine, Feel No Guilt, Flirt, Grooming, Mythology of Aušrine.

Virtues: Confident, Selfish.

Affinity: I'm Wonderful (Alluring Glance, Evade Blame, Look at Me!, Shrug Off Self-Doubt)

Secret: Great Destiny (The devotee may freely use her own hero points to assist another or allow other characters to do so. This is typically used to permit others to support her champion or favourite or else to draw upon the hero points of some beguiled sap who is prepared to let her plunder his fortune.)

Rites & Representations: A beautiful and wilful young woman with ash blonde hair. She dances on a stone in the middle of the sea on Midsummer's Day, and her followers likewise treat this as a day of ritual and passion, leading the dances in which the whole community rings a pole around which a bonfire has been lit. [Ow-SHREE-nay]

Worshippers: Those who wish to be or regard themselves as beautiful. Aušrine is a popular deity for young women, but it is generally regarded as appropriate to move on to more responsible deities such as Zemyna once married, a mother and generally taking on adult responsibilities.

Connections: Aušrine is a daughter of Perkunas and lover of Menuo.

Antagonisms: Aušrine is, unsurprisingly, despised by Saule, Menuo's wife.

Disadvantages: Worshippers of Aušrine will generally not be taken especially seriously.

AUTRIMPAS

The Serious Waters

God of the calm seas and large lakes, a deity of calm deliberation; even when he must kill, he does so carefully and conscientiously.

Abilities: Devotee of Autrimpas *or* Initiate of Autrimpas, Know Lithuania's Waters, Mythology of Autrimpas, Swim.

Virtues: Calm, Conscientious.

Affinity: Calm Waters (Breathe Water, Calm Water, Drown Foe in Calm Water, Float, Smash Wave, Walk On Calm Water)

Secret: Master Lake (The devotee may attune himself to a particular lake or other specific body of still water. He gains a bonus equal to ¼ the secret's rating when on or in that water. It costs 3 HP to change attunement after the initial one, and a week of ritual immersions.)

Rites & Representations: A solid old man, with seaweed for a beard. [Ow-TRIM-pas]

Worshippers: Sailors and boatmen, who depend upon the waters for their livelihoods or wish to invoke his protection on those who travel them.

Connections: Autrimpas is lord over the spirits of each major lake; lesser ones are the domain of his brother, Ezerinis

Disadvantages: Autrimpas is periodically bullied by Bangputis and the Four Winds: when resisting magic or attempts to over-awe or dominate him by devotees of these deities, a follower of Autrimpas suffers a penalty based on the auto-augment value of his Devotee/Initiate of Autrimpas. This only applies when the other character has initiated the contest.

BANGPUTIS

The Angry Storm

Angry and vindictive god of the sea storm, who sails the rough seas in a golden-anchored ship.

Abilities: Brawl, Devotee of Bangputis *or* Initiate of Bangputis, Intimidate, Loud Voice, Mythology of Bangputis, Sense Storm, Survive Storm.

Virtues: Angry, Bully, Vindictive.

Affinity: Sea Storm (Blow Enemy Down, Deafening Blast, Shred Sail, Whip Up Storm)

Secret: Blessed of the Storm (The devotee may use half the secret's rating as a bonus to any attempt to sail through or survive a sea storm unscathed.)





Rites & Representations: A muscular and vigorous man, with two bearded faces, one on each side of his head. He wears a crown in the shape of a cockerel. On his back are great furred wings he can use to blow a storm, and he bears a fish in his left hand and an oar in his right. [Bang-put-EES]

Worshippers: Sailors who seek to placate him, pirates and raiders who seek to draw on his destructive powers and emulate his marine tyranny.

Connections: The sons of Bangputis and his long-suffering wife Veju Motina are the four great winds: Rytys (east), Pietys (south), Šiaurys (north) and Vakaris (west).

GABIJA

The Hearthflame

The friendly goddess of fire and the domestic hearth, brought to earth by Perkunas. She is a willing and loving goddess, but can be angered if not treated with respect.

Abilities: Cook, Devotee of Gabijia *or* Initiate of Gabijia, Light Fire, Mythology of Gabijia, Tend Fire.

Virtues: Friendly, Passionate.

Affinity: **The Hearth** (Banish Smoke, Burn Away Curse, Dry Clothes, Dry Wood, Find Kindling, Make Fire Smoke, Spark Fire, Warming Heat)

Secret: **Keep the Home Fires Burning** (So long as the devotee is in or close to home, the hearthfire will continue to burn – or at least smoulder, ready to reignite when given more firewood – and remain safely in its hearth.)

Rites & Representations: A maternal woman, with burning feet. Her rites surround the hearth, which is treated like a family pet. At night, a bowl of water is put beside it, so Gabija can wash her face; in the morning the fire must be greeted (indeed, it is normal for the fire to be spoken to throughout the day), and during a special meal, salt should be cast into the flames. [GA-be-jah]

Worshippers: Gabija is one of the most popular domestic goddesses.

JUNDA

The Fiercest Woman

A war goddess of the Lithuanians, the patron not only of women warriors but also the reserve. She tends to hold back while Kovas takes the lead in battle, waiting for the enemy to be engaged and then sweeping in to his flank. Some men scorn her as cautious, but she knows that this is just battle-sense, and in the fight she is as fierce as any man.

Entry Requirements: Only women may devote to her, although men may become initiates.

Abilities: Devotee of Junda *or* Initiate of Junda, Mythology of Junda, Spear & Shield Combat, Run Fast, Tactics.

Virtues: Fierce, Patient, Proud.

Affinity: **War** (Burst of Speed, Chilling Screech, Hurl Spear Through Man, Roll and Spear, Stabbing Spear)

Secret: **The Deliberate Blow** (The devotee may bide her time to ensure that she delivers a perfect and deadly blow. If she forfeits one action in an extended contest combat, she may then apply half the secret's rating as a bonus to her next attack in the contest. In a combat being run as a simple contest, she instead gets a bonus equal to ½ the secret's rating.)

Rites & Representations: A fierce young woman, short-haired, always running. [YUN-day]

Worshippers: Female warriors. She is also invoked by male warriors late to the battlefield, in the hope that they can still make a difference.

Connections: Junda fights alongside Kovas, and some say they have been known to share a tent after the battle...

KELIUKIS

The Wayfarer

God of roads and paths, a wanderer.

Abilities: Devotee of Keliukis *or* Initiate of Keliukis, Know Stories of Distant Lands, Mythology of Keliukis, Remember Route, Seasoned Traveller.

Virtues: Curious, Wanderlust.

Affinity: **Travel** (Find Path, Know Way Home, Make Path, Make Road ritual, Spot Ambush, Surmount Obstacle)

Secret: **Keep On Travelling** (The devotee may use this ability to augment others or else as an active one to get past whatever obstacles may be in his way, whether exhaustion or a locked door.)

Rites & Representations: A young man, typically looking as if he came from a different part of Lithuania, with a staff from which hang small symbols and tokens from different cities and places he has visited. [Keh-LIU-kis]

Worshippers: Traders, travellers, wanderers and wayfarers.

KOVAS

Master of War

A god of soldiers and the guardian of frontiers and boundaries. He is especially associated with the *sudlice*. His followers may replace *Sudlice Fighting* with another style of combat, if they really must.

Abilities: Devotee of Kovas or Initiate of Kovas, Military History, Mythology of Kovas, Ride, Sense Border, Sudlice Fighting.

Virtues: Stern, Warlike.

Affinity: **Soldier** (Hook Rider from Horse, Shout Orders, Stand Fast, Strike Hard)

Secret: **Lead Warband** (The devotee may ignore multiple target penalties when using magic or other abilities to support a military unit following him, so long as it includes no more than twice as many warriors as the secret's rating.)

Rites & Representations: A proud soldier bearing a sudlice, his face concealed behind a full helmet, mask or scarf. [KOH-vas]

Worshippers: Soldiers and those of a martial disposition.

Connections: While he is disconcerted at times by the fact that she is both woman and warrior, Kovas is Junda's shield-brother, and sometimes even more.



Giedrius may be young, but he is strong in his faith in Perkunas, and he prepares to unleash the power of the Lightning Arrow at the Catholic raiders who have dared occupy the valleys of his beloved Žemaitija.

PERKUNAS

The Thunderer

Perkunas is the son of Dievas and in effect the most important of the gods given that his father largely disassociates himself from everyday affairs. Indeed, he is also known as *Divirksas*, Priest of the Gods, because Dievas has granted him the authority to rule in his name. Called Perkons by the Latvians and Perkuns by the Prussians, he is the master of the heavens, of storm and thunder, who lives atop the god-mountain.

Perkunas brought fire to the earth. Anything struck by lightning becomes sacred to some extent, as it now holds within it a portion of the sacred fire, and a person who survives such a strike is blessed by Perkunas.

Entry Requirements: None (although it is rare for women to join).

Abilities: Archer, Axe Combat, Devotee of Perkunas or Initiate of Perkunas, Drive Chariot, Mythology of Perkunas, Tame Goats.

Virtues: Combative, Enthusiastic, Loud.

Affinity: **Thunderer** (Call Wind, Deafening Bellow, Lightning Arrow, Ride on the Storm)

Secret: **Bring Fire to Earth** (The devotee may summon a mighty lightning bolt from the heavens. It can be used as a direct magical attack, in which case it is automatically augmented by the Thunderer affinity and Devotee of Perkunas.)

Rites & Representations: A middle-aged man with a red beard, bearing axe and bow and riding a two-wheeled chariot drawn by a billy goat. The sacred oak groves are especially important to him. [PER-KOO-nahs]

Worshippers: Warriors, leaders, men of action and adventures.

Connections: Perkunas is a son of Dievas. The Russians believe Perkunas to be Perun by another name, and vice versa.

Antagonisms: Perkunas is a perpetual foe of Velnias and angered by Menuo's betrayal of Saule.

Disadvantages: A devotee of Perkunas is considered the embodiment of Lithuanian national pride and identity; as such, he will be expected to solve the thorniest problems and defeat the toughest foes.

POTRIMPO

The Fertile Friend

The generous and carefree god who spreads fertility across the world, bearing the initial fecund impulse of Perkunas's masculine energy to every field and forest. Because Potrimpo is the wellspring of life and travels everywhere, he can also be asked for knowledge of the present and past (not the future, for that is the preserve of Laima, the weaver of Fate). Those of his devotees who have mastered this art are known as *burty*, seers, and



they are expected to practice their skills for others – but always for a price which can be met, even if it is unexpected or bizarre.

Entry Requirements: Only men may join this cult.

Abilities: Cheery Grin, Devotee of Potrimpo or Initiate of Potrimpo, Keep On Walking, Mythology of Potrimpo, Seduce.

Virtues: Friendly, Happy-go-lucky, Indefatigable, Lusty.

Affinity: **Fertility** (Bless Crops, Fecund Manliness, Love You Long Time, Quick Recovery)

Secret: **Casting the Wax** (The devotee may divine the fate of some individual or item by asking a question of Potrimpo and them dripping melted wax into water. The answer is found by interpreting the shapes it forms. This does not tell the future, only present and past, and will often be shown in some allegorical form. The level of information imparted and its clarity depends on the level of success – and a poor failure may actually mean that the devotee has misinterpreted the omens. A relationship with the individual or item concerned may be used to augment the Secret's rating. The resistance is 14 for very general questions such as 'is this person still alive?' or 'does this person love me?' to 5^{mf} for something more precise along the lines of 'where do I find this person?' or 'whom does this person love?' and 1^{mf2} upwards for extremely detailed insights.)

Rites & Representations: Potrimpo appears as a happy young man, beardless and simply-dressed, carrying ears of grain. [Po-TRIM-po]

Worshippers: His cult is especially favoured by young men and farmers.

RAGANA

Witch and Seer

The village wise woman, whose secret arts can change today and foresee tomorrow. Of all the deities of Romuva, she stands to lose most by the spread of Christianity, as most of its priests consider her a witch and an agent of the devil.

Abilities: Cryptic Proverbs, Devotee of Ragana or Initiate of Ragana, Herbal Medicine, Mythology of Ragana, Village Wisdom.

Virtues: Protect Community, Secretive, Wicked Sense of Humour.

Affinity: **Witch** (Appear Beautiful, Brew Healing Draught, Enhance Potency of Herbs, Preserve Herbs, Scare Enemy, Shrivell Manhood)

Secret: **Seer** (The devotee may predict the fate of people in her presence: see page xx on fate and the future.)

Rites & Representations: Ragana is often simply manifested as an old woman, but more sacred images show her two forms, a seductive wood-

nymph by day, talon-footed old hag by night. The crescent horn is sacred to her, and she is often allegorically represented by a horn, especially by pagans who want to show her homage but fear persecution by Christians. [RAH-ga-nah]

Worshippers: Wise women, healers and those who enjoy disconcerting their neighbours.

Antagonisms: Unsurprisingly, Ragana and her worshippers have come to dislike the encroaching Christian faith.

Disadvantages: At best disliked, at worst actively persecuted by Christians.

SAULE

Mistress of the Sun

Saule lives with her daughters in a castle on the upper slopes of the god-mountain. Every morning, she drives her chariot of gleaming copper across the sky, drawn by horses of living fire. At dusk, the chariot descends into the Baltic Sea, and Saule turns it into a golden boat to take her home, while her horses are washed in the sea before stabling over night. Saule married Menuo, and the stars are their offspring. Even though he still dallies with Aušrine, occasionally they still consummate their union, and eclipses are such times, when Saule and Menuo hang a cloth over themselves to hide their lovemaking.

Abilities: Devotee of Saule or Initiate of Saule, Drive Chariot, Literate, Look Safely into Sun, Keep to Routine, Mythology of Saule.

Virtues: Dutiful, Sunny.

Affinity: **Mistress of the Sun** (Blazing Aura, Light Bonfire, Pour Light from Jug, Summon Little Flame, Rise in Morning)

Secret: **Chariot of Fire** (The devotee may ride a metal chariot through the sky. A single check against a natural resistance of 14 suffices to allow the chariot, the animals pulling it, the devotee and up to 3 others to be carried through the sky for half an hour in a day. Longer or repeated journeys or more passengers will increase the resistance, and additional checks of this secret and perhaps Drive Chariot may be required in case of acrobatic manoeuvres.)

Rites & Representations: A beautiful, blonde woman, holding the jug from which the light of the Sun is poured. Her festivals are Kalėdos at midwinter and Ligo midsummer. At Kalėdos, images of the Sun are carried through the fields and villages to ensure a warm, prosperous summer. At Ligo, a bonfire is lit at the top of a pole. [SOW-lay]

Worshippers: Typically worshipped by women, who value her constancy and good humour; however, she is also a patron of arts and literacy, and so has a constituency among male and female scholars and savants.

STORY SEED: THE HILL OF CROSSES



In the north of the country, at the margins of Teuton-held Zemaitija, is a low hill. Once, it was sacred to Saule, for it was here that she briefly set down her chariot the time one of her horses went lame because one of the Ice Wyrms' teeth stuck in its hoof. Now, though, the hill is a thicket of crosses of every kind. At first, three Knights killed in battle were buried there under simple wooden crosses, but soon the hill became the centre of a deliberate attempt to reshape the Otherworlds, driving away the Romuvan influences and claiming them for Catholicism. Something must be done!

- ▶ Saule's followers want to reclaim the hill; a recapture of the land and the physical removal and destruction of the crosses would work, but this means taking on the mailed knights of the Ordenstaat in open warfare. Perhaps by questing into the far Otherworlds they could petition Saule to repeat her earlier touch-down, scouring the hill clear in a blaze of solar flame?
- ▶ Lithuanian Catholics are just as determined to hold back the Ordenstaat's invasions – whether in the Mortal World or the Otherworlds. The Hill of Crosses is consecrated to Mary of the Teutons; perhaps devotees of one of the other aspects of the Blessed Virgin could change its spiritual character so that while still a Christian site, it is no longer one so closely associated with the Ordenstaat? Infiltrating the site with new crosses with appropriate inscriptions might work – but be a long job. But what about the hill's presence in the Representational World. A skilled and magically powerful religious artist could, for example, change the hill's iconic image and in the process change its reality.
- ▶ Of course, Teutonic heroes might find themselves having to protect this bastion of Christianity against those villainous Lithuanians!

Connections: Menuo is her wayward husband, Perkunas her loving father.

Antagonisms: Saule is at best chilly towards Aušrine.

SOVIJUS

The First of the Dead

A mighty hero of pre-history, the hunter who bested the Great Boar. But, when his nine sons ate its nine spleens, he grew angry and they turned against him. One heaved him to the underworld and buried him in the ground, but next morning, Sovijus dragged himself from the ground, complaining that lizards and slugs had been biting him all night. The second night, Sovijus was bound in a tree, but next morning he shook himself free, complaining that he had been bitten all night by insects. The third night, he was thrown into a fire, and in the morning he stretched and rose, saying he had slept 'sweetly, like a babe in a cradle.' Sovijus thus found the right way to dispose of the dead, by cremation, and leads the souls of the dead to their new lives in Dausos or Pekla.

Abilities: Conduct Cremation Rites, Devotee of Sovijus or Initiate of Sovijus, Make Fire, Mythology of Sovijus, Talk to Ghost.

Virtues: Not Fear Death, Stoic.

Affinity: **Funeral Rites** (Burn the Dead, Comfort Mourner, Grow Nails, Keep Fire Burning, Lay Ghost to Rest, Sense Unquiet Dead)

Secret: **Burn Back to Life** (If the devotee dies in a fire or else his body is thrown into a fire within a few minutes of death, he may be able to return to life. He must successfully pit this ability, augmented only by his Mythology of Sovijus skill, against a rating of either 10M or else the number of AP he has been brought below zero, whichever is greater. If successful, he steps from the flame, weakened and singed – with AP equal to the secret's rating if still in an extended contest – but otherwise healthy. This only applies to 'untimely' deaths by violence, poison or the like, not a natural death by old age.)

Rites & Representations: A representation of Everyman, Sovijus appears in many different guises: as warrior, farmer, hunter or husband. However, he is always distinguishable by the flames running up his legs. Sovijus has no holy days as such, but is called upon at every funeral. It is bad luck for a body to be cremated without a follower of Sovijus being present, and those who want to make a particular display of their piety, respect for the dead or ostentatious wealth, will ensure that many are present, and that they tend the funeral pyre themselves. [So-VEE-jus]

Worshippers: Those who wish to prepare themselves for death or lose their fear of it (including warriors).

Connections: While not a subordinate of Velnias, Sovijus plays his part in bringing souls to him.



TELIAVELIS

The Sun-Smith

The smith who forged the sun from molten metal and hurled it into the sky, where it became the chariot of Saule.

Entry Requirements: Only men may join this cult.

Abilities: Blacksmith, Devotee of Teliavelis or Initiate of Teliavelis, Hammer Combat, Mythology of Teliavelis, Strong.

Virtues: Hard Working, Inventive.

Affinity: **Smith** (Bless Metal Implement, Blow Fire Hotter, Ignore Heat, Purify Metal, Shape Metal, Sharp Edge, Strengthen Armour, Unbreakable Hammer)

Secret: **The Greatest Smith** (The devotee can reform metal items with one or a few blows of his hammer. Armour can be shattered, a plough turned into swords and a cannon into a bell. Normally, this means defeating a natural resistance of 14, although modifiers may apply for especially large items or unusual and complex transformations. Magic items resist with their highest power.)

Rites & Representations: A brawny, bearded man, holding an oversized hammer. [Tel-YA-veh-lis]

Worshippers: Blacksmiths, those who build practical things or like to find practical solutions to the problems in the world.

UPINIS

The Power of the River

God of rivers, fast-flowing and at once generous and dangerous.

Abilities: Devotee of Upinis or Initiate of Upinis, Move Quickly, Mythology of Upinis, River Boating, Swim.

Virtues: Energetic, Respect Pigs.

Affinity: **River** (Breathe River Water, Command River Creature, Drown Pig, Speak with River Creature, Swim Fast)

Secret: **Power of the River** (The devotee gains a bonus equal to ¼ of the secret's ability when on or in a river.)

Rites & Representations: A slender man with a pig's head. His favoured sacrifice is a white suckling pig, drowned in a river, which will generally ensure it remains pure and full of fish (although he will also accept carved wooden pigs). However, the pig is sacred to Upinis, and undue cruelty to the animal may cause local waters to become fouled. [Oo-PI-nis]

Worshippers: Any who live by or work on the rivers; those who enjoy travel.

VELNIAS

Master of Hell

Velnias is the god of the underworld, where the souls of the sinful are confined. His underworld, Pekla, is below the god-mountain and closest to the mortal realm in low-lying areas, lakes and marshes, and these are at once places of danger and also where it may be possible for mortals to ask his help or guidance. After all, while a gloomy figure responsible for the torment of the sinful, who also tries periodically to usurp Dievas, he is also fair and honest. He may help humans with the harvest or come as a guest at a wedding, often in return for music, for he is fond of both that and dance. Dievas allots every mortal a number of years, and until those years are up, his or her soul may not leave the earth, so those who die too soon must remain, sometimes as ghosts but more often reincarnated as animals, trees or flowers.

Abilities: Dance, Devotee of Velnias or Initiate of Velnias, Mythology of Velnias, Sense Guilt, Speak to Dead.

Virtues: Honest, Love Music, Melancholy.

Affinity: **Underworld** (Call Lost Soul, Command Dead, Make Dead Dance, See Dead People, Sense Death, Shred Ghost, Torment Guilty)

Secret: **Haggle with Velnias** (The devotee may intercede with Velnias and bring back the dead, but at a terrible cost. This is a ritual, and the base resistance is 40, plus a modifier reflecting how long the target has been dead – use the duration modifier. This presupposes a largely intact body: if the body is seriously damaged or only partially present, add a further +10 to +20 resistance. As well as the usual bonuses from ritual supporters, the devotee may sacrifice animals or even humans to increase his target number: +2 per animal of at least pig or goat size to a maximum of +10 and a further +10 per human, to a maximum of +30. If successful there is also a further price to pay to Velnias: hero points equal to the total resistance. These may come from the devotee or willingly sacrificed by any of his ritual supporters. If they do not have enough hero points as such, the devotee himself must instead sacrifice abilities to make up the shortfall. Points sacrificed from abilities, relationships, skills, etc are worth as many hero points as it would have cost to acquire them if related to play so that, for example, reducing an affinity from 18 to 17 would be worth 3, and a skill from 20 to 18 would be worth 6. Any ability brought down to 12 is lost.)

Rites & Representations: A solemn, long-faced man in black (even when dancing a merry jig, his face is always sombre), bearing a dead branch or flower. [VEL-nyas]

Worshippers: Those who deal with the dead, from professional mourners to bereaved souls who hope one day to be reunited with loved ones.

Connections: Sovijus.



Antagonisms: Velnias has several times tried to kill or depose Dievas, always without success.

ZEMEPATIS

Homefather

Patient and loving god of the homestead and head of the family.

Entry Requirements: Men only.

Abilities: Belly Laugh, Devotee of Zemepatis or Initiate of Zemepatis, Head Family, Mythology of Zemepatis.

Virtues: Love Family, Paternal.

Affinity: Family (Chide Daughter, Find Food For My Family, Fix the House, Hurt Attacker, Lead By Example, Make My Family Proud, Please My Wife, Scold Son)

Secret: Protect Family (The devotee may take any hurt or pain suffered by a member of his direct family – wife, children, parents, siblings – up to but not including immediate death. This may only be done at the moment when the hurt happens, not subsequently.)

Rites & Representations: A middle-aged peasant, generally a little plump, with a spear in one hand, sheaf of grain or other agricultural implement in the other. [Zhe-MAY-pah-tis]

Worshippers: While widely respected among all Lithuanians, invoked when a son is born or reached majority, few men devote to him.

Connections: Brother to Zemyna, Mother Earth.

ZVORUNA

Mistress of the Forests

Zvorūna's are the dark woods of Lithuania, places at once rich in game and full of danger. She is a huntress, sometimes appearing as a human woman, at others like a great, lean black dog. Sometimes called Medeina, she is a harsh goddess who offers much to those able to keep up with her but spares no thought on those who fall.

PLAYING LITHUANIANS

The Lithuanians make an interesting character choice because they are at once relatively 'barbaric' – in many ways, they are closer to the Viking archetype than the Rus', who claim descent from them – but they also have a relatively stable, settled and civilised society. Lithuanians are on the whole tied to their homeland, but there are reasons why they might travel, whether as exiles, traders, mercenaries or emissaries.

Abilities: Command Dogs, Devotee of Zvorūna or Initiate of Zvorūna, Find Way in Forest, Hunt in Forest, Mythology of Zvorūna.

Virtues: Passionate or Ruthless, Solitary.

Affinity: Bitch of the Forest (Call Dogs, Follow Track in Forest, Invisible Behind Tree, Run Up Tree, The Arrow That Knows Its Target)

Secret: Black Dog (The devotee may become a dog of equal mass, generally a Very Large Dog. He must overcome a natural world resistance of 14: the better the success, the quicker the transition. In dog form, the hero retains mental and magical abilities, and those physical characteristics which are appropriate. For example, *Agile* will transfer, but *Blacksmithing* will be beyond the shape's capabilities. The secret's rating can be used to augment any natural ability, and the hero can still use magic freely.)

Rites & Representations: A huge she-dog or else a wild and lissom huntress, dressed in dark green and black rags. [Zhvoy-ROO-nay]

Worshippers: Hunters, foresters and women who rebel against their cultural roles.

OTHER DEITIES

Particular gods and goddesses worth mentioning are Austėja the Queen Bee, Laima the Weaver of Fate, Laukpatis (Lord of the Fields), Lytuvonis (Rain), Menuo the Changing Moon and Zemyna Mother of the Land. There are many other minor deities, such as Bubilos, god of bees and honey, Divytis the fisherman, Dugnai, goddess of the bakery, Ezerinis god of streams, Ganiklis the shepherd god, Pilnytis the rich, Ragutis, god of beer, Swiežpuskynis, god of domestic fowl, Vakarine the Evening Star and Aušra the Dawn, Bližgulis, god of snow, Gaila, goddess of bad dreams, Karorius the cavalry god, and even Rugužis, god of pickles. Typically such minor deities provide no more than one or two abilities (beyond *Initiate/Devotee of...* and *Mythology of...*) and a couple of feats in a pretty narrow affinity.

YOUR FIRST LITHUANIAN HERO

When creating a Lithuanian character, there are some basic questions a player ought to consider:

- ❑ **Romuvan or Christian?** There are very obvious fault-lines within Lithuanian society, but none deeper or more important than this. Is the character



an adherent of the old ways, or a Catholic? If the latter, is his faith a matter of piety or expediency? And does he understand and relate to those of his countrymen loyal to the old ways, or does he regard them as backward souls who will in due course see the light, or does he despise them as pagans?

- ❑ **Town or Country?** The larger Lithuanian towns and cities are thriving centres, modernising rapidly, and increasingly Catholic; in many ways they are similar to their counterparts in Poland, Latvia and Russia. On the other hand, the countryside is much more distinctive, dominated by villages which have not changed for decades, even centuries, and the traditions of Romuva, raid and blood-feud.
- ❑ **What kind of Lithuanian?** While sharing a common culture, the choice of origins affects not just abilities and character but also priorities. A Zemaitijan farmer under Teutonic rule will have rather different priorities than a Dzukijan worried about the Rus' getting uppity in Minsk. Indeed, the hero could even be Rus'.

LITHUANIAN RUS'

Your hero may be from one of the city states under Lithuanian sway. In this case, create them using the default Rus' template, but add *Speak Lithuanian* and/or *Know Lithuanian Customs* to the abilities and either *Ally of Lithuanians* or *Hate Lithuanians* as a trait.

Occupations

The permitted occupations for the Lithuanian keyword are:

- ❑ **Cavalry Soldier** (Regular, Skirmish): Since the time of Mindaugas. The Lithuanians have drawn heavily on Mongol ways of fighting. Even their relatively heavy cavalry wear armour of mail or lamellar (plates of metal or leather laced onto a coat) rather than the full suits of plate mail favoured by the flower of Teutonic or Polish chivalry. They bear spears and *sudlices* rather than lances, swords and shields. Light skirmish cavalry use throwing spears or bows and swords, relying on speed rather than heavy armour. Kovas, Junda and Perkunas are especially popular military gods.
- ❑ **Child**
- ❑ **Crafter:** Lithuanians need craftsmen and -women like any others, and a particular local speciality is the use of the country's plentiful supplies of amber in jewellery and ornamentation, for which there is a great demand both at home and in distant lands. Teliavelis is the patron of blacksmiths, but

Zemepatis and Gabija are favoured otherwise, as friends of the commoner.

- ❑ **Entertainer:** As well as storytellers and the singers of both bawdy ballads and the sacred *dainas*, Lithuanian entertainers favour the kanklės, a zither-like instrument.
- ❑ **Farmer:** Most Lithuanians are peasants, but it is rare for a young man not also to know how to use a spear. Zemepatis and Potrimpo are especially favoured by the men, Gabija and sometimes Saule or Ragana by the women.
- ❑ **Foot Soldier** (Archer, Regular, Skirmish, Artificer): Most Lithuanian armies are made up of peasant levies, but the Grand Duke, richer *kunigai* and even some *bajorai* also retain regular infantry units, while others fight as mercenaries, especially in Russia. They are typically no more than lightly armoured, and fight with spears, throwing spears, bows, swords and the *sudlice*. Junda, Kovas and Perkunas are favoured.
- ❑ **Healer:** Wars, raids and the rigours of daily life require healing, traditionally from wise women (who may know Ragana's ways) and followers of Ausaitis.
- ❑ **Hunter:** Lithuania's woods are rich in prey for hunters, who are also valued members of raiding parties as well as the scouts who spot Teutonic raids and prepare the ambushes in which they may be killed or captured. Zvorūna is a particular patron of hunters, but many also look to Keliukis.
- ❑ **Merchant:** Lithuanians are also traders, selling timber, furs, grain, honey and wax through their own merchants, the Baltic Hanseatic League and the Rus'. Keliukis is favoured by itinerant traders, but otherwise there are no specific deities patronising commerce.
- ❑ **Noble:** This keyword really applies to the families of the richest aristocrats, the *kunigai* and entourage of the Grand Duke. Lesser nobility ought to use a different keyword such as Warrior or Cavalry Soldier. While Dievas is sometimes worshipped by members of the nobility wishing to affirm their Romuvan piety, most are Catholics.
- ❑ **Priest** (Christian only): While Romuva has no religious hierarchy, there is a Christian one in Lithuania now, although largely in the towns and cities.

'A Serious Man'

One of the highest accolades a Lithuanian can be given is to be described as 'a serious man' (*rimtas zmogus*). It carries with it a whole range of positive associations, from reliability and discretion to sobriety and bravery. Perhaps most of all, it suggests that this is an individual free from the traditional Lithuanian vices of being argumentative and prone to swing from reckless enthusiasm to morose pessimism!



VYTENA OF MEDININKAI

There are those who fight with spears and those who fight with strategy, those who fight with magic in the moonlight and those who fight with murder in the dark. Vytena fights with subterfuge and ridicule. When she was just ten, she was captured in a Teutonic raid and forced into service in Latvia. While scrubbing floors and fetching water, she came to realise that the Knights, with their discipline and zeal, their state-of-the-art equipment and steady supply of new recruits and allies, could not be beaten on the battlefield. Instead, she saw that their very zeal and piety was not just a strength but also a weakness. At the age of 20, she managed to flee and slipped back into Lithuania. She has devoted herself to using her own ways to fight a solitary war against the Knights. In part, she does this by travelling the towns and villages along the border, putting on entertainments designed to sharpen peoples' will to resist and putting heart into the demoralised. However, she also slips back into Lithuania regularly, using her cunning, ten years' experience in Latvia and the wiles of Aušrine to travel under the guise of a freewoman from Riga. There she does what she can to divide and undermine the Knights: today, tempt one into sinful thoughts, tomorrow spread a subversive and scurrilous song with a catchy tune among the drinking houses of Dorpat. Because of her ability to travel into and out of Latvia, she also increasingly finds herself carrying out sundry tasks for others: spying, delivering secret messages, smuggling hostages home. Most recently, she has heard rumours of a select party of Teutonic Knights secretly travelling to Novgorod, and is thus contemplating following them to see what mischief they intend...

Lithuanian Entertainer 20M, Devotee of Aušrine 20M, Hate Teutonic Knights 20M2, Quick Wit 1M3, Mimic 20M, Ridicule 1M3.

- ❑ **Sailor:** Until they lost Zemaitija, the Lithuanians had a coastline, but they are not natural sailors, preferring to navigate their mighty rivers. Upinis and Autrimpas are their main patrons, but some also appease Bangputis.
- ❑ **Scholar:** There is not a strong culture of literacy and learning amongst the rough and ready Lithuanians, but in the main cities and especially the Grand Duke's court, there is now a growing need for such specialists. Most are Christians, especially Franciscan monks, many educated abroad. Pagan scholars, though, generally worship Saule.
- ❑ **Thief:** Where there are towns, there are goods to be stolen, although there is no specific deity thieves follow.
- ❑ **Warrior:** These are Lithuanian men (and women) who have dedicated themselves to combat. As such, most will either be *bajorai* or *kunigai* or else they will be their retainers, bodyguards or leaders of warbands. Kovas, Junda and Perkunas are the obvious deities of choice, though women often also follow Zvorūna, too.

Remember how divided and fractious the Lithuanian are. While there are agents of the Grand Duke, with no real Lithuanian 'state' there are numerous rival, parallel and cross-cutting agendas at work. Besides which, the Lithuanians' traditional independence, pride and stubbornness ensures that even the least soldier, agent or traveller feels free to make up his own mind as to what to do rather than slavishly follow orders.

The Grass Snake

The grass snake, the žaltys, is sacred to Zemyna and all who follow Romuva. It can die and return to life, and gives good and bad omens. At times, militant Catholic Lithuanians seek to round up and kill local grass snakes, which can spark open conflict. The most famous was in a village outside Kaunas, which led the powerful and hot-headed Degutis twins (she follows Zemyna, he Zemepatis) to turn a whole meadow's grass stalks into snakes, driving away Margarita the Twice-Baptised and her thugs. Catholics sometimes call Romuvans 'snakes in the grass' as a result.

LITHUANIANS AS NARRATOR CHARACTERS

Lithuanians are half-way between the barbarism of their past and a medieval world that is pressing upon them, through conquest by the Ordenstaat, alliance by Poland. In many ways, they offer the most varied opportunities for Narrator Characters: they could be fierce pagan backwoodsmen or educated, cosmopolitan Christian scholars. They could regard the Rus' as kin and allies against the 'Europeans' or they could see them as backward and dangerous neighbours fit for conquest and conversion.

LITHUANIANS IN YOUR WORLD

Ironically, while on the verge of an alliance which will turn it into a strong regional power, Lithuania appears fighting for its very survival. On the one hand, this is about playing off and resisting outside enemies. The Teutonic Order is clearly the main and most active threat, but the Lithuanians are acutely conscious that in other circumstances Catholic Poland could also pose a serious danger. Nor are Lithuanian relations with the Rus' – several of whose cities, after all, they control – without problems.





STORY SEED: THE STAR OF TRENIOTA

Treniota was a Grand Prince of Lithuania in the mid-thirteenth century, a staunch pagan who denounced the conversion (however empty) of his uncle Mindaugas and killed him for it. He ruled for just a year before being murdered and deposed by Vaisvilkas, one of Mindaugas's sons. When he fell, his personal diadem was lost, a fourteen-pointed star of silver, chased with amber. A potent Romuvan relic, tales of the Star's whereabouts have surfaced from time to time but always proven empty. Until now. Someone claims to have recovered the Star and has proven this by calling on one of its most famous powers, control of the weather, to blanket Vilnius in snow in mid-summer. Now, this unknown someone is offering to sell the Star – at auction, in Minsk. Not surprisingly, the city is now crawling with agents and opportunists. Who has the Star, who wants it, can it be seized beforehand?

► Jogaila wants it. It's not so much that he wants to use it, but if it is in another's hands – such as Vytautas – then when he pledges his wholehearted allegiance to Christianity, it would be powerful rallying point for the pagans. His trusted leitis Aras of Many Sons is here to buy it, with a sizeable purse and, some suggest, an even more sizeable warband hidden amongst the travellers and traders thronging the city.

► Vytautas wants it. What better way to establish his claim to power? He may not have much money, but his agent Black-Eyed Jurgis has been spotted in the city, and where he goes, the Six Snake Sisters will be somewhere, too.

► There are powerful Romuvans who want it. They include the rich trading magnate Steponas of Palanga, still smarting at the way the loss of Zemaitija deprived him of his maritime routes, and Mad Bad Vitalija, the most powerful (and unpredictable) witch of Ragana in all Lithuania.

► The Bishop of Vilnius wants it. This is a symbol of Romuva – destroying it, or melting it down for a cross, would be a powerful symbol of the Catholic ascendancy. It might even be enough to convince the Pope to rein in the Ordenstaat and instead put his faith in peaceful conversion of the Lithuanians. He has sent Father Joannes of the Gates of Dawn, ostensibly to make a moral case for its custody, but the Church's treasury in Vilnius is now surprisingly empty and Joannes did travel with a creaking and groaning covered cart which left deep ruts in the mud as it passed.

► The Poles want it. Incorporating it into the regalia of the joint kingdom would be a magically powerful gesture (and show Jogaila that they are the dominant and most effective partner). The passionately persuasive Ludwika of Radom, accompanied by the silkily deadly Kazimierz Longhand, is there to make sure.

► The Ordenstaat wants it. Destroying the Star would weaken Lithuania's magical defences, perhaps even cement the Order's grip on Zemaitija. Father Hans is their representative, but it is just chance that a group of tall, burly German 'pilgrims' is passing through Minsk?

► Novgorod wants it. Lithuania has been a perennial threat, and mastering the Star would be a moral and magical blow to them. Mikhail Sabakoi is here, ostensibly as an agent of Mayor Elizaveta of Both Banks, but his personal ambitions to take her job for himself are well known, and what better way than such a success? (And are the rumours that his pockets are flush with Mongol silver true – and if so, just what does this portend?)

► And lots of other people want it. They may be opportunists looking to resell it for their own profit, descendants of Treniota, perhaps even Gerasim, the prince of Minsk himself? And who has the Star?

Novgorod, as the nearest major Rus' power, is most active in maintaining relations with Lithuania. It appears not to fear its western neighbour, instead it trades with it and regards it as a useful source of mercenary troops with which to deter its other, more pressing enemies, such as the Swedes or the Muscovites. Pskov is an ally and all but a Lithuanian dependency. After all, without such a friend, it would be dominated by Novgorod – or easy prey for the Teutonic Knights. Much the same is true of Smolensk, while Bryansk historically tried to play Moscow and Lithuania off against each other in the hope of retaining independence. However, with the rise of Muscovy and the Lithuanians' abortive support for the Mongols at Kulikovo, this strategy begins to look dangerous. Will they throw themselves upon the dubious mercy of Dmitri Donskoi, or accept Lithuanian dominance as their only hope of deterring Moscow's revenge? And if so, will that make Lithuania an enemy of Moscow's?

But there are also serious internal pressures in Lithuania. The proposed Lithuanian-Polish union may

represent a diplomatic triumph, but for many the prospect of an alliance with Catholic Poland is scarcely more palatable than conquest by the Catholic Teutons. Indeed, one of the reason why Jogaila was willing to grant the Teutonic Order Zemaitija might prove to be precisely because the region is known for its fierce devotion to Romuva. Two birds, one spear: this placates and diverts the Teutons, while also avoiding the almost inevitable rebellion in Zemaitija when he announces his conversion.

Nor are these tensions purely religious. Many among the *kunigai* fear that their traditional freedoms will be lost under the new order, and that Jogaila will try to turn the *bajorai* against them in a strategy of divide and rule. Conversely, the predominantly pagan *bajorai* fear being made to renounce their faith. Meanwhile, Vytautas is now free, and plots his own revenge.

18. THE TEUTONIC ORDENSTAAT: THE NORTHERN CRUSADERS

“Gott Mit Uns!”

(‘God with Us!’, battle cry of the Teutonic Knights)

The Teutonic Order, *Deutschritter Orden*, is a crusading order, originally founded in the Holy Lands, but since transferred to northern Europe. There, in the name of God and St George, they have become an infamous terror to the pagans (and not a few Christians at that), but at the same time represent one of the most efficient and disciplined states of Europe. Warrior-monks – though most these days are more knight than holy man – the Teutons proudly bear the black cross of their order and in its name carry out feats of both extraordinary bravery and sacrifice but also barbarity and brutality. Their *reisen*, or raids into Lithuania and northern Russia, are often little more than hunting parties devoted to visiting the wrath of God on the pagans by fire and sword. On the other hand, their hospitals are the envy of Europe, and the honour, piety and self-sacrifice of which they are capable cannot be doubted.

The full Knights are the ruling elite of the Teutonic *Ordenstaat*, or ‘Order State’. For each, there are perhaps ten sergeants, men-at-arms, junior priests or healers and other subordinates. They are often lesser members of the Order, called ‘half-brothers’ or ‘greymantles’ (because they wore grey rather than the white surcoats of the full Knights). Of course, the lands of the Order also encompass a huge subject population, ranging from pagan slaves and poverty-stricken farmers, to enthusiastic German colonists and rich traders and bishops, ruled by the Knights from their stone- or brick-built castles and fortified monasteries.

The *Ordenstaat* is divided into two portions: northern Prussia and Ermland to the west, and Kurland and Livonia to the east, which they gained when they incorporated the lesser order of the Knights of the

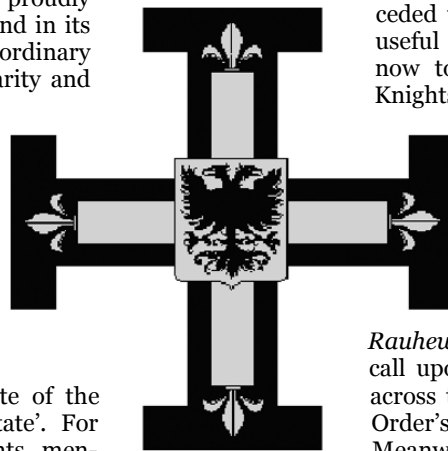
Sword (also known as the Sword Brothers). These were pagan lands, and despite forced conversion and the influx of German colonists into Prussia and Ermland, they are still dangerous and unsettled. Strongholds dot the landscape, signs of a deliberate policy of pacification by fortification.

All the more unruly is Samogitia, a still-pagan region between the two, which the Lithuanians have recently ceded to the Order. While it is undoubtedly useful for the two halves of the *Ordenstaat* now to be linked, it also means that the Knights must deal with its fractious and warlike people, conscious that if they spark a full-scale rebellion there, the temptation will be for the Lithuanians to reclaim it. Here, the Knights are building their castles, but meanwhile must rely on patrols through this rough land, either on foot or else through the air, as the

Rauhewesteritter, devotees of St Hippolytus, call upon their saint to ride their warhorses across the skies, a fearsome reminder of the Order’s magical and military might. Meanwhile, to the *Ordenstaat*’s east lie the

heathen Rus, while to the south of Prussia is Poland: a Catholic state, but no friend. Nor is even all Christendom behind the Order, as successive popes, jealous of its independence and suspicious of its morals and methods, send emissaries and encyclicals in a vain bid to bring it under the control of a Vatican many of the Knights consider corrupt and effete.

Some would consider this a dangerous and hostile environment, but this is the world and life the indomitable Teutonic Knights have chosen, full of challenges and opportunities. After all, there are wars to be won, treasures to be plundered, pagans to be converted or chastised and a rich and full life to be lived!



LAND AND PEOPLES

THE LAND

Northern Prussia and Ermland is the heartland of the Ordenstaat, conquered when the Order subjugated the indigenous pagan tribes in the first half of the thirteenth century. It stretches from Kammin in the west, bordering the German lands of Brandenburg, across to Memelburg in the east, just ten miles from Kurland. This is a land in change, as German colonists from the west clear woods and plant crops, as merchants from across Europe visit its fairs and markets, and as the local population begins to forget its pagan ways and embrace Christianity out of choice rather than at the point of a sword.

The order's mighty fortress capital, **Marienburg**, was completed in 1309, and is now one of the glories of northern Europe. Built of red brick, the three-layered fortress sprawls across 52 acres. From fortified piers, the Order's boats control the adjacent Nogat river, collecting tolls and enforcing its monopoly of the amber trade. In

total, some 3000 Knights and foot soldiers garrison the castle, including the Company of the Sword of St George, elite personal guard of the *Hochmeister*. All are devotees of St George, whose hearts are pure and whose blades glow with the light of divine retribution. Within the Holy Mother Mary Church, within the Upper Castle, is an 8' tall stuccoed statue of the Virgin, famous for its healing powers.

If Marienburg is the Grand Master's personal fiefdom, **Königsberg** is the Marshal of the Order's. Built on both sides of the Pregel river and on an intervening island, it is known as the 'city of bridges' (seven span the river) – though the Pregel is frozen from November to March. The city is dominated by the castle the Order built there after their victory over the Eastern Prussians, a victory won thanks to the support of Ottakar of Bohemia, after whom the grateful Knights named the new town (Königsberg means 'King's Mountain'). Under *Ordensmarschall* Konrad Zöllner, it has become the centre for a growing faction of zealous young Knights and priests who consider the Order at risk from Papal

interference and internal stagnation, and share dreams of glory and victory in new crusades to the east.

Like Königsberg and most of the other cities of the Ordenstaat or along the Baltic coastline, **Elbing** is a member of the Hanseatic League. The small fortified sea port has thus become an important trading town, to which German colonists are flocking. It is also the seat of the Hospitaller, head of the Order's institutions of healing. As such, while its Hospital of the Holy Ghost is by no means the largest within the Ordenstaat, its priests and surgeons are amongst the most proficient, and it has an extraordinary range of saintly relics with which to assist its healing. There are those who even suggest that the Order brought back medical techniques of the Saracens from the Holy Land, and may even have, securely locked within crypts sealed with iron bars and holy seals, Jewish doctors, but these are no doubt scurrilous and impious rumours.





The Order's capital, Marienburg, is at once fortress, cathedral, city and statement of Teutonic power.

The walled city of **Thorn** is built around a great redbrick fortress the Order built here in the 1230s as part of their drive to subjugate the Prussians. It is famed for its numerous churches, including the massive Cathedral of the SS Johns, the Churches of St Jacob and St Catherine and the great Church of the Blessed Mary, the most important single site dedicated to St Mary of the Teutons. It is not unusual to see a penitent Knight who has committed some sin or failed in his duty kneeling bareheaded before the church, praying for days and nights (sometimes until he collapses with weariness and exhaustion).

Memelburg is known for four things: its ice-free seaport on the Baltic, its citadel, the local amber, and the frequency with which it has been burnt down by Lithuanians and Poles. Nonetheless, wooden buildings predominate within the redbrick walls: the local population is as famous for its stubbornness as its speedy construction work. Vowing never to let it be sacked again, its present *Komtur* (or governor) has, it is said, begun the construction of an army of clockwork knights, his so-called 'Iron Levy.' He has denied the rumours – which are also beginning to alarm the Order's leaders – but nonetheless has acquired the nickname 'Iron Gottfried.'

Danzig is another major port city, founded in 997 when St Adalbert of Prague brought God to the local pagans in the name of the king of Poland. Facing a rebellion by his own noblemen, Ladislaus the Elbow-High of Poland turned to the Teutonic Knights to break a siege of the city in 1307. This they did with ease, but then turned and massacred their Polish loyalist 'allies' and claimed Danzig for themselves. It has become a thriving settlement of more than 10,000 people and the capital of the Hanseatic League.

Kurland and Livonia were added to the Order's possessions when they incorporated the Livonian Sword Brothers. Although they have been united for almost 150 years, there are still tensions between the two, not least as the capital of this eastern state, Riga, clings jealously to its privileges and tradition. Its civil governor, Archbishop Johannes Pulkat, knows he cannot directly challenge the authority of the Order's regional commander, *Landmeister* Volkmar the Hammer, though. After all, the Order has deposed archbishops

before, and the threat of uprisings is still very real, especially among the Estonians of the northeast. They remain recalcitrant – many have submitted to baptism, but most are Christian only within the sight of their masters, still practising pagan ways in their hidden forest shrines. Garrisons in the fortified ecclesiastical towns of Dorpat and Reval remain watchful, but if nothing else the Estonians, no friends of the Lithuanians, do provide a good source of light mercenary troops and scouts for the *reisen*. Christian colonisation into Kurland and Livonia has been limited and confined to the towns. Eastern Prussia is known for its short summers, wet autumns and long, cold winters, but even so the Teutonic Knights

were taken aback by what they called the 'Kurland Weather' in their new eastern province, especially its harsh and unpredictable winters, marked by sudden, chilling windstorms and blizzards.

Originally a simple fishing settlement, **Riga** has been transformed by the Knights of the Sword since they seized it in 1201 and made it their capital. Their original Castle of St George has been rebuilt as an even stronger fortress, and St Mary's Cathedral is as full of relics as any other in northern Europe. The richest building in the city, though, is the House of the Blackheads, magnificent guildhall of this association of unmarried merchants. After all, even when Riga is iced up, trade still thrives, sailing (or sliding) down the Dvina river, through Livonia and into Russia.

Samogitia, known as Žemaitija to the Lithuanian pagans, lies between the Order's eastern and western territories. It is a land of low hills, winding rivers, small lakes and rough scrubland, whose pagans reject Christianity with the stubbornness for which they are famed. Any signs of overt resistance are crushed severely, but the Samogitians have simply hidden their weapons and await the opportunity to rise. The hills of

THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE

The Hanseatic League is an alliance of Baltic and northern European trading cities dating back to the twelfth century, which to a considerable extent transcends politics, including as it does cities of the Rus' (Novgorod), Livonia (Riga), Teutonic Order (Königsberg, Elbing, Thorn, Memel, Danzig) and Poland (Krakow). Danzig has become the notional capital of the League, but while this is a city of the Order, the merchants who dominate the League protect their independence fiercely, and even the *Hochmeister* does not seek to control them. The League has shown itself prepared to protect its interests, not least using its well-armed merchant ships to fight and win a war with the Danes 1368-70, and the effects of an economic blockade on any of the Baltic powers would be ruinous.



WILLIAM SCROPE

The English knight William Scrope is a frequent guest-crusader with the Teutonic Knights, clearly destined for great things. What people first notice on meeting him is his immense enthusiasm for life and wealth of experiences. He has twice led *reisen* into Lithuania, both times with success. He fought for the Genoese when they tried to seize Venice. He has served in France with John of Gaunt. He has fought and travelled widely, and everywhere he has been he has made allies (and a good few enemies, especially amongst the clergy, for whom he seems to have a great dislike) and left tales of his prowess. He is best at nothing, but he is good at a great many things, and one of his talents is knowing precisely when to try some different approach. In a fight, he is as likely to distract his opponent by dazzling word play as to smash their blade aside with a devastating riposte, and in battle, while not one to fear the frontal attack, he is also a source of unexpected stratagems. And if they don't work? He'll laugh, shrug, and come up with something even more bizarre.

English Knight 20rf12, Man of Many Talents 20rf11, Unexpected Idea 10rf11, Devotee of St Michael 10rf11, Dislike Priests 5rf11, Indomitable Good Humour 10rf11

Samogitia are sites of pagan worship, and in the past were often topped by balefires to burn offerings to their gods or warn of approaching enemies. The Knights have threatened to burn any who seek to set such beacons on their own bonfires, but nonetheless they are a common symbol of defiance. The haunted heights of Satrija Hill have become a particular symbol of local resistance. The hill is said to be the burial mound of Jauteryte, strongest and most beautiful woman ever born in Lithuania and the wife of the giant Alchis. Despite every effort of the Knights, from mass exorcisms to erecting stockades around it, every summer and winter solstice, flames billow from its summit and witches and other pagan malefactors frolic in the night.

HISTORY

The Teutonic Order was founded in 1190, originally on the basis of a German hospital built in the Crusader city of Acre. The aims of what were then known as the Servants of St Mary of the German House were tending sick and wounded German crusaders and the defence of the holy places. However, increasingly its role as a militarised order of warrior-monks took precedence over its healing mission. Drawn largely from German clerics, knights and supporters, it rapidly grew in strength and wealth, but its hopes of continued expansion in the Holy Lands were dashed by both the Moslem resurgence of the early twelfth century and also the jealousies of its fellow crusading orders, the Templars and Hospitallers.

Returning to Europe

In response, it began to develop interests elsewhere, especially in its natural homeland of Germany. The fourth Grand Master, the lowborn but high-achieving Hermann von Salza (1210-1239), was both a doughty warrior and a cunning politician, the confidante of popes and princes, including German Emperor Frederick II. He began marketing the Order's services to Christian monarchs, offering its military might in return for land and wealth. In 1211, the Order responded to a plea from King Andrew of Hungary, desperate to find some counter to the warlike Cuman tribes invading his

Transylvanian provinces. The Teutonic Knights dispersed the tribesmen but then tried to make the region their own. Hungary was strong enough to drive them out. Others who called on the order for assistance would not be so fortunate.

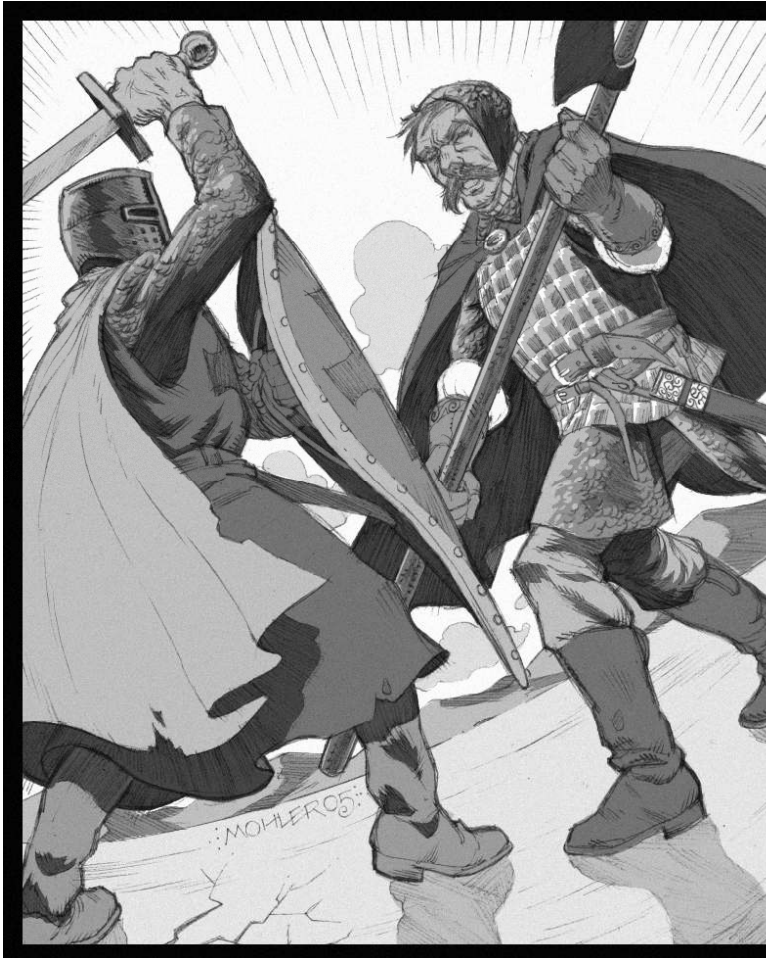
In 1222, Polish Duke Conrad of Masovia appealed for their assistance in quelling the pagan Prussians to the north. The Teutonic Order demanded and was promised lands along the river Vistula in return as well as – in what would prove most important – whatever territories they were able to conquer.

Thus began the Prussian Crusade, a campaign of open war, forced conversion, resettlement and massacre which would crush the Prussians and their pagan faith. Furthermore in 1237 the smaller holy order of the Sword Brothers, based in the city of Riga, was incorporated into the *Deutschritter Orden*. By von Salza's death in 1239, the Order controlled two substantial regions along the Baltic coast, and above all, it had conquered a secure base for itself, to which it held legal claim.

The Order then looked to further expansion, at the expense of both the pagan Lithuanians and the Christian Poles. Thus began the continuing war with the Lithuanians, as well as occasional sorties into the lands of the Rus', who defeated them at the battle of the Neva in 1240 and then at Lake Peipus in 1242. Likewise, Lithuanian victory in 1270 temporarily ended the Order's hopes of a rapid sweep eastwards, especially when Riga rose against the Teutons, who subdued it with violent dispatch 1297-98.

Despite these setbacks, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, the order had become a rich, powerful and dynamic force in northern Europe. In 1309 the Grand Master left Venice –their headquarters after Acre fell to the Moslems in 1291 – for Marienburg, just as the papacy began to become alarmed about the conduct and independence of the military orders. Pope Clement V, who ordered an investigation, was right to be concerned, but the Order had become rich (not least by trading corn through the Baltic trading alliance known as the Hanseatic League) and its culture of expansion and war had taken on a life of its own. Grand Masters who instead looked to peaceful coexistence with their





BATTLE ON THE ICE

With the Rus' already beleaguered by the Mongols from the east, in 1240 Bishop Hermann von Buxhövdén, bishop of Dorpat, led a combined force of former Sword Brothers, Danes and Germans against the Russian city of Pskov, seizing it with the intention of later moving against the trade routes of Novgorod and then the city itself. By 1242, the military adventure had the blessing of Pope Gregory, as well as additional contingents of Teutonic Knights and Estonian levies, but Novgorod had recalled its prince Alexander Nevsky, and he assembled his own force of cavalry and foot, supported by mercenary Mongol horse archers. He recaptured Pskov easily, made a feint towards Dorpat and then met the crusaders in battle on the frozen waters of Lake Peipus. The arrogant Western knights charged forward, but Nevsky's flank elements repelled the crusaders', leaving them surrounded and on ice which had seemed thick and strong but which suddenly began to crack as Rus' magics overwhelmed the defensive harmonics of the Teutons' portable organ. As unseen forms tore at the ice from below, the crusaders tried to flee, but most of those who survived the Russians' spears and axes drowned in the frozen waters of Lake Peipus, where their unquiet ghosts still float, frost-limned and hate-filled.

neighbours were deposed (Karl von Trier, 1318) or even murdered by their own (Werner von Orseln, 1330). Meanwhile, despite sporadic local rebellions (most notably the Estonians' St George's Night uprising of 1323), the Ordenstaat was increasingly secure. Even an invasion by neighbouring Poland was turned into a counter-attack which led to further expansion.

So the Order became, in a way, dependent on war. Knights who wanted to prove themselves or win plunder (for vows of poverty had fallen rather into disrepute) had to be placated and diverted. A distant Rome needed to be shown that the Order was indeed a valiant and effective shield against the pagans, whose brutal methods were a regrettable necessity. The answer was a new crusade.

The Lithuanian Crusade

In 1339, the Order formally declared crusade against Lithuania. Instead of a single major assault, this led to a campaign of smaller incursions. The struggle became vicious and merciless on each side. Individuals and small bands of knights would launch their *reisen*, raids into Lithuanian territory, burning, killing and looting. Lithuanians likewise would ambush raiders or even launch attacks of their own into the Ordenstaat.

Captured Knights faced slavery at best, torture, sacrifice or being burnt to death in their armour at worst.

However, this is not simply a war of religious and territorial expansion, it is also a cause and noble pastime which attracts the flower of European chivalry. It has become all the rage – especially when there is a dearth of wars closer to home – for knights to travel to the Ordenstaat to spend a season or a year jousting, feasting and hunting pagans. The prizes offered by the *Hochmeister* and the richness of his table have become famous. For some of these *gäste* ('guests'), this is an opportunity to hone their warrior's skills. For others, it is a convenient way of purging themselves of their sins and carrying out a pledge to go on crusade without having to travel to the Holy Lands and take on the altogether more formidable Moslems. But it has also become positively fashionable; what began as a political expedient to attract support from the chivalry of Europe to forestall persecution by Rome has become a lucrative business in 'crusading tourism.'

So far this century, the Order has launched over 80 *reisen*, large and small. Some have been successful, others have ended in disaster. After all, to reach the cultivated plains of Lithuania, the expeditions must penetrate a hundred miles of thick forest and treacherous swamp. The unpredictable and often harsh



RAUHEWESTERITTER

This is a group of some thirty especially pious and dedicated Knights, devoted to both St George and also St Hippolytus and able to draw upon the powers of the latter to ride their greater chargers through the skies. Under other circumstances one might expect them to be feted as a special élite and granted privileges to match, but it is a sign of that the Order has not completely abandoned its austere old ways that they are instead obliged to wear scratchy, rough hairshirts under their armour when galloping through the skies (from which they get their nickname: the 'rough-vested knights'), in order to remind them that they are but mortals and to prevent them from indulging in unseemly pride. Ironically, this very lack of affectation has become an affectation in itself, and more than a few eyes will roll when a *Rauhewesteritter* at a feast makes a point of demanding water instead of wine. All is forgiven, though, when one of their patrols spies Samogitians preparing for a raid or thunders from the skies to scatter an ambush in some lonely clearing.

Lithuanian weather also seems to conspire against the Knights: only the coldest winters (which freeze the swamps and make the icy rivers into thoroughfares down which their horses can charge) and hottest summers (which dry the swamps and mud flats) suit the invaders. Otherwise, heavy rain can turn soil to mud and streams into thundering torrents. Between the weather and the terrain, the Knights are often forced to abandon their warhorses, arguably their greatest advantage, and fight on foot. However, if anything these hardships make 'crusading tourism' all the more popular, and 'guests' will pay fortunes for the privilege of fighting the Order's war for them!

A Time of Decision

Of course, this is also transforming the order and creating new tensions. To keep these foreign guests happy, the Order is importing fine wines, spices and entertainments, all a far cry from old ideals of disciplined austerity. Some of the Knights gladly indulge in this comfortable life style; others grow resentful and mutter of the need to return to the old ways. Those who complain that knights are becoming little more than merchants have become outraged by the news that when the Order ends up with a surplus in wines and spices, it often trades them with the heathens of Novgorod!

Then there is the debate as to the Order's immediate priorities. Should it concentrate on pacifying unruly Samogitia before further expansion? Securing the Samogitian corridor would bind the Ordenstaat together and also perhaps heal the rift between Marienburg and Riga. Those who advocate this policy are disparaged as 'long-beards', because many are older and also, as fiery young Grand Commander Konrad von Wallenrode sneered, 'they would have grown beards to their knees before they made any decision.' This is unfair, but since when has fairness played a part in faction fighting? Instead, the 'long-beards' – including many of the *Rauhewesteritter*, who best understand the Samogitians' potential for rebellion – appreciate that the Order's position is strong, but brittle. If, as is expected, the Lithuanians and Poles unite against them, then the Ordenstaat will find itself in a battle for survival. The Samogitians would gladly rise against their Teutonic masters, and once again the Ordenstaat would be broken in two.

On the other hand, there are the 'crusaders', who advocate a renewed campaign against Lithuania. After all, it is common knowledge that Lithuania's present prince, Jogaila, is a treacherous cur: he was happy to accept the support of the Order against his uncle Kestutis, but now proposes an alliance with the Poles. Such a union would be a great danger to the Order: better to smash the pagans now! This is a popular position with the younger and poorer Knights, who scent glory and land in a victory to the east, supported not least by Wallenrode, the fiery Grand Commander of the Order.

While Marshal Zöllner formally has not announced his own position, it has become increasingly clear that he sees the Rus' as a greater long-term threat to the Order. Either he does not believe that any Lithuanian-Polish union will last, or else he regards it as inevitable, such that the Order needs must find itself a new foe. Whatever the reason, he and his closest allies have begun talking up the challenges and opportunities in the pagan lands of the Rus' now that Mongol might is in retreat. Just as importantly, it has become known that the Marshal is prepared to pay well for artists, troubadours and poets able and willing to tell the story of the Order's defeats at the hands of Novgorod, and how the pagan treachery and devilish sorcery which brought them about need to be avenged.

But now Winrich von Kniprode, Grand Master for the last thirty years, lies dying. Masses have been said in his name in Marienburg and Riga and in churches and cathedrals all the way to Rome itself. The jewelled skull of St Elizabeth of Thuringia was fetched from its sanctuary in Prague with an escort of two hundred Knights, but even its touch has not lifted the wasting ailment which in a few short months has turned an ageing but still powerful warrior into a skeletal remnant. Nonetheless, with the piety and iron will for which he is famed throughout Christendom (and feared amongst the pagans), somehow he still clings to life.

It cannot be long, though, before the Order musters for a funeral and an investiture: a solemn farewell to one *Hochmeister* and a cautious welcome to a new one. There seems little doubt that it will be Konrad Zöllner von Rotenstein, the present Grand Marshal. Even his enemies grudgingly admit that he is a canny warrior and a devoted Knight of Christ, and no other candidate has





KONRAD ZÖLLNER

Grand Marshal of the Teutonic Order

No one doubts that Konrad Zöllner von Rotenstein is an extraordinary and masterful man, least of all himself. Of impeccable noble German stock, as a young man he showed no great signs of piety, instead throwing himself into the world of warfare and tournament with equal and bloodthirsty skill. At the age of 26, a slight wound became infected, and he fell seriously, seemingly mortally, ill. Just as the last rites were being read over his moaning, feverish body, he suddenly sat bolt upright. Silent and shivering, he rose slowly and, weak but hale, began methodically to strip the gaudy ornamentation and gilt from his weapons and armour. Still unspeaking, he bade farewell to his astonished family and left, never to return. A week later he was initiated into the Order and his rise since has been meteoric.

He is a cunning politician and a fine warrior, an able administrator and inspiring preacher. Perhaps his greatest strength, though, is his absolute and unbending belief in himself as the agent of God's will. It wins him few friends, but many devoted followers, not least amongst the most zealous of the Order and, probably, even more enemies. However, it drives him ever onward, driving out all fears and doubts, to the point that the Grand Mastery of the Order is almost within his grasp.

Teutonic Knight 1M3, Devotee of St George of the Teutons 20M, Absolute Self-Belief 1M5, Relationship to the Order 20M3, Make It So 1M3

the same authority. Truth to tell, many of the senior figures within the Order fear challenging Zöllner even more than they fear the consequences of his rise.

One future dilemma, which most knights refuse even to contemplate, is that for the Order to continue to prosper at the expense of the foreign crusaders, there must continue to be a crusade. Rumours abound that Jogaila plans to declare Lithuania a Christian nation in order to seal his alliance with Poland. Are the rumours that Zöllner actually wants to prevent the Lithuanians from converting true? Could such a senior Teutonic Knight really be so scheming and be prepared to imperil the souls of the Lithuanians in the interests of the Order?

THE PEOPLE

Knights and priests will take the Teutonic Knight keyword, and all must be men. Greymantles may also take the Teutonic Knights keyword, but most of the soldiers and other subordinates of the Knights will take that of their ethnic homeland, typically German. Servants and the like will take the German homeland keyword.

Unsurprisingly, Germans make up the majority of the Teutonic Order, but knights are also drawn from across Christendom (even it is rare than a non-German rises to the highest offices of the Ordenstaat). The knights and

priests represent the order's elite, and are marked by the black crosses they wear on their white surcoats and vestments.

The 'half-brothers' (*halbrüder*) wear white if of noble birth, grey otherwise, but in both cases emblazoned with a black T (the Greek letter tau) instead of the full cross: these include foot soldiers, sergeants and the junior clerics. (They are still called 'greymantles', whatever the actual colour of their vestments.) There are also a few 'half-sisters' (*halbschwestern*), as discussed below. Whereas most full Knights are clean-shaven these days (although traditionalists still wear full beards, as they did in the Holy Land), half-brothers are usually bearded.

However, it is important to remember that the Order makes up only a small proportion of the total population of the Ordenstaat. To offset the size of the indigenous population the Knights conquered and forcibly converted, they also encouraged the colonisation of their western lands by Germans, and over time not only have more migrants moved into its plains and towns, but there has also been intermarriage and assimilation. Locals and colonists alike often serve the order directly. Most military expeditions, for example, are led by Knights but supported by large numbers of tribal warriors, promised pay or plunder, and trained by specialist Knights known as *Anwält*, advocates, who also oversee the native tribes. More prosaically, the castles, hospitals and churches of the Order hire domestic staff,



ALBRECHT'S ADVENTURE

Herzog (duke) Albrecht III of Austria launched an expedition into Lithuania in 1377, desperate to prove his manhood and be knighted. Accompanied by poet and chronicler Peter Suchenwirt, he gathered an entourage of 50 noblemen, each with their own soldiers and servants. At first, it is more like a holiday: Albrecht arranges feasts and receptions at towns along the way and at Marienburg is banqueted by von Kniprode. Then on to Königsberg, to meet the Marshal and be briefed on the situation on the border. There Albrecht holds another feast, the greatest yet, at which he also gives out gifts of silver and gold. The Marshal provides guides and sets out a proposed route, like any good tour guide.

Then the *reise* begins. Four wooden bridges are built across the river Šešupė for Albrecht's company, which now numbers over a thousand, swollen with adventurers and other 'guests' from as far afield as Scotland and France. Then they come upon the river Nemunas, as wide as an arrow can fly. However, the Order has again provided for its distinguished – and rich – guest; boatmen await to ferry them across. Now, though, they are in enemy territory, crossing deep swamp and forest in worsening weather. Soon, they come across a Samogitian village. The crusaders attack, the village is burned and 60 men killed. Albrecht gleefully declares this a great victory and Count Hermann duly knights him, who returns the favour by knighting 74 other participants.

At night, though, the crusaders find out just why Lithuania is also known as 'Christian's Grave.' Lithuanians attack, in small bands of undisciplined but fierce and skilful warriors, spreading chaos, burning tents, killing horses, then slipping back into the woods. The crusaders respond by building a stockade around their camp every night, as they march deeper into Lithuania, foraging off the land and burning what they cannot take. For eight days the crusaders continue to advance, putting two more villages to the torch, but then the pagans summon freezing rains which last three days and three nights. Armour starts to rust, food rots, wounds fester and morale slumps. Albrecht's chaplain seeks to lift the curse, but instead, the rains somehow pour into him, and he drowns in seconds in front of the horrified prince. The crusaders retreat, at speed, as the jolly sport of burning pagan villages suddenly seems rather less appealing. The Nemunas is now fierce and wild, its spirits roused by the Lithuanians, but nonetheless Albrecht and most of the raiders manage to return to Königsberg. Exultant and relieved, Albrecht gives thanks to God. He also pays a rather more material and immediate debt to the Order which arranged his expedition: captives, silver bowls filled with gold and a promise, made in secret to the *Hochmeister* and yet to be redeemed.

► Count Hermann's son, Karsten, was lost in the chaotic retreat across the Nemunas, and he will pay well for the return of his son, or at least his body. Did he drown, his corpse washed along the river until coming to rest in a spirit-infested marshland? Is he now the beaten slave of some unkempt local chieftain? Or is he still a captive, but now hopelessly in love with a fierce Lithuanian maiden?

► Jogaila of Lithuania is worried that Albrecht's promise is somehow directed against him – perhaps to try to prevent his alliance with Poland. Heroes must travel into the heart of the Ordenstaat to try and uncover the secret.

artisans, labourers and farmers from the local population.

The Knights also take slaves, a practice considered moral and legally acceptable so long as they are taken from the pagans. This is a matter of some controversy within the Order – to some, all slave-taking is an abomination, to others it is simply inefficient, as slaves are less reliable labourers. But it is still common,

especially in Livonia, for communities of the Order also to have small or large numbers of enslaved workers.

Finally, there are also the 'guests', crusading knights from across Christendom as well as their retainers, camp followers and hangers-on. The flower of European chivalry – and more than a few weeds – travel to the Ordenstaat for feasting, fighting and absolution.

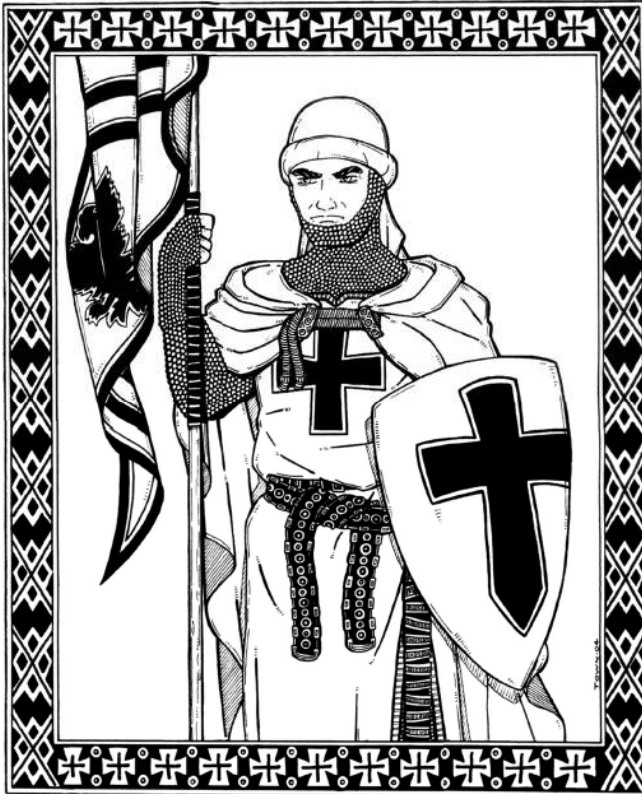
LIFE AND CUSTOM

POWER AND AUTHORITY

The Teutonic Order has an essentially military structure. The **Grand Master** is elected for life by a college of electors nominated by regional commanders, and is responsible only to the Pope and his conscience. In

practice, a *Hochmeister* can often ignore Papal authority so long as the Order is behind him. After all, Rome is a long way away – and the north-eastern margins on the Catholic world are dangerous lands with their own laws and ways. Instead, the *Hochmeister* is a virtual autocrat, who also appoints the other senior officials. They are generally renewed on a yearly basis by the Chapter





General, an annual gathering in Elbing of representatives from throughout the Order, but in practice this will usually simply ratify the decisions of the *Hochmeister*.

The other key officials are:

- The **Grand Commander** (*Grosskomtur*), is second only to the *Hochmeister* and leads the Order in his absence; he is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the *Ordenstaat*. The present *Grosskomtur*, Konrad von Wallenrode is a peerless warrior, but there are those who fear he has been promoted beyond his capabilities.
- The **Marshal of the Order** (*Ordensmarschall*) is responsible for military forces and preparations. The present incumbent is Konrad Zöllner.
- The **Hospitaller** (*Spittler*) manages the Order's hospitals and charitable institutions. In some cases, the *Spittler* is a warrior-knight unable to campaign any more for reasons of injury, age or ill-health but more often, as now, the post is occupied by a priest-doctor, currently Bishop Otho 'Lampighter' (he received his nickname for his habit of absent-mindedly calling on the powers of St Elmo to light the oil lamps in the Hospital at Elbing).
- The **Treasurer** (*Tressler*) administers its property and moneys and oversees the activities of the *Grosschäffer* (in effect the Order's minister for trade), as well as the new mint which produces the Order's own coin, the silver shilling. Along with the Grand Master and Grand Commander, the Treasurer is one of the only people with the key to the giant, saint-blessed chests in

which the Order's greatest treasures are kept. The present *Tressler*, Ugo Pantaleoni, was a close ally and confidant of Kniprode's and fearful of Zöllner's likely succession. That the Venetian is the only non-German amongst the Order's hierarchy also fails to endear him to Zöllner and his radical followers.

The *Ordenstaat* is made up of two provinces: Prussia (including Ermland) and Livonia (including Kurland). Territorial command runs from the *Landmeisters*, the Provincial Commanders. The Grand Master also acts as the *Landmeister* of Prussia, while Livonia has its own reporting to him. Both Prussia and Livonia are divided into regions, each under a *Landkomtur* (Regional Commander). These are broken into 'commanderies' (*Komturei*) under a *Komtur* (Commander) – essentially individual castles or fortified monasteries and the territory they control. The result is a strikingly efficient system, perhaps necessarily so, given that most of the *Ordenstaat* has been carved from recalcitrant pagan lands, whose indigenous peoples, even if Christianised, still bear the Knights little goodwill.

LIFE AND VALUES

'I promise the chastity of my body, and poverty, and obedience to God, Holy Mary, and you, to the Master of the Teutonic Order, and your successors, according to the rules and practices of the Order, obedience unto death.'

Oath of initiation into the Teutonic Order

The *Deutschritter Orden* is a religious order, whose members observe an almost monastic routine of fasts and prayer, but the Knights are also part of the wider social world of European chivalry. Full knights have to be of noble birth or, rarely, elevated to that rank because of their deeds on the battlefield. That said, many are of distinctly petty noble roots. Most Knights join as squires, fresh-faced young men of noble birth and high hopes. However, it is also not uncommon for the Order to accept veterans, so long as they are of appropriate rank and suitably devout character. Of course, while many are indeed pious, there is no doubt the Order also attracts a good number who simply seek land in the pagan east, the chance for a good fight or material or spiritual absolution (for joining the Order annuls any monetary debts the Knight may have owed).

A prospective member must satisfy a panel of examiners, prove his noble heritage and pay a fee of 30-60 Marks (often in the form of land, donated by the applicant's family). His formal investiture takes place after a day and a night's fasting and prayer. He is then led into a suitable church, wearing a plain tunic and with an empty scabbard. There, before the Grand Master, the Marshal or the Grand Commander, he swears to serve God, obey the Grand Master and observe the Rules of the Order. Then his new sword is consecrated that it may be used to defend the poor, widows, orphans and churches, before being presented to the new Knight.



Contest: Joining the Order

Abilities: Worship God (-5), Reputation as Pious Warrior, Relationship to the Order, Reputation as Warrior (-5); **Augments:** Patron, Wealth, Reputation, Piety.

Resistance: 5M; **Modifiers:** Poor reputation.

Outcome: On any victory, the candidate is successful and becomes a member with a *Relationship to the Teutonic Order (member)* 17 – better successes might increase this rating. On a tie or marginal defeat, the candidate has failed to make his case, but is considered of promise. He may try again after he has performed some service to the Order. On any worse defeat, he is rejected, and would generally not be able to try again.

Notes: The narrator should feel free to dispense with the roll if the hero is suitably qualified and it fits the needs of the story.

Poverty

While the Order is rich, most Knights still live relatively simple lives, even if accustomed to living as conquerors. All but the oldest or most senior Knights sleep on simple wooden cots in dormitories, rise early for their religious devotions, spend long days working and training, before dining together in a refectory. Although their feasts have become famous across Europe – in part as a result of their need to attract knightly ‘tourists’ – their usual fare is simple and modest, although the Knights are known for their fondness for beer. Senior Knights may well live rather more comfortable lives, but even so generally make a virtue of simplicity and avoid ostentation. One may go to battle in the finest armour imported from Italy or France, but wear the same plain surcoat as issued to everyone else over it. Likewise, he may have his own chamber, but the ivory chess set with marble board will be kept in a simple wooden box, and he will drink fine wine from a crude metal goblet. Besides which, these are often not his personal property but the perks of the job: this certainly avoids jeopardising that vow of poverty, but does help explain why so many Knights cling on to their posts as long as possible, preferring to die in office than give up the life to which they have become accustomed.

A few Knights also engage in trade, although this is generally handled by trusted vassals. It is not considered polite to note that the Order itself is a major Baltic and European trading partner and financial institution, actively involved in Hanseatic League trade, even selling Prussian grain (for which it has a monopoly) to arch-enemy Novgorod. Furthermore, while usury – lending money and charging interest or otherwise making a profit from it – remains banned by Papal decree, a clever *Tressler* can find ways of putting the Order’s great wealth to use, whether bankrolling expeditions launched for trade or plunder or lending money in return for the expectation of suitable ‘donations’ in return.

Chastity

The Order generally regards women with suspicion. On the one hand, they are vessels of the same divine grace as the Blessed Virgin Mary, on the other they can be pawns of the Devil, arousing carnal passions unbecoming a Knight of Christ. The Rules of the Order advises Knights to avoid women where possible, although it is accepted that sometimes this may be impossible. They are, however, explicitly warned against speaking to women alone, and they are forbidden to embrace even their sisters and mothers. While there are a few women ‘half-sisters’ working as nurses and even medics in the hospitals of the Order, elaborate efforts are made to avoid the dangers of temptation.

Of course, some Knights succumb to temptation. Punishment is severe: at best, a year stripped of privileges, forced to sleep with the servants and survive on bread and water for three days a week. More stringent punishments include imprisonment chained in the Order’s dungeons, and while a repentant Knight might then be allowed back into the fraternity, he is barred from office thereafter. The Order also seeks to uphold this virtue through positive example. Bertold Bruhaven, first *Komtur* of Königsberg, apparently took a beautiful local maiden to his bed every night for a year, and only after this time was up, when he had managed to resist the temptations of lust and ‘took an oath and gave proof that he had never deflowered her’ did he feel worthy of joining the Order.

31. How women shall be received into the service of the house.

Furthermore we decree that no women shall be admitted in full service and fellowship to this Order, for it often happens that manly courage is most harmfully softened by familiarity with women. And yet, since there are some services for the sick in the hospitals and also for the livestock which are better performed by women than by men, therefore, it is permitted to receive women as sister-aids for such services. However, they shall be received only with the permission of the provincial commander, and, after they are received, they shall be housed apart from the quarters of the brethren, for the chastity of professed brethren, who dwell with women, although a light is kept on, still is not safe, and also may not last long without scandal.

From the Rule of the *Deutschritter Orden*

Obedience

Obedience is as much a virtue in the monastery as in battle, so it is no surprise that the Order puts great store by it. Cowardice in battle is one of the greatest sins for the Knights, and those guilty of it (if they survive to be dragged to the judgment of their peers) will be whipped and expelled from the Order, without hope of redemption or spiritual absolution.

However, Western knights are traditionally unruly, fiercely protective of their privileges of rank and eager to





outdo their comrades in the quest for glory and plunder. While far more disciplined than most, the Teutonic Knights are still not an army of automata (though the first time the Estonian national hero Kalevy encountered these armoured knights, he apparently thought these were men of iron). Likewise, as well as genuinely devout crusaders and healers, the Order also includes many who joined in pursuit of personal wealth and power or the chance to kill. For that matter, the boundaries between them are often blurred. Zöllner's religious

conviction, for example, is undoubted: those unhappy with the prospect of his taking the *Hochmeister's* mantle worry that it is precisely because he is so zealous in his belief that the Order represents the best and truest agency of God's Will on Earth, that he might employ un-Christian means to a Christian end. As Hospitaller Dietrich Schilling put it – shortly before his fatal accident – 'there are the Godly and there are the villainous, but God spare us from the villainy of the Godly.'

THE ORDER AND THE CHURCH

The Teutonic Knights are zealous members of the Roman Church, and all the information and keywords in chapter 19 thus apply. However, there are some distinctive strictures which apply to all members of the Order, both full Knights and greymantles. None may follow any faiths or beliefs other than the Roman Church (even some saints recognised by Rome are considered a little too liberal by the Order). Unusually, almost all Knights and greymantles are at least initiates, and fully half the Knights are devotees. This helps explain why such a small Order is so fearsome and effective, in a world when initiation is rare, never mind devotion.

Three saints are central to the Order's religious identity: St Mary of the Teutons, St George of the Teutons and St Elizabeth of Thuringia. Although not exclusive to the Order, these three saints are so closely associated with it that their keywords are provided below. While members of the Order may also follow other saints – soldiers such as Sebastian, Lawrence and Maurice are all popular, and St Hippolytus for the *Rauhewesteritter* – they must at least be an initiate of one of these, and they must maintain a level of worship in one of them at an equal or higher level to that of any other saint.

Example: Otto of Burgelauf is a devotee of St George, all the better to smite the heathens, with *Devotee of St George of the Teutons 10m*. His family have always been blessed by St Wynfrith, though, and he wishes to show his respect for this committed evangelist. As he is already a devotee of St George, he could become either an initiate or devotee of St Wynfrith, but his *Devotion to St Wynfrith* could not rise above *9m*.

MAGIC AND THE OTHERWORLDS

The magical effects of invoking saints by Knights are much the same as for the mainstream Roman clergy. However, visible auras are also especially likely either to focus on a Knight's sword or take sword-like form. For example, a healer calling on Mary to exorcise a victim of possession may seem to be wielding a sword of light, cutting away the dark demon. Also, the choral effects associated with major powers or collective magics are often regarded as sounding more sinister and brooding, overlaid with reverberating organ notes.

As a disciplined, hierarchical organisation, Knights will often benefit from the augmentation and communal support of subordinates and followers. In battle, for example, it is usual for each file to concentrate its magics in supporting their lead rider, who is thus formidable. Likewise, a typical *komtur* contains 12 Knights and up to 60 greymantles, all offering total or extraordinary support: a bonus of +5 to +10 to rituals and the like. In suitable circumstances, the local Christian population would also turn out to sing prayers and join services: a single village of 300 colonists in Prussia, for example, offering moderate support would provide an additional +2.

The Otherworlds of the Ordenstaat's lands are a distinctive mix of regular Catholic imagery, Teutonic zeal and the remnants of paganism. The Ideal World is a dangerous place, overgrown and inhabited by demonic pagan creatures, half human, half beast. Knights often prove their piety and reaffirm their vows by crossing the veil and spending a week hunting and killing these remnants of paganism, a mission of spiritual cleansing. The Representational World hangs over almost all the Ideal. Its appearance is much the same psaltery-style as in the other Catholic lands, but it contains several remaining pockets of paganism, which look like stained, charred or defaced parchment. There is no Boundary World in these parts, but there are a few gateways to special routes at key places in the Representational World, roughly corresponding to Riga, Marienburg and Thorn. Closed to all but the most pious, these lead to locations within the Transitional World analogous to Italy and Palestine, from which there are further routes to the Holy Gates of the Transcendent World.

ST ELIZABETH OF THURINGIA

The Hungarian Rose

Elizabeth was the daughter of King Andrew of Hungary. Raised in a world of privilege and luxury, she nonetheless sought out both the solace of prayer and the joy of charity. Married to Ludwig of Thuringia at the age of 13, she continued, over the protests of her courtiers and family, to devote herself to the sick and the needy. She had one of her castles turned into a hospital, in which she would tend the patients herself. When



Germany was struck by famine, she sold all she had to bring bread to the starving, earning her a special place in the country's heart.

Entry Requirements: Forswear any worship outside the Roman Church.

Abilities: Bake, Devotee of St Elizabeth of Thuringia or Initiate of Elizabeth of Thuringia, First Aid, Life of St Elizabeth of Thuringia, Speak German.

Virtues: Charitable, Love Germany, Quiet Determination, Unworldly.

Affinity: **Sweet Charity** (Encourage Generosity, Heal Sick, Shame Miser, Smile Away Threat, Smooth Away Blemishes, Turn Weapon into Rose)

Secret: **Bread of Heaven** (If the devotee personally bakes bread, then at the time when someone else eats of it, she can add half the Secret's rating to casting any magic from the Sweet Charity affinity upon him.)

Rites & Representations: A calm young woman, wearing a crown, either tending to beggars or bearing roses in her apron, reflecting the miraculous event when food she was carrying turned to flowers. Her day is 17 November.

Worshippers: Women, healers of the Teutonic Order and bakers.

Connections: St Elizabeth is well-regarded by the Teutonic Order, especially its priests and healers.

Antagonisms: While lacking the militancy of other Teutonic Orders, it still disapproves strongly of pagans and those who consort with them.

Disadvantages: Members of this order are expected to shun worldly possessions and instead devote themselves to the care of others.

ST GEORGE OF THE TEUTONS

The Crusader

This is the aspect of St George revered by the Teutonic Knights and other crusaders who regard holy war against pagans, schismatics and apostates of every kind as a struggle for the very soul of the world, a glorious cause in which the ends justify the means. There are, of course, honourable and fair-minded worshippers of this aspect, but in the main they tend towards the ruthless and fanatical.

Entry Requirements: Forswear any worship outside the Roman Church.

Abilities: Devotee of St George of the Teutons or Initiate of St George of the Teutons, Ignore Injury, Life of St George, Sword Fighting.

Virtues: Combative, Dedicated, Hate Pagans, Intolerant.

Affinity: **Crusader** (Cutting Blade, Hymn of Victory, Resist Pagan Magic, Smite Pagan, Strength of the Virtuous)

Secret: **Fight On!** (When engaged in a combat against pagans or other enemies of the Roman Church, this ability may be used either for or to augment a Final Action. Alternatively, it may be used to allow the warrior to fight on, even when his AP fall below zero. He may continue to act until his AP fall below -[his rating in this ability]. If he manages as a result to bring his AP back into positive figures, he sustains no injuries, but if falls below the ability's threshold or else remains at minus AP when he wins the contest, he then collapses and suffers the appropriate consequences.)

Rites & Representations: A mounted warrior, slaying a dragon or worm, but in this aspect he bears a sword rather than the traditional spear. His day is 23 April, when a parade is held in Marienburg.

Worshippers: Primarily warriors of the Teutonic Order.

Connections: Followers of this aspect often maintain good relations with other aspects of St George, although generally not those of the Russian Orthodox Church (and certainly not in the case of worshippers who are members of the Teutonic Order). Given the extent to which this aspect of the saint is so closely associated with the Teutonic Knights, it is widely considered its patron (even though the formal role falls to St Mary of the Teutons).

Antagonisms: This is a zealous crusading order: it is openly and unremittingly hostile towards pagans and those who consort with them (which includes any who practice *dvoeverie*), even though from time to time the Teutonic Order may talk to or even ally with pagan powers for political advantage.

Disadvantages: Members of this order are expected to be disciplined and uncompromising, and those failing to live up to this will soon face pressure and worse from their peers. This also means that even other Catholics tend to consider them dangerously fanatical. Usually with good cause.

ST MARY OF THE TEUTONS

The Blessed German Mary

This is an aspect of the Blessed Virgin Mary (see **GUESTS AND FOES FROM THE WEST**, emphasising certain virtues held dear by the Teutonic Order since its inception: a kind of 'tough love' which can at once heal the sick and succour the needy, while still preaching discipline and crusade.

Entry Requirements: Forswear any worship outside the Roman Church.

Abilities: Cow Pagan, Devotee of St Mary of the Teutons or Initiate of St Mary of the Teutons, Encourage Crusader, Life of St Mary of the Teutons.

Virtues: Chaste, Dedicated, Loving, Strong Will.



Affinity: One Hand Open, One Closed (Banish Demons, Banish Fear, Cast Out Disease, Close Wound, Take Away Pain, Weaken Pagan)

Secret: Raise the Virtuous Dead (As the secret of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the next chapter, except that it may only be used to raise a Christian with Worship God 5^m or better.)

Rites & Representations: Like all aspects of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she is represented as a haloed woman in long robes, but she usually holds one hand out, open, in benediction, while the other remains at her side, closed with determination. As with other aspects of the Virgin Mary, her holiest day is the Feast of the

Assumption on 15 August, but Mary of the Teutons is also specially revered on the third Friday in April, known as the Black Cross Day.

Worshippers: Women, members of the Teutonic Order, especially healers and priests.

Connections: Followers of this aspect often maintain good relations with other aspects of Mary, although not those of the Russian Orthodox Church. St Mary of the Teutons is the formal patron of the Teutonic Order.

Antagonisms: St Mary of the Teutons is arguably the most zealous and intolerant of the aspects of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and will have no truck with pagans, schismatics and backsliders.

PLAYING TEUTONIC KNIGHTS



It is easy for the Knights to become nothing more than two-dimensional hate figures, medieval Nazis against which to pit Rus' and other player heroes. There is certainly a strong tradition behind this – not least in the way they are depicted in Eisenstein's classic Soviet propaganda film, *Alexander Nevsky* – and narrators can use them in this role if they choose. However, there is a lot more to them than that. They are, after all, crusaders, pious warrior-monks devoted to their cause. They can be

as honest and honourable as any knight, and as dedicated and self-sacrificing as any monk.

They can also make interesting player heroes within the world of **Mythic Russia**, whether active members of the Order or renegades. In any case, though, they are potentially a major force in the setting.

YOUR FIRST TEUTONIC KNIGHT HERO

An interesting change of pace would be to run a campaign based on Teutonic Knights travelling into Russia, whether on a *reise* or perhaps as spies or emissaries. After all, Germans are by no means rare, especially in the lands of Novgorod. A few specific questions worth considering when creating a Teutonic Knight hero are:

- **Soldier, Priest or Specialist?** Are you the classic warrior on horseback, or a priest or healer, or simply one of the many specialists working for the Order. After all, it may be interesting to play a member of this feared and fearful military Order who is actually a puny quill-pusher or gentle doctor.
- **Crusader, Killer or Carouser?** Did you join the Order out of purest Christian duty or to escape your debts? Do you spend your days training in the tilting yard and your night at prayer, or do you enjoy the feasts and a few tankards of good German beer? Or is this just a great excuse to hone your skills and blood your blade?
- **New Blood, Traditionalist or None-of-the-Above?** Do you support any of the main factions, such as Zöllner's followers or the traditionalists? Or do you avoid such politics, being more interested in the work of the Order (or your own personal agenda)?
- **Good, Bad or Ugly?** Are you a shining example of Christian chivalry, pious, noble, generous and true? Do you harbour inner doubts and guilty secrets, such that you question your own commitment to the Order or



'THE GHOST'

No one would question the devotion this tall, angular Livonian holds towards the Order, but nonetheless few feel comfortable with his presence. He calls himself Albert von Buxhövden – the same name as the founder of the Sword Brothers in 1202 – but his background is unknown, and he simply ignores enquiries. The nickname 'the Ghost', originally reflecting his apparent claim to be this long-dead figure, strikes most who meet him as singularly appropriate. He is pale, withdrawn, yet always alert, ready to burst into action. He speaks rarely and quietly, in a heavy, archaic Livonian accent. In battle, he is a terror, his unusually-slender sword whirling and thrusting with murderous precision. Yet he is at his best when alone, a spy, scout or assassin. Zöllner, a man into whose personal service he has drifted, made the unguarded comment that 'I would rather face ten such men with swords before me, than one with a knife behind me.' Those who wonder whether there could be any connection between a private visit he paid to von Kniprode and the *Hochmeister's* sudden collapse are wise to keep their suspicions to themselves. After all, 'the Ghost' may seem a man without fear or temper, but he is also undoubtedly without humour or mercy.

Teutonic Knight 15m2, Killer 20m2, Initiate of St George 20, Natural Magic: Move Unnoticed 20m, Mysterious 15m, Troubled Soul 10m

fear the consequences were your colleagues to see into your tortured soul? Or are you a cynical opportunist, for whom the black cross of the Order represents money, power or the freedom to kill and enslave pagans with impunity?

Women and Other Exceptions

A female character within the Order will be one of the *halbschwestern*, 'half-sisters'. Given the Order's fear of spiritual contamination, they are expected only to work within the Hospitals and even then must remain in pairs and their living and sleeping quarters are behind iron-barred wooden doors, locked by the senior *halbschwester* and behind which no male Knight can venture for peril of his soul. The fact that other women serve (even on their own) in the castles and offices of the Order, cleaning the churches and cooking the food, is a logical inconsistency it is unwise to note.

However, the *halbschwestern* are not always content to remain subordinate. Agnethe 'die Nadel', 'the Needle' is effectively the senior healer at the Hospital of the Two Ladies in Königsberg, an institution dedicated to SS Elizabeth and Mary. In theory, she is responsible to the *chirurgleiter*, or senior doctor, but for the past twelve years, that post has been left unfilled, and this formidable and spiritually powerful woman has been given free rein. That she has been able to do so even during Zöllner's time in Königsberg has caused some surprise and no little gossip, ranging from the speculative to the scurrilous.

Like any holy order, the Teutonic Knights also attract members from the furthest reaches of Christendom. These include knights from Scotland, Spain, even the occasional Irishman (notably Domnall Ciotach, one-armed but open-handed chaplain to the Livonian *Landmeister*). Perhaps the most unusual is Sir Jibril ul-Fida, a converted Saracen, dubbed *Russig*, 'Sooty', with the sensitivity for which the Knights are famous. Nonetheless, his skill as a horseman and his evident devotion to Saint Elizabeth (for reasons he chooses rarely to divulge) are second to none and were such that *Grosskomtur* von Wallenrode – who makes up with

fairness what he may lack in wit – was glad to knight ul-Fida and sponsor him for initiation into the Order within a week of knowing him.

Occupations

The permitted occupations for the Teutonic Knight keyword are:

- **Cavalry Soldier (Shock):** The mounted chivalry which best characterises the might of the Order. Teutonic Knights wear full armour, typically suits of fine mail reinforced with metal plates along the arm and leg, their heads encased in great barrel helmets, bearing swords and lances. They ride great warhorses, trained to bite and kick in the attack.
- **Foot Soldier (Archer, Shock):** The Order's own infantry are foot knights, wearing armour little lighter than those of the cavalry. Some are armed with swords or axes, many carry spears or bills. The archers are actually crossbowmen.
- **Healer:** The healers of the Hospitals are typically junior priests, recognisable by their tonsures. Many are highly skilled, not least thanks to the Saracen methods they learned in the Holy Land.
- **Noble:** While all Knights are of noble birth, there are those who are more inclined towards the duties (and perks) of office than the reise and the tilting yard. The Noble keyword ought to be taken for these administrators.
- **Priest:** Although there is a separate hierarchy of clerics, the Order has its own 'priest-brothers' – they may be healers or clerks, but they may just as





easily be warriors fighting in the front line with the other Knights.

Grey mantles may take the German keyword and the following occupations:

- **Cavalry** will be sergeants, generally considered Regular, although still armed and armoured to a high standard.
- **Crafters** are the skilled artisans of the Order, including blacksmiths and farriers.
- **Entertainers** within the service of the Order are likely to be drummers, buglers or pipers, playing both in peacetime ceremonies and on the battlefield, or else an organist, playing the great church organs or else the smaller one known as the portative, which could even be taken on campaign.
- **Foot Soldier** specialities, along with the above, include Artificer, as the Order also deploys both traditional stone-throwing siege engines when necessary, as well as primitive cannon.
- **Healers** will generally be junior figures within the Hospitals.
- **Merchants** are the factors and officials working in the Tressler's empire.
- **Scholars** are chroniclers, clerks and other scribes, not least the specialists who maintain the constantly-updated work that is the *Wegeberichte*, the Order's guide to routes into and through Lithuania, always consulted before a reise and updated with whatever intelligence is gathered in the field.

Of course, a full range of other occupations are to be found within the *Ordenstaat*, from farmers tilling the soil to thieves plying their trade in its cities. Many other nationalities are also present, from the 'guests' to travelling merchants and even such specialised groups as the élite Genoese crossbow units the Order hires for major operations.

Daily Life

As noted above, most Knights live a life which is half monastic, half military. They reside in brick or stone castles. Large and small, scattered across the *Ordenstaat*'s lands, or in the bastions and fortified barracks in the cities. Most Knights rise early for religious services, spend their day in prayer, training, active service or administration, eat simply and retire early to their dormitories. Of course, there are exceptions, such as the feasts held for the *gäste* and the hardship and also freedom of raids on the pagans.

TEUTONIC KNIGHTS AS NARRATOR CHARACTERS

A nice narrative trick is to build up a stereotype, then challenge and reverse it. For example, Rus' heroes may become accustomed to dealing with disciplined and ruthless Teutonic crusaders as fearsome and

uncompromising enemies, before finding themselves saved by a Knight who would gladly kill them on the battlefield but regards it as his Christian mission to defend his fellow man off it.

Also, avoid making them always nothing more than religious robots. As well as members of a monastic order, they are professional soldiers and the masters and administrators of conquered and colonised lands. Most of the Knights' time is taken up in prayer, training and the business of government, but they are people, just like their vassals and allies. Duty, honour, obedience are all important to them, but as knights they also hunt and hawk like any noblemen and boast about past victories and exchange combat lessons and ideas like any warriors.

Besides which, not all Knights conform to the stereotypes. Or rather, there are numerous stereotypes – both unflattering ones, such as muscular zealots, bigoted priests and cynical politicians, as well as more positive figures, such as honourable warriors, jovial doctors, honest administrators and pious monks – and as many ways to break them. Then there are also former Knights. These may be embittered has-beens, crippled by illness or injury, or passionate souls ejected from the Order because of their love of a woman – or perhaps their over-merciful treatment of pagans.

It is also worth noting that from their point of view, the Lithuanians really are the bad guys. They not just pagans but raiders and slave-takers. They even (sometimes) practice human sacrifice. To fight these barbarians and bring the modern, civilised values of modern Europe can be considered a noble cause, after all.

THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS IN YOUR WORLD

If the Mongols are still the eastern 'superpower' of **Mythic Russia**, so too the Order is a major player to their west.

What does the Order seek? In the long-term, the subjugations of Lithuania (and perhaps Poland, though even Zöllner doesn't plan that far ahead) and the forcible imposition of the true Latin faith on the schismatic Rus'. In the immediate term, the pacification of Samogitia, freedom from further Papal interference and the prevention of the Lithuanian-Polish alliance.

In a more historical, low magic campaign, the Teutonic Knights can be used as a steady, brooding threat to the west and the occasional source of direct physical, magical and covert threat.

In a more freewheeling, high magic campaign, the narrator can play up the caricature of the Teutonic Knights as disciplined zealots and, just as pulp action games and films set in the 1930s like to give Nazi German bad guys bizarre experimental technology and/or occult secrets, so too should the more bizarre aspects of the Order be stressed. This can also apply if



the Knights are considered good guys – or at least no worse than anyone else! – in which case they rely on their cutting-edge technology and magic to supplement their skill and discipline when fighting a more numerous and often savage enemy. Examples of this ‘crusaderpunk’ might include:

- **Clockwork armies** of automata in knightly plate armour from Iron Gottfried’s workshops (in themselves an ironic comment on popular perceptions of the Order). These could be unstoppable battle robots or entertainingly clunky, prone to jams and needing to be rewound with large, engraved keys, at the most inconvenient moments.
- **Clone Warriors** born from vats of bubbling protoplasm in those secure dungeons deep below Elbing. Why go to all the trouble of recruiting and training fallible flesh, when pure new Knights can be created from the imprint of past heroes. Of course, what happens when Zollner wants to create a whole army of Zollners? And, of course, this kind of venture is always going to lead to disaster – not least because even the slightest hint might draw not just the wrath of the Papal Inquisition but even of the other senior members of the Ordenstaat.
- **Arcane and occult conspiracies**, seeking to acquire holy relics (such as the Holy Grail and the Holy Lance) and draw on their powers to sweep away their enemies. These is, of course, Meddling In Matters Beyond Mortal Ken and this a Bad Thing, which heroes are expected to be able to thwart! On the other hand, the Teutonic Knights could instead be presented as the secret agents of Order, launching their own overt and covert operations precisely to prevent others from unleashing the forces of Hell and Chaos.





19. FRIENDS & FOES FROM THE WEST

“Those who come with a sword will die from that sword!” (Alexander Nevsky)

While Russia has been relatively isolated from Western Europe while under Mongol rule, that certainly does not mean that there are not contacts. Westerners – *Nemtzes* or the ‘voiceless’ in Russian as they often cannot speak the local language – come as exiles and adventurers, traders and mercenaries, scholars and missionaries.

Given that they are not a core element of the game (beyond the crusaders of the Ordenstaat), Europeans are not covered in anything like the kind of detail provided for other cultures. Instead, this chapters concentrates on those more frequently to be found in **Mythic Russia** – and aspects of their societies likely to be relevant to play.

STRANGERS IN RUSSIA

Foreigners of every kind are to be found in the courts and markets of **Mythic Russia** – this is just a brief guide to some of the most common and what brings them to this cold and distant land.

after specialists, from the swordmaster Henri Fournier engaged by Oleg of Tver to train young Prince Ivan, to Yvette DesNouages, the famous madame, currently ensconced in Kiev.



ENGLISH

England and Russia will only really discover each other much later, but even at the time of **Mythic Russia**, there are Englishmen (and Scots and Welshmen) who have made their way east. Most are missionaries or mercenaries – Prince Mikhail of Suzdal, for example, reportedly hopes to raise a force of English longbowmen able to outrange and outfire Mongol horse archers. The unfair and bitterly resented poll tax raised to pay for England’s running wars with France have also triggered the Peasant Revolt, and there are tales of agitators fleeing to distant parts ahead of King Richard’s assassins. However, the outrageous ‘Doctor Calendula,’ a travelling purveyor of dubious medicines and scurrilous rumour, is certainly not such a political exile, for all his fanciful tales of being chased from his native land by a cabal of embittered rivals.



GERMANS

Germany is not a nation but a collection of states, principalities and palatinates, often but not always under the rule of the Holy Roman Emperor. Although the incursions of the Teutonic Knights create considerable suspicion and fear of Germans, the importance of the Hanseatic League to Baltic trade ensures a substantial German population in Novgorod. A handful are travelling the Siberian trade routes or acting as emissaries in Moscow, Kiev and other major cities. (Indeed, they later became so common that *nemets* eventually became the word for German rather than foreigners in general.) Many display considerable curiosity about Russia, its peoples and its faiths. While the Thuringian nobleman Otto von Hermsdorf is accused of being everything from a spy of the Ordenstaat to a closet Prussian pagan, he himself claims to no more than a fascination with Russian folkways and festivals.



FRENCH

France has been ravaged both by the Black Death and English invasion – the early stage of the Hundred Years War was a disaster for them, with French chivalry smashed at Crecy and Poitiers. However, the French are now fighting back, and they have little time for distant, backward Russia. Those few French in Russia – and they are few – are typically eccentric travellers or sought-



HUNGARY

Hungary is an ally of the Byzantine Empire’s, not least because they face a common threat from the Ottoman Empire to the south. The rulers of Serbia, Walachia, Moldavia and Bulgaria became vassals of Hungarian King Louis the Great, but he has just died. His daughter Mary and her German husband Sigismund



are now co-rulers. However, the Ottoman threat is growing, Hungary has lost its control over Poland and there is considerable opposition to Sigismund within the Hungarian aristocracy (he has not even been crowned yet). In this charged environment, some aristocrats, finding themselves on the losing sides of political disputes, have sought sanctuary to Russia, while the wars with the Ottomans have also displaced Hungarian subjects from the Balkans, some of whom are looking to build new lives in south-eastern Russia (especially Russian Orthodox Bulgarians and Serbs).



ITALIANS

Italians are one of the most significant European players in Russia, even if fewer in number than Germans and Scandinavians. What brings Italians to cold, distant Russia? Money and exile. Italy is a land of city states, just entering the period of extraordinary cultural progress known as the Renaissance. It is torn by conflicts between city states – especially Venice and Genoa– and factions known as the *Guelphs*, supporters of the popes, and the *Ghibellines*, who look to the Holy Roman Emperor. These struggles create a constant source of exiles fleeing political enemies at home. They also create both a supply and a demand of mercenaries, who range far in the search for new employers. Genoese pikemen fought for Mamai at Kulikovo, for example. Sometimes even mercenaries can be exiles. The Compagnia della Carrara Espatriata (the ‘Company of Carrara in Exile’) was raised from former marble quarry workers, forced to flee when their protests against terrible working conditions were brutally crushed by the Milanese Viscontis, who controlled the town at the time. Though new to the arts of war, they are tough, determined and united by bonds of kinship and shared hardships. Having arrived on Genoese ships to the Crimea, they are now making their way north into Russia, seeking service and perhaps a home.

It is fitting how war has become a business in Italy. There a new mercantile class has risen, thanks to trade and then the banking industry they virtually created. They send their agents, buyers caravans, bankers and factors far and wide in the search for new markets and sources of revenue. Venice and Genoa have both made a substantial commitment to operations in Russia. Genoa has been especially active – it backed Mamai, then killed him when he became a liability. Can it forge a new understanding with Tokhtamysh, or will it instead throw its lot in with Donskoi and the Russians? Is it true that the exotic and feline Contessa Silvana di Bonafede is in Moscow precisely for this reason?

However, not all exiles are fleeing politics. The earthy and widely-read natural philosopher Guglielmo Cornelli is in Russia escaping the threat of Excommunication, for curing people’s spiritual maladies simply by talking to them. On the other hand, it is thought that the rakish Federico d’Este is travelling in Russia not, as he claims, to find news of his grandfather, lost on the Silk Road route east a decade ago, but because his amorous exploits became too embarrassing for his family, who sent him away before open feuds erupted at home.



POLES

Polish attention is largely concentrated to the north, on the impending union with Lithuania and the ongoing threat from the Teutonic Order. There are ambassadors at several Russian courts, especially in neighbouring cities such as Kiev and Smolensk.



SCANDINAVIANS

Sweden, Norway and Denmark vie for dominance in Scandinavia, although Sweden is the largest and most powerful. Novgorod and Sweden have been perennial rivals for dominance in the north-west; by the mid-fourteenth century they had largely established respective spheres of interest. However, intermittent hostilities have done nothing to deter traders, adventurers and mercenaries from Scandinavia from travelling to Russia to seek their fortune – as Rurik did. Besides which, so long as there is a Varangian Guard in Constantinople, there will be a two-way flow of recruits and retirees passing through Russia.



SPAIN

Spaniards are rare in Russia. Since the peninsula was reconquered from the Moslems in the thirteenth century, Spaniards have begun ranging further, including swordsmiths and –dealers, including the cadaverous Baldomero Delgado, now based in Moscow. Fine swords in the Toledo style have become quite fashionable amongst the boyars of that city.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC FAITH

A detailed assessment and description of the Roman Church, as worshipped across most of Europe, is beyond the scope of this book. Besides which, it is a foreign faith in **Mythic Russia**, with no substantial congregations

outside the far north-west, on the borders with Lithuania, Poland and the Ordenstaat.





"Teach nothing new, but implant in the hearts of everyone those things which the fathers of venerable memory taught with a uniform preaching ... Whence, we preach nothing except what we have received from our forefathers. In all things, therefore, both in the rule of faith in the observance of discipline, let the pattern of antiquity be observed." – Pope St. Leo I (the Great), Father and Doctor of the Church

Catholicism shares most of the same basic precepts as other forms of Christianity but is much more closely tied to the Papacy and the rites and hierarchies of the Latin Church. The Pope in Rome is deemed to be God's spiritual representative on Earth, even though there are powerful divisions between the Holy See and the Holy Roman Empire. However, there is no Holy Roman Emperor at present – the last, Charles IV, died in 1378, and had effectively abandoned any claims to universal rule over the lands of Christendom – so there is something of a vacuum at the heart of Europe. This has created opportunities for all kinds of other rulers and powers, including the Teutonic Ordenstaat.

Broadly speaking, the Latin Church of the time is intolerant and in many ways corrupt. Many clergymen are appointed because of corruption and favouritism and use their offices to make money and live well. Indeed, they even sell pardons for past sins or, though indulgencies, for ones yet to be committed. This is not a reflection of the underlying message of the Faith, nor to say that there are not many good and honest believers and clergymen. It is just a statement about the Church of the times.

Special Advantage: Righteousness

Followers of the Roman Church know that they follow the one true faith. **They automatically receive an auto-augment bonus from their Worship God Piety when resisting any pagan (in other words, non-Christian) magic with another ability. When using their Piety to resist magic, then it augments itself!** For example, if the dishevelled monk Hairy Spongus is resisting pagan magic with his Worship God 18M, he actually has a rating of 21M, because the auto-augment of 18M is +4. This is a great boon, but it affects all magics. Were a pagan to try to use his magic to heal Spongus, for example, the resistance would be +4 as a result, even though the monk would prefer he succeed!

When Catholics invoke magic, they do so through the intercession of patron saints, and thus the effects usually involve haloes materialising behind or around the caster's head and perhaps their form also beginning to reflect that of the saint in more extreme cases. Lights will often glow around casters, the songs of angelic choirs peal in the air along with the scent of myrrh and incense. The Catholic Representational World looks like an illuminated manuscript, a flat parchment page on which carefully-inked and –coloured figures move and on which writing appears to explain what symbols mean or simply to provide an accompaniment to the action of the moment.

SAMPLE CATHOLIC SAINTS

ST ADALBERT OF PRAGUE

Apostle of the Prussians

Adalbert was a Bohemian nobleman, an evangelist who faced the hostility of many within the pagan Bohemian aristocracy. As a result, he took holy orders in Rome and then, after an abortive attempts again to bring the faith to Prague, became a missionary in Russia, Poland and Prussia – where he was martyred in a savage pagan ambush. He is thus both the patron of Christian Prussia and Prague and also of those who would spread the true Catholic faith in dangerous lands.

Abilities: Devotee of St Adalbert of Prague or Initiate of St Adalbert of Prague, Infuriate Pagan, Life of St Adalbert of Prague, Ridicule Opposing View, Spot Ambush, Talk for Hours.

Virtues: Blunt, Intolerant, Risk-Taker.

Affinity: **Evangelist** (Bible Basher, Glimpse of Damnation, Rouse the Faithful, Sniff Out Idols, Strike Heathen Dumb, Uplifting Preacher)

Secret: **Missionary Man** (Provides a bonus equal to ¼ its rating to any attempts to convert pagans or resist their magics.)

Rites & Representations: Sometimes as an elderly religious figure, but more often he is a mix of the ecclesiastical and martial, wearing monk's robes or priestly vestments, but carrying a club, a lance, or both. His day is 23 April. [AD-al-bert]

Worshippers: Tub-thumping preachers and those who feel it is not enough to know they are superior to the heathens but have to tell them so.

ST AMBROSE OF MILAN

The Honey-Tongued Doctor

From an early age, Ambrose impressed people with his ability to reconcile different factions and points of view. When disputes as to who should become the next Bishop of Milan led to violence, he intervened and so impressed both sides that they insisted he take the post – even though no priest and even unbaptised. On one day, then, he was baptised, ordained as a priest and consecrated as a bishop. His career was spent preaching and bringing sides together, and his successes included bringing St Augustine back to the path of righteousness.

Abilities: Broker Deal, Calm Anger, Devotee of St Ambrose of Milan or Initiate of St Ambrose of





Milan, Life of St Ambrose of Milan, Schmooze, Sweet Words.

Virtues: Busybody, Optimist, Peacemaker.

Affinity: **Peacemaker** (Blunt Blade, Dispel Hostile Magic, Find Compromise, Peacemaking Speech, Seal Sword in Sheath, Turn Away Blow)

Secret: **Listen to Me, Everyone!** (The devotee may ignore multiple target penalties when using any feats from his Peacemaker affinity.)

Rites & Representations: A small man with a nimbus of yellow hair, arguing with a pagan or holding a beehive or a small church. His day is 7 December.

Worshippers: Those who prefer consensus to conflict. He was described as the 'Honey-Tongued Doctor' for his elegant speech, but it also means that he has become considered patron of beekeepers!

Connections: Close ties with the cult of St Augustine.

ST AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Doctor of Grace

While raised a Christian, Augustine then fell from grace, living a dissolute life as a tutor in rhetoric and then experimenting with other philosophies, until brought back into the fold by St Ambrose of Milan. He travelled to Hippo in North Africa, founded a monastery and become one of the great figures of Christian theology, whose writings underpin many of Catholicism's doctrines, from original sin to the just war. Nonetheless, his sinful earlier life cost him his Secret.

Entry Requirements: Must be literate.

Abilities: Compelling Writer, Devotee of St Augustine of Hippo *or* Initiate of St Augustine of Hippo, Know [area of study], Know Catholic Theology, Life of St Augustine of Hippo, Literate, Remember Telling Quotation, Rhetoric.

Virtues: Hungry of Learning, Thoughtful.

Affinity: **Theologian** (Anticipate Question, Bless Just War, Effortless Confidence, Make Pagan Question Own Beliefs, Silence Doubter, Unexpected Question)

Rites & Representations: A grey-bearded old man in ecclesiastical robes, bearing a crosier. His day is 28 August.

Worshippers: His worshippers tend to be philosophers and scholars.

Connections: His worshippers are expected to show their respect for St Ambrose's.

ST BRENDAN THE NAVIGATOR

The Sailor Saint

Brendan was an Irish monk who, after missionary work in his own land, travelled the seas, evangelising the

peoples and islands encountered including the strange natives of a great island they found far to the west in the Atlantic. He experienced many adventures – including stopping on one small island to celebrate Easter Mass then lighting a fire and finding it to be the back of a giant whale – but he and his followers were sustained by their faith and Brendan's mastery of seafaring skills.

Abilities: Devotee of St Brendan the Navigator *or* Initiate of St Brendan the Navigator, Life of St Brendan the Navigator, Navigate by the Stars, Swim.

Virtues: Brave, Laugh in the Face of Adversity.

Affinity: **Seafarer** (Hearten Crew, Hold Course, Make Saltwater Drinkable, Mend Sail, Plug Leak, Prey for Calm, Sing Up A Wind, Tight Knot)

Secret: **Navigator** (The hero always knows the direction north and the straight direction home. This can also be used as an ability to sense a suitable route to somewhere visited or not; the resistance is 14 to retrace a route taken before, but greater if the route is difference such as to a familiar place but from a different start-point or if the hero has never actually been at the destination point at all.)

Rites & Representations: A balding, bearded man in monk's vestment, holding a small ship. His day is 16 May, a good time to start a long journey.

Worshippers: Sailors, fishermen, travellers.

ST CHRISTOPHER

Christ-Bearer

Offero was a wanderer, who enjoyed nothing better than to see new places, but when he met an ageing hermit who lived by a stream, he listened to his tales of Christ and professed his new faith. He took the hermit's place, and carried any who wished to cross the stream. One day, he agreed to carry a small child, whose weight was so great it drove him waist-deep into the mud. After he had staggered across, it was revealed that the child was Christ, weighed down by the woes of the world. He then baptised Offero as Christopher ('Christ-Bearer') with the waters of the stream and he is now the patron saint of travellers.

Abilities: Carry Heavy Loads, Devotee of St Christopher *or* Initiate of St Christopher, Know Tales of Distant Lands, Life of St Christopher, Pack Quickly, Walk Far.

Virtues: Adventurous, Helpful, Wanderlust.

Affinity: **Traveller** (Carry Friend, Ford River, Know Safest Route, One More Mile, Pray Away Blisters, Stay On Route)

Secret: **Safe Journey** (Gives a bonus of ¼ towards travelling safely, whether against ambushes or getting lost.)

Rites & Representations: A powerfully-built man, often with a staff, sometimes wading through water with a child on his shoulder. His day is 25





July, a day on which to help out pilgrims and other travellers on their journeys.

Worshippers: Travellers, bearers, pilgrims.

ST DAMIAN

The Silverless

Damian was a Arab doctor who, once he had become a Christian, would accept no money for healing the poor and the deserving. He and his brother Cosmas were tortured and martyred for their faith, but suffered no injury from water, fire or air while being tormented, not did they suffer on the cross, until their beheading.

Abilities: Devotee of St Damian *or* Initiate of St Damian, Diagnose Ailment, First Aid, Good Listener, Life of St Damian, Mix Medicines.

Virtues: Caring, Unmaterialistic.

Affinity: **Doctor** (Close Wound, Disappear Bruise, Drive Away Fever, Ease Pain, Pray Out Disease, Pray Away Vile Humours)

Secret: **Pray for Healing** (The hero may carry out Great Healing on another.)

Rites & Representations: A dark-skinned man in robes, holding a box of medicines or ointments. His day is 26 September, a day in which many doctors, whether or not they worship Damian, will waive fees to treat paupers.

Worshippers: Doctors and others who would heal.

Connections: The cult is very close to that of St Cosmas, which is essentially similar, although its Secret is *Cure Blindness*.

ST ELIGIUS

The Working Saint

Eligius was a supremely able French metalsmith, who turned the fruits of his labours to helping the poor, ransoming slaves and building churches. He is thus a patron of pious craftsmen.

Abilities: [Any craft skill], Concentrate on Work, Craftsman's Contacts, Devotee of St Eligius *or* Initiate of St Eligius, Focus on Detail, Life of St Eligius, Recognise Good Craftsmanship.

Virtues: Frugal, Hard Working, Perfectionist.

Affinity: **Honest Craft** (Bless [Item Produced], Deter Thief, Mend Break, Show Off Work, Tidy Workspace, Waste Not Want Not, Work Faster)

Secret: **Fine Work** (Items the devotee makes himself are of extraordinary quality; where appropriate add the secret's auto-augment to the usual equipment bonus, so that a sword forged by Diego of Toledo with Fine Work **111** would get an additional +2.)

Rites & Representations: A beardless man in red craftsman's clothes, often bearing some tool of a trade. His day is 1 December.

Worshippers: Craftsmen.

Disadvantages: He is very much seen as a worker's saint, looked down upon by the aristocracy.

ST ELIZABETH OF THURINGIA

See the entry in *THE TEUTONIC ORDENSTAAT*.

ST ELMO

Light of God

Elmo – also known as Erasmus or Eramus – was a Christian bishop forced to flee to Mount Lebanon when the Roman emperor launched new persecutions. There he was fed by a raven but was eventually discovered and imprisoned. An angel saved him, lifting him from confinement in a flash of light, but when he continued to do his holy work, he was found again and martyred. In the process, he was tortured by having hot iron hooks pulled through his intestines, but the wounds miraculously healed themselves in blazes of glowing energy, further proving that St Elmo's powers manifest themselves through bright, crackling balls of light.

Abilities: Befriend Bird, Devotee of St Elmo *or* Initiate of St Elmo, Life of St Elmo, Live Rough.

Virtues: Flighty.

Affinity: **St Elmo's Fire** (Blinding Spark, Cauterise Wound, Floating Ball of Lightning, Hot Spark, Repel Lightning)

Secret: **Gone in a Flash** (In an electric flash, the devotee disappears and reappears in the nearest safe place; this could be three paces to the left, if the only threat is a single stray arrow, or three miles away if in the middle of a battle, and is determined by the narrator. The resistance is 14, modified by the distance which the devotee would have to travel.)

Rites & Representations: A half-clothed man, often holding in his intestines, while ball lightning floats around his head. His day is 2 June.

Worshippers: Elmo is not linked directly with a profession, although he is quite popular with sailors, and is generally worshipped as a result of personal persuasion.

ST GENESIUS

Acta Christiana

Genesius was a Roman actor hired to perform in a skit mocking the Christian baptism. However, in the middle of his performance, God Himself spoke to him and he converted on the spot and professed the truth of the gospel. He was beheaded for his temerity and is now a patron saint of actors and other entertainers, especially those who use their arts to celebrate God.



Abilities: Actor or Singer or Comedian, Change Voice, Devotee of St Genesis or Initiate of St Genesis, Life of St Genesis, Play to the Audience, Project Voice, Stage Presence.

Virtues: Confident, Exhibitionist.

Affinity: **Entertainer** (Convincing Performance, Look At Me, Make 'Em Laugh, Mimic Sound, Quick Costume Change, Tear-jerking Performance, Throw Voice)

Secret: **Life is Theatre** (The hero ignores multiple target penalties when performing to an audience. The secret can alternatively be used to augment any appropriate ability or feat used on an audience member.)

Rites & Representations: A young, clean-shaven man, bearing the happy 'comic' and sad 'tragedy' masks of the theatre. His day is 25 August.

Worshippers: Professional actors as well as those who make a drama out of everyday life.

ST GEORGE

Victory Bringer

A valiant and chivalrous warrior, George was a Roman soldier from Cappadocia who, despite his many and selfless deeds – including slaying the dragon of Libya – was nonetheless killed by the Roman Emperor. Three times he was chopped into small pieces, the pieces burned in the fire and buried deep in the earth, three times he was revived, unharmed, by the power of God, before eventually being taken up into Heaven. Thus, St George became one of the most popular saints in Europe. This default aspect celebrates his role as a valiant Christian knight, but there are many others.

Abilities: Devotee of St George or Initiate of St George, Knightly Courtesy, Life of St George, Riding, Show No Fear, Spear & Shield Combat.

Virtues: Brave, Chaste, Chivalrous, Dynamic.

Affinity: **Christian Knight** (Armour of Faith, Defend Innocents, Lord Guide My Spear, Preserve Chastity, Reassure Innocents, Sword of Glory)

Secret: **Raw Charisma** (The hero simply oozes heroic charisma. His teeth flash whitely when he smiles, a stray sunbeam catches his face as he looks moodily into the middle distance, his cloak flaps impressively in the breeze even when no one can feel any wind. This provides a bonus of ¼ the secret's rating to any attempt to influence others, but also a penalty equal to ½ its rating when the hero is trying to hide, disguise himself or otherwise escape notice. It can also be used as an active ability to command someone – even an enemy – to carry out a single, brief and specific action. The hero could, for example, tell the guard to open the gate with such natural confidence that he would, before he even thought about whether he should. However, that would not prevent the guard from then yelling out a

warning, or trying to close the gate again before the hero's allies come through as well.)

Rites & Representations: A mounted knight, slaying a dragon with his spear. His day is 23 April, a very popular feast day, often chosen for tourneys, jousts and other martial displays.

Worshippers: Knights, warriors and those strong in faith.

ST GEORGE OF THE TEUTONS

See the entry in **THE TEUTONIC ORDENSTAAT**.

ST GREGORY THE GREAT

Father of the Fathers

One of the founding fathers of the Papacy, a powerful and popular figure elected pope unanimously in 590. He was responsible for a range of initiatives, from dispatching missionaries to England and Spain and writing seminal texts on doctrine to collecting the plainchant and melodies later known as *Gregorian Chants*. He is thus revered not just for his knowledge and wisdom, but his leadership of the Church.

Abilities: Catholic Theology, Devotee of St Gregory the Great or Initiate of St Gregory the Great, Know Trivia, Life of St Gregory the Great, Literate, Politics, Remember Song.

Virtues: Authoritative, Enquiring Mind, Get Things Done, Loyal to Papacy.

Affinity: **Get Things Done** (Anticipate Backsliding, Plan Quickly, Quash Opposition, Right Man for the Job, Spot Opportunity, Team Building Talk)

Secret: **Determination** (This secret provides a bonus equal to its full rating to any attempt to resist distraction or otherwise stay in good heart, including recovery through a Final Action.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented in papal vestments, holding a church in one hand, open book in the other. His day is 3 September.

Worshippers: Scholars, priests and men and women of learning and piety, as well as those who would Get Things Done.

ST HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME

The Martyr of Porto

Hippolytus was a Roman soldier guarding Christian prisoners, who became converted through conversations with his charges. When some were executed, he helped the other prisoners give them a decent Christian burial, for which he was strapped to two wild horses and dragged to his death. He has become a patron of horses and their riders, though.

Abilities: Devotee of St Hippolytus or Initiate of St Hippolytus, Funeral Rites, Keep Watch, Life of St





Hippolytus, Mounted Combat, Ride, Tend Horses.

Virtues: Brave, Chatty, Love Horses.

Affinity: **Horse** (Heal Horse, Pray for Horse, Ride on the Wind, Speak to Horse, Speedy Horse, Stay on Horse)

Secret: **Awaken Horse** (The hero's horse – only one at any one time, and it must be one he owns and is familiar with – 'awakens' and becomes an intelligent sidekick without the need for hero point expenditure. Instead of having 15 points to distribute between the 3 special abilities starting at 13, the hero gets as many as the secret's rating, which is also used for the Relationship between horse and rider.)

Rites & Representations: A Roman soldier, with a horse on each side. His day is 13 August.

Worshippers: Riders, especially knight, including the fearsome *Rauhewesteritter* of the Teutonic Order.

ST HUBERT OF LIEGES

Apostle of the Ardennes

Grandson of a king, son of a duke, Hubert was a spoiled and dissolute young man devoted to wenching, drinking, bullying underlings and, above all, the hunt. One day, he was out hunting when he saw a vision of a mighty stag with a glowing crucifix between its antlers. A voice warned him that he was heading straight to Hell. Henceforth he became a pious and god-fearing man, a priest and a missionary, who also used his skills to find pagan idols and sacred circles. He is still, however, patron saint of hunting and also dogs.

Abilities: Devotee of St Hubert of Lieges *or* Initiate of St Hubert of Lieges, Farrier, Hunt, Know Animal Ways, Life of St Hubert of Lieges, Ride, Track, Train Dogs.

Virtues: Sober, Persistent, Pious.

Affinity: **Hunt** (Command Dog, Follow Trail, Heal Dog, Penetrating Horn Note, Sense Prey's Presence)

Secret: **Awaken Dog** (As the secret of St Hippolytus, but relating to a special dog.)

Rites & Representations: A young man in clerical garb, but bearing a hunting horn and with a dog at his side. His day is 3 November.

Worshippers: Hunters of men and beasts and the beaters, farriers and others who work for them.

Disadvantages: His initiates and devotees must abjure all alcohol.

ST JOSEPH THE WORKER

The Carpenter

Joseph was the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary. While widely revered for his role in the life of Jesus, his

direct worship is largely limited to two aspects. One celebrates his willingness to obey God's will without question or hesitation while this concentrates on his role as a humble, hard-working carpenter.

Abilities: Carpenter, Cheerful Endurance, Devotee of St Joseph the Worker *or* Initiate of St Joseph the Worker, Know Your Place, Life of St Joseph the Worker.

Virtues: Dutiful, Hard Working, Unassuming.

Affinity: **Worker** (Cut Wood, Ignore Distractions, Join Wood, Shape Wood, Work Like Two Men)

Secret: **Finish What's Started** (Once a project has been started that will take more than one day to complete, this secret gives a bonus equal to ¼ its rating to completing the job.)

Rites & Representations: A man in simple clothes, sometimes shown cradling the infant Christ, but for this aspect more often holding carpenter's tools. This aspect's day is 1 May.

Worshippers: Artisans and labourers.

ST LUKE THE APOSTLE

Bringer of Light

One of the earliest converts and followers of Jesus, Luke was a physician, but is celebrated now as a patron of artists because of his paintings of both Christ and his mother.

Abilities: Artist, Devotee of St Luke the Apostle *or* Initiate of St Luke the Apostle, First Aid, Good Eye, Life of St Luke the Apostle.

Virtues: Artistic, Devoted, Pious.

Affinity: **Artist** (Clean Brush, Glowing Colours, Intimidate Critic, Preserve Paint, Repair Picture, Represent True Nature)

Secret: **Holy Art** (The devotee can create pictures and murals which are magical and have long-term power; this must be negotiated with the narrator.)

Rites & Representations: A bearded man holding a painting or an artist's brush. His day is 18 October.

Worshippers: Professional artists and those of artistic pretensions or abilities.

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

The Blessed Virgin Mary

The Blessed Virgin Mary is a central element to Catholic theology, representing a wide range of virtues and attributes. For many ordinary worshippers, she is also the most approachable and comprehensible of the great Powers, and thus her *Little Office* and other prayers are widely known and said. This is perhaps the most widespread of her aspects, celebrating her fundamental



role as a mother. There are, however, many more – including St Mary of the Teutons.

Abilities: Common Sense, Devotee of Mary Mother of God or Initiate of Mary Mother of God, Household Knacks, Know What You're Thinking, Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Virtues: Approachable, Loving, Maternal, Pious.

Affinity: **Mother** (Bless Childbirth, Bless Home, Keep The Nasties Out, Kiss It Better, Outsmart Child, Sense Danger to Family)

Secret: **Mother's Love** (Gives a bonus of ¼ its rating to any attempts to comfort, heal or protect another.)

Rites & Representations: A haloed woman in long robes, sometimes cradling the infant Christ. As with other aspects of the Virgin Mary, her holiest day is the Feast of the Assumption on 15 August, and the aspect's personal day is 1 January.

Worshippers: She is extremely widely revered, and directly worshipped by many women, from every class and profession.

Connections: Followers of this aspect often maintain good relations with other aspects of Mary, occasionally including those of the Russian Orthodox Church.

MARY OF THE TEUTONS

See the entry in *THE TEUTONIC ORDENSTAAT*.

MARY, OUR LADY OF MERCY

The Blessed Virgin Mary

This aspect celebrates the Virgin's role as a protector of the weak and dispenser of divine mercy.

Abilities: Devotee of Mary Our Lady of Mercy or Initiate of Mary Our Lady of Mercy, Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Solicit Alms.

Virtues: Charitable, Loving, Merciful, Pious.

Affinity: **Mercy** (Banish Unkind Thoughts, Comfort the Fearful, Console the Despondent, Feed the Hungry, Turn Aside Blow, Warm Thoughts)

Secret: **Raise the Dead** (This is an extraordinary ability which must be used as a ritual, typically during a mass. The base resistance is 40, plus a modifier reflecting how long the target has been dead – use the duration modifier. This presupposes a largely intact body: if it is seriously damaged or only partially present, add a further +10 to +20. If successful there is also a further price to pay: hero points equal to the total resistance. These may come from the devotee or willingly sacrificed by any ritual supporters. If they do not have enough hero points as such, the devotee himself will have instead to sacrifice abilities to make up the shortfall. Points sacrificed from abilities, relationships, skills or

the like are worth as many hero points as it would have cost to acquire them if related to play so that, for example, reducing an affinity from 18 to 17 would be worth 3, and a skill from 20 to 18, 6. Any ability brought down to 12 is lost.)

Rites & Representations: A haloed woman in long robes. As well as the Feast of the Assumption (15 August), this aspect is directly celebrated on 24 September.

Worshippers: The charitable and those who have benefited from that charity.

Connections: Followers of this aspect often maintain good relations with other aspects of Mary, occasionally including those of the Russian Orthodox Church.

MARY, QUEEN OF HEAVEN

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Although rarely directed worshipped, this aspect concentrates on her role as notional 'queen of heaven' – not an actual role, so much as a vision of how the pious and merciful Christian monarch ought to be. In the bloody and dangerous times of **Mythic Russia**, while many pay her lip service, few apply her generous and peaceable ways in practice.

Abilities: Devotee of Mary Queen of Heaven or Initiate of Mary Queen of Heaven, Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, See Into Heart, Quiet Authority.

Virtues: Loving, Merciful, Pious, Wise.

Affinity: **Christian Monarch** (Banish Hatred, Disgrace Boaster, Dispel Fear, Find Fair Judgement, Make Enemies Friends, Recognise Wise Counsel, Shame Bully)

Secret: **The Ultimate Sacrifice** (Automatically succeed at any action on dying – other than anything which would prevent the devotee's death.)

Rites & Representations: A haloed woman in long robes, wearing a crown. As well as the Feast of the Assumption (15 August), this aspect is directly celebrated on 22 August.

Worshippers: Pious rulers and aristocrats; very occasionally, she is followed by optimistic commoners who wish to remind their rulers of their Christian duties.

Connections: Followers of this aspect often maintain good relations with other aspects of Mary, occasionally including those of the Russian Orthodox Church.

ST MATTHEW THE APOSTLE

Apostle of Ethiopia

Matthew was a tax collector for the Romans, converted by Jesus and become one of his closest followers. His





gospel is central to the New Testament and he played a particular role preaching among the Jews. Because of his former profession, he is now patron saint of bankers, tax collectors and book-keepers.

Abilities: Book-Keeping, Devotee of St Matthew the Apostle *or* Initiate of St Matthew the Apostle, Know Jewish Ways, Life of St Matthew the Apostle, Numerate.

Virtues: Meticulous, Nit-picking.

Affinity: **Ledgers of Credit and Debit** (Assess Spiritual Credit, Assess Value, Count Coins Instantly, Drain Wealth, Disconcert Shopkeeper, Sniff Out Irregularity, Unnerve Debtor)

Secret: **Manage Money** (Provides a bonus equal to ¼ its rating to any financial transactions which are *not* carried out for direct personal gain.)

Rites & Representations: A middle-aged man holding a book and pen or bag of money. His day is 21 September.

Worshippers: Those who count or handle money (or would like to).

ST MAURICE OF THEBES

Mauritius the Legate

See St Moris in **SAINTS OF THE RUS'**. He is patron saint of soldiers, but also one who reminds them that they may have higher loyalties than the chain of command.

Abilities: Devotee of St Maurice of Thebes *or* Initiate of St Maurice of Thebes, Life of St Maurice of Thebes, Rally the Troops, Sword & Shield Fighting, Tactics, Train Troops.

Virtues: Honourable, Resolute, Think for Yourself.

Affinity: **Fight for Right!** (Bright Blade, Drive Back the Sinful, Overcome Pagan, Pray for Unity, Shame Coward, Shield of Glory, Stand and Fight)

Secret: **Last Man Standing** (This ability may be used either for or to augment a Final Action. Alternatively, it may be used to allow the warrior to fight on, even when his AP fall below zero. He may continue to act until his AP fall below -[his rating in this ability]. If he manages as a result to bring his AP back into positive figures, he sustains no injuries, but if falls below the ability's threshold or else remains at minus AP when he wins the contest, he then collapses and suffers the appropriate consequences.)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as a soldier in Roman armour, bearing a banner and a palm, with a sword at his side. His feast day is 22 September.

Worshippers: Soldiers and those who believe in taking personal responsibility for their actions and those around them.

ST NICHOLAS OF MYRA

The Wonderworker

See **SAINTS OF THE RUS'**. This aspect reflects his patronage of pilgrims and those who do good deeds.

Abilities: Barrack Room Lawyer, Cheery Manner, Devotee of St Nicholas of Myra *or* Initiate of St Nicholas of Myra, Life of St Nicholas of Myra, Remember Good Turn.

Virtues: Active, Cheerful, Generous.

Affinity: **Goodfellow** (Always Something Nice to Say, Bless Other, Find Right Gift, Sense Innocence, Shame Miser, Stay Positive)

Secret: **Miracle** (The devotee can bring about extraordinary acts of good fortune for others. For each mastery in the Secret or part thereof, the devotee needs spend one less hero point per miraculous plot edit – see the **HERO POINTS** chapter – which may bring the total cost to zero. However, these can only be acts of kindness, and which will not work to the devotee's direct advantage. Even if it just that the devotee will simply gain the credit for being a miracle worker, then the hero point cost is raised by one and must be at least one. No individual may benefit from such miracles more than once per season.)

Rites & Representations: A bearded man in bishop's robes, holding three bags of gold. His day is 6 December.

Worshippers: Many love St Nicholas for his good deeds; some even try to emulate him.

ST NICHOLAS OF MYRA (THE REFORMER)

The Godfather

Nicholas was willing to work with thieves to reform them, and thus they are sometimes known as 'St Nicholas's Clerks' or the 'Knights of St Nicholas,' This aspect of his cult works with thieves. Its arts have also been useful, though few would publicly admit it, when Christians have faced persecution. This aspect does not have a distinct identity; it has no special symbols or churches, only a few prayers, nor its own feast day. Its worshippers are happy to seem just like the mainstream cult's. They do not want to draw attention to themselves either because they are ashamed of their criminal past... or for some other reason.

Abilities: Devotee of St Nicholas the Redeemer *or* Initiate of St Nicholas the Redeemer, Know [City *or* Region] Underworld, Life of St Nicholas of Myra, Spot Criminal.

Virtues: Cheerful, Optimistic, Unjudgemental.

Affinity: **Escape** (Find Hideout, He Went Thattaway, Hide in Unexpected Place, Outrun Pursuit, Slip Bonds, There's Nobody Here)





Worshippers: Thieves past or present and those who would reform them.

Disadvantages: If for any reason the worshipper's true association with this aspect becomes known, that could cause social stigma at best, serious investigation at worst.

ST PETER THE APOSTLE

Christ's Rock

Simon was a simple fisherman, yet he became one of Christ's disciples, named Peter ('Rock') by Jesus, for he would be the foundation on which the Christian Church would be built. He became the first pope, even while the faith was an underground sect, persecuted by the Romans. A miracle-worker and a humble man, he was crucified upside-down, because he did not believe himself worthy of dying the same way as Jesus.

Abilities: Devotee of St Peter the Apostle *or* Initiate of St Peter the Apostle, Know Catholic Politics, Life of St Peter the Apostle, Preach, Read Latin, Swain Clergyman.

Virtues: Determined, Humble.

Affinity: **Holy Authority** (Browbeat Lesser Clergyman, Come All Ye Faithful, Impress Senior Clergyman, Invoke Religious Authority, Know Way to Nearest Church, Know Direction of Rome, Know Distance to Rome, Make Bells Peal, Waft of Incense)

Secret: **Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven** (The devotee may use this as an active ability to travel across the veils between otherworlds, or else to provide a bonus equal to half its rating to any other ability used for this purpose. It can also be used to augment any ability normally while within a Catholic part of the Representational, Boundary or Transcendent Worlds.)

Rites & Representations: A balding man in papal robes, clutching one or two great keys. The feast of Peter and Paul is 29 June, the feast of the Chair of Peter – celebrating the papacy – is 22 February.

Worshippers: While widely respected, St Peter's initiates and devotees tend to be ordained clergy, especially those with political ambitions.

ST SEBASTIAN

The Archer

There is often a strange perversity of martyrdom: the means of a saint's end can end up defining him. Sebastian was a Roman soldier, killed for consorting with and helping Christian prisoners. He was tied to a tree, pincushioned with arrows and left for dead. He was healed miraculously, though, and returned to preach to the emperor, who ungratefully had him beaten to death. However, Sebastian's ability to survive being filled with arrows has led to his becoming a patron of archers.

Abilities: Archer, Bowyer, Devotee of St Sebastian *or* Initiate of St Sebastian, Fletcher, Life of St Sebastian, Tough.

Virtues: Ethical, Resolute.

Affinity: **Archer** (Mend Bow, One More Arrow, Piercing Arrow, Ricochet Shot, See Through My Arrow, Shoot As Far As I Can See)

Secret: **Resist Arrows** (This can be used as an active ability to resist arrows or to augment others to that end. In addition, when losing a contest which would see the devotee hurt by arrows, each full mastery in this secret reduces the level of defeat by one. If brought below Marginal defeat, the hero is unhurt.)

Rites & Representations: A young man tied to a tree, wearing only a breech-clout and perforated by arrows. His day is 20 January.

Worshippers: Archers, bowyers and fletchers (and perhaps those with a rather black sense of theological irony).

ST STEPHEN OF HUNGARY

Stephen the Great

Born a pagan, Stephen was baptised with his father and went on to unify the Magyars of Hungary under his Christian rule. He was crowned king on Christmas Day 1001, with the blessing of Pope Sylvester II. He is thus not only the patron saint of Hungary but also an exemplar of the Christian ruler.

Abilities: Devotee of St Stephen of Hungary *or* Initiate of St Stephen of Hungary, Know Hungarian History, Life of St Stephen of Hungary, Politics, Speak Magyar.

Virtues: Builder, Think of the Future.

Affinity: **Nation-Builder** (Crown of Glory, Find Allies, Seal Oath, Sanctify Regalia Ritual, Sense Treachery)

Rites & Representations: A young man in royal regalia, holding high a sceptre. His day is 16 August, a feast day throughout Hungary.

Worshippers: Hungarians revere him, and he has a wider constituency among rulers and conciliators.

ST THOMAS AQUINAS

Doctor Angelicus

Of wealthy Italian birth, Thomas secretly joined the Benedictine Order. His family had him kidnapped and imprisoned to prevent him from following a religious vocation, but his faith was strong. He studied then taught at the many universities. He was a passionate scholar, a prolific writer and revered for creating a scholarly basis of Church writings, not least in his magisterial, if unfinished *Summa Theologica*. Nonetheless, shortly before his death he experienced a





LOCAL SAINTS

There are also numerous minor saints and unusual aspects of saints whose worship is essentially limited to a small fraternity, profession or, more usually, locality. The following template and sample is provided so that narrators and players can feel free to create their own to fit the needs of the story.

Name

Local name

Entry Requirements: Usually Any.

Abilities: Devotee of St [Name] or Initiate of St [Name], Know [City or Region] Geography, Know [City of Region] History, Life of St [Name], [one or two specific abilities relating to the saint's life and character]

Virtues: Proud of [City or Region], [one or two relating to the saint's character].

Affinity: **One relating to the city or the saint** (2-3 relatively narrowly-defined feats)

Secret: Local saints and local aspects of greater saints will rarely have a Secret.

Rites & Representations: Varies, although will usually incorporate the local symbol.

Worshippers: Locals.

EXAMPLE: ST CHAD OF MERCIA

Twice-Elected

Chad was a seventh-century monk who was appointed to the bishopric of York by royal rather than religious decree. When St Wilfrid, the rightful successor, returned from the continent, Chad's consecration was declared invalid. He took the allegations of an improper election in his stride, accepting it with an eager humility which demonstrated his own saintliness, and he was subsequently made bishop of Mercia. He is now the patron saint of the small but growing English town of Birmingham, already an industrious centre of weaving and cloth-making. A quirk of his was to pray through thunderstorms, because, as he put it, "God thunders forth from heaven to rouse people to fear the Lord, to call them to remember the future judgment."

Entry Requirements: Any.

Abilities: Devotee of St Chad of Mercia or Initiate of St Chad of Mercia, Endure Storm, Know English Midlands Geography, Know English Midlands History, Life of St Chad of Mercia.

Virtues: Humble, Obedient, Proud of Birmingham.

Affinity: **God's Thunderstorm** (Call Rain from Clouds, Refreshed by the Rain, Thunderclap)

Rites & Representations: A bishop, holding a cathedral and a vine branch. His day is 7 March.

Worshippers: Those from Birmingham and other cities associated with him, such as York and Litchfield.

humbling divine vision which made him understand that all his writings could still not capture the true majesty of the Kingdom of God.

Entry Requirements: Must already be Literate.

Abilities: Devotee of St Thomas Aquinas or Initiate of St Thomas Aquinas, Good Memory, Life of St Thomas Aquinas, Read and Write Latin, Speak Latin.

Virtues: Humble, Inquiring Mind, Scholarly.

Affinity: **Scholar** (Erase Unholy Words, Find the Right Document, Immovable Bookmark, Know Way Round Library, Preserve Holy Words, Read Between the Lines, Read Quickly and Silently, Save Book)

Secret: **Beyond Words** (The hero can open the eyes of others to inner truths and the triviality of the Mortal World's concerns before the love of God. Through the course of a sermon, conversation or even written correspondence, he targets one of his interlocutor's Virtues, Relationships or mental Flaws. If he can overcome its rating with the secret's, then he may be able to reduce or even eliminate it, and replace

it with the Virtue *Love God*. On a Tie or Marginal Success or Defeat, there is no effect. On a Minor Success, the target ability is reduced by 10 and *Love God* gained at 10 or increased by 5, if already possessed. The numbers for Major and Complete successes are 15/10 and 20/15, respectively. No one individual may be affected more than once per year. If the target is a pagan, then this will create serious internal conflicts; either way, the target may resent this enforced conversion.)

Rites & Representations: A balding, slightly overweight man in monk's habit, holding book and quill pen. His day is 28 January.

Worshippers: Scholars, literate priests.

ST WYNFRITH

Apostle of Germany

Wynfrith – who later took the name Boniface – was an English monk who campaigned actively against paganism in Germany, where he topped and destroyed pagan idols. In Saxony, for example, the local tribe





worshipped a pagan god in the form of a great oak. Wynfrith simply took off his shirt, hefted an axe and felled the tree, standing on the trunk to declaim “how stands your mighty god? My God is stronger than he.” He is thus a forthright and muscular evangelist among the pagan tribes of Germany, and also a patron of brewers, for he was no stranger to beer.

This cult is also known as St Boniface’s, but amongst the Germans, it is still more commonly known by this name.

Abilities: Axe Fighting, Brew Beer, Devotee of St Wynfrith or Initiate of St Wynfrith, Drink Beer, Fell Tree, Know Germany, Life of St Wynfrith, Muscular, Speak German.

Virtues: Bluff, Direct, Likes a Drink.

Affinity: **Muscular Christianity** (Keep Drinking, Punch Pagan Out, Shatter Pagan Idol, Stronger Than You, Work Till Sundown)

Secret: **God Bless Germany!** (Provides a bonus equal to ¼ its rating to all magics from this Power while on German soil.)

Rites & Representations: A burly man in simple clothes, a great axe over his shoulder. His day is 5 June.

Worshippers: Germans, brewers, evangelists and people for whom the direct route is always the best – especially after some beer.

PLAYING FOREIGNERS

There is no standard series of guidelines for Europeans, as this is too broad a category, and beyond those powers covered elsewhere, Europe as a whole does not play a particular role within the affairs of the Rus’.

If creating a European narrator hero, remember that Europeans are relatively rare in Russia, but more to the point that Russia is not a natural destination for them. There has generally to be some good reason for them to be there.

- ❑ **What kind of European?** From which of the various nations do you hail? How far do you follow and how far challenge the national stereotypes?
- ❑ **Why Are You Here?** What brings you to this cold and miserable land? In many cases, this will be some particular professional skill or vocation (such as missionary work), but it could also be a personal interest or expediency.
- ❑ **No, Really: Why Are You Here?** Many who come do so for multiple reasons, both overt and covert.
- ❑ **Are you here for long?** Does the hero plan to create a new life here, or is he just here for a specific purpose. Indeed, European heroes are often well suited to short-term games or for players dropping in to play for one or a few sessions, as not only may they have some particular, achievable objective, but players unfamiliar to the world of **Mythic Russia** will not be penalised for not knowing about the details of the setting and can thus learn about it alongside their hero.
- ❑ **What do you think of Russians?** For even educated Europeans, Russia is pretty much the edge of the known world – and probably beyond the boundaries of civilisation. Does your character recoil in horror at the Russians’ bizarre and uncouth ways, hide a smile at their barbaric ways, find them charmingly rustic, or treat them as equals who just happen to have different customs and values? In particular, is the Russian Orthodox Church a muddle-headed schism that imperils the souls of those misguided Russians who worship it, but is ultimately going to be reunited with the true Mother Church – or is it, as the Ordenstaat insists, a dangerous and quite possibly diabolical parody of true Christianity?





20. TSARGRAD

CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE GREEKS

“Not since the world was made was there ever seen or won so great a treasure, or so noble or so rich, nor in the time of Alexander, nor in the time of Charlemagne, nor before, nor after, nor do I think myself that in the forty richest cities of the world had there been so much wealth as was found in Constantinople. For the Greeks say that two-thirds of the wealth of this world is in Constantinople and the other third scattered throughout the world.”

– French crusader Robert of Clari, who witnessed the pillage of the city in 1204.

Constantinople, the latest incarnation of the eastern Roman capital Byzantium, is in decline – but it is still the most glorious and powerful city known to Russians, at once an object of inspiration and envy. ‘Tsargrad’, they call it: ‘Emperor-City.’

Byzantium once ruled half the Roman Empire, the dominant force across the region. The splendour of its churches was enough to induce the Rus’ to convert to Christianity. Now it is just one state amongst many, pressed from every side. Nonetheless, it is proud, conscious of its great past, deeply conservative.



Its emperor now rules only a sliver of land, and that often by sufferance of his underlings. The Turks press closer every day. Its navy is all but gone, its army full of mercenaries and barbarians. Its civil service is corrupt and inefficient. Within the city walls stretch fields where once stood houses and palaces. For all that, though, this is a grand city-state, whose people regard it not only as the only truly imperial city and home of the only genuine form of Christianity – the Greek orthodox faith – but also uniquely blessed by the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos (Mother of God). The Greeks may face an uncertain future, but they will not go quietly or humbly.

LAND AND PEOPLES

The city of Byzantium was founded in the seventh century BC, then all but destroyed after it unwisely backed the losing power in a Roman civil war. In 300, the Emperor Constantius began the reconstruction of the city to be his new capital. First called New Rome, it was soon renamed Constantinople in his honour. In 395, the Empire split into Eastern and Western portions, and as Italy was battered by successive waves of barbarian invaders and internal divisions, the Byzantine Empire of the East flourished. In the sixth century, the Emperor Justinian conquered much of the old lands of Rome, and was what the Greeks now call a *Kurios Poli*, or ‘Master of the City’, able to channel, focus and direct the concentrated magical potential of

860: The Slavs attack Tsargrad

Rus’ Prince Ruslan learned from his spies that the emperor’s armies were engaged fighting Arabs in Asia Minor, while his fleets chased pirates in the Aegean and Mediterranean. Judging this to be a perfect opportunity to loot Tsargrad of its treasures, he gathered a host of 8,000 warriors on 200 boats to storm the city. The Greeks were taken unawares and the Rus’ began to besiege the city by land and raid the surrounding coastline. However, the emperor hurried back to the city and broke the siege by force of magic. The relic of the robe of the Virgin Mary was taken from its jewelled casket in the church at Blachernae and paraded around the walls, before being dipped symbolically in the sea. Instantly, a mighty wind began to blow; the ships of the Rus’ were battered and broken, forcing them to withdraw.

this great metropolis, using it as an extension of his will. Thus, he could blot an army from the face of the earth with one sweep of his hand, and cause a broken city wall to reform itself with a word. These were glory days, but even while the Byzantine Empire seemed at the peak of its power, a new threat was arising: Islam.

Five years after Justinian’s death, Mohammed was born in Mecca. By the seventh century, Islam had spread across the Middle East, Persia and Egypt under new and dynamic dynasties. Islam and Byzantium would compete for regional dominance for centuries, but it was the ambitious and effective



Ottoman dynasty of the eleventh-century Great Seljuk Turkish Empire which would eventually break the dominance of the Byzantines.

Even so, they might have lasted longer had the city not fallen in 1204, not to Moslems but fellow Christians. Crusaders had turned to the premier maritime power of the age, the Venetian Republic, for transport of their armies to the Holy Land. When the fleet was ready, the crusaders found they lacked the money to pay, so the Venetian doge (in effect, president) Enrico Dandolo offered them a deal: transport in return for their help recapturing the Dalmatian port city of Zara, seized by Hungary. This they did, and many became rich from the plunder of the Christian city. Then a new temptation arose. Byzantine emperor Isaac had been ousted, blinded and imprisoned by his brother Alexius. Isaac's son – also called Alexius – escaped and began seeking allies to avenge his father. He offered the crusaders wealth and warriors for their struggle in the Holy Land, if they first helped him restore his father to the throne. Dandolo, still embittered after the Byzantines had had him blinded when he was an emissary to the city, and eager to see a rival for supremacy in the Mediterranean broken, gave Alexius his support, and although many crusaders refused, a sizeable combined force of Venetians and crusaders sailed for Constantinople in 1203.

The Fall of Constantinople

Alexius's claims that the people of Constantinople would rise to topple the usurper proved unfounded – if nothing else, because of their hostility to the 'Latins' of the West. So the decision was made to enthrone him by force. In 1204 the walls of Constantinople were breached for the first time in history. After fierce fighting, Isaac was restored, only for him to pass the crown Alexius Angelus. However, when Alexius tried to default on some of his ruinously generous promises, the crusaders removed him. He foolishly tried to turn the fearsome magic potential of the city against them, despite the fact that the contested nature of his coronation meant that he had only partially mastered it. Not only did he fail, but the crusaders were determined to loot Constantinople afterwards. They sought plunder but also – mistakenly – assumed that because so much of the magic of the city manifested itself through the statues, icons and other treasures it had accumulated over the centuries, their theft would also rob Constantinople's powers.

The crusaders made one of their number ruler in Alexius's place, but the grip of the Western 'Franks' on Constantinople was relatively tenuous. For decades they would fight wars and skirmishes against Greeks, Wallachians, Bulgarians and other recalcitrant former subjects of the Empire, not least three Byzantine splinter states: the Empire of Trebizond, the Empire of Nicaea and the Despotate of Epiros.



Alexius tries – and fails – to overawe Dandolo, who stands in glory on the prow of his war-galley *San Marco*, sealing the feckless pretender's doom.

Empire Reborn... yet also Dying

In 1261, an army loyal to Nicaean co-emperor Michael Palaeologus seized Constantinople while Venetian forces were away on campaign. Michael was crowned *Basileus*, or Byzantine Emperor, becoming Michael VIII Palaeologus. Michael set about rebuilding the city after a half-century of incompetence and neglect, but Dandolo's aim had been accomplished. The Greek Church continued to flourish, even in comparison with the growing power of Rome, but Byzantium was no longer a serious threat to Venice's political and economic dominance of the Mediterranean.

It is still enduring a long and painful decline, ravaged by the Black Death in the middle of the fourteenth century and losing territories to foreign invaders and local risings. The Moslem Ottoman Empire is an increasingly serious threat. In 1373 Emperor John V Palaeologus was forced to pay them homage. His son, Andronikos, rebelled against him and in 1376 seized Constantinople with Ottoman and Genoese help. In 1379, John escaped with Venetian aid and cut a deal with the Ottomans; they restored him to the throne so long as he pardoned Andronikos and reinstated him as heir. Peace has returned to Constantinople, but at what price? The

Byzantine Empire has become a vassal of the Ottomans and an arena for the rivalry between Genoa and Venice. Furthermore, the power of the city has been diluted yet further.

John rules in Constantinople, to be sure, but Andronikos and his son and co-emperor rule the north shore of the Marmara, under Turkish suzerainty. John's younger son Manuel II is the local ruler of one of the Empire's last remaining outposts in Thessalonika in southern Greece. He shows spirit, but it is no secret that the Turks mean soon to seize this region. John's fourth son, Theodore I, has been installed as Despot of the Morea, on the Peloponnesus peninsula, westernmost of Byzantium's remaining territories. He has also had to become an Ottoman vassal, and his undoubted energies seem directed towards making the Morea a secure and autonomous region, as though he has accepted the inevitability of Constantinople's fall.

THE LAND

Woe for Constantinople; the city may still be a glory, but its empire is but a tawdry shadow of its past glories. The days when it ruled Greece and much of the Balkans are distant memories and now Byzantine Empire is now virtually a city state, its lands stretching only a little way beyond its walls. It controls the immediate vicinity of the city and a short stretch of Black Sea coastline, as well as two fragments of its old empire: Thessalonika and Mistra in eastern and southern Greece, respectively.

The coastline territories are lands of fig and olive groves and fields of wheat and barley, of long, warm summers and cold, but short winters. Rich lands: no wonder they have been coveted over the years and centuries by enemies from Venetians to Hungarians, and now the Ottoman Turks.

Thus, the 'Greeks' of Byzantium are actually a varied miscellany of peoples. While the Greeks themselves are indeed the dominant ethnic and political body in the city and the empire, the multiethnic composition of the empire includes the natives of various lands they have controlled in their years, remnants of invading peoples and also the mercenaries, slaves and adventurers who have flocked to Constantinople, some drawn by the promise of wealth, others bought and sold themselves. Mongols, Armenians, Danes, Russians, Spaniards, Albanians, Turks, Jews, Africans and even a very rare traveller from distant India may be found at this crossroads of the world.

THE CITY

Constantinople itself is the heart of the empire, the mightiest city known in the times of **Mythic Russia**. Built on a triangular promontory controlling the Bosphorus Straits,

it is enclosed by walls which are a thousand years old, yet still unrivalled as defences. Within these triumphs of Imperial Roman architecture is a still-thriving community of some 100,000 people as well as some of the largest and most striking buildings of the age, not least the mighty cathedral of Hagia Sophia.

Yet this is a city in decline; the scars left by the Latin occupation are still visible, from the repairs made to the walls to the empty spaces where great treasures once stood, and the empire no longer has the resources to maintain every buildings as once it could. Its population is also dwindling slowly, so there are empty, disused and crumbling buildings. Once, after all, the city's population numbered a million souls. But even in its current, slightly shabby and seedy state, Constantinople is still extraordinary and impressive.

Whether approached on land or by sea, the first sight greeting the traveller are the city's high, banded walls: the single sea walls which rim the promontory's coastline or the imposing **Theodosian Walls** guarding the landwards side of the promontory: a triple-walled defensive line built of brick and stone, some 20m (60') high and studded with fortified gates and towers. Although only consecrated to the Emperor Theodosius rather than directly built by him, generations of prayers and the incorporation of relics from the bodies of Christian Roman emperors into the walls mean that they are now invested with powerful magical protection.

At its southern end is the **Golden Gate**, once a symbol of the city's glory, now of its woes. The gilt statues of elephants which once adorned its crest were stolen by the crusaders, the gold melted down for coin. Now it



looks more like a building site than entry to a great city. Several times, it has been walled up for defensive reasons, then reopened for political ones. At present, it looks likely to be sealed again, such that travellers will instead have to use the nearby Gate of Christ, also known as the First Military Gate. Just beyond the gate is the walled Psamathia district, dominated by the **Studion**, the largest monastery of the city, consecrated to St John the Baptist.

Within the walls, fields, parks and simple empty space stretch between the pockets of buildings, virtual villages within the 'city.' Eastwards from the Golden Gate stretches the **Mesē**, the city's main street, which leads towards the tip of the promontory, the concentration of buildings becomes greater, until – through another stockade – the traveller enters the **Venetian Quarter**. This is the true heart of the city, with the ancient Great Palace of the emperors, a complex of churches and manses, now an administrative centre, stretching beyond the oval grounds of the **Hippodrome**, where once the competing factions of the Greens and the Blues would cheer on their teams and retire to an agreeable riot after the race.

To the south are harbours on the Sea of Marmara (also known as the Propontis), to the north, harbours on the Golden Horn, leading to the Black Sea. Both are busy throughout the day, as ships bring food to fill the swollen granaries and store-houses which keep the city alive, as well as trade goods or every kind. In between is

a thriving and vibrant city, and here, amidst priests from Britain, traders from Africa, priests from Greece, sailors from Italy, craftsmen from Turkey, mercenaries from Albania, aristocrats from their palaces and beggars from the gutters, it is easy to forget for a moment that Constantinople is in decline and under threat.

Even given the height of the walls, the tall dome of the **Hagia Sofia** ('Holy Wisdom') cathedral is a clear landmark, next to the Great Palace. This is the spiritual heart of Constantinople – a city with more than a hundred churches – and the seat of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, presently Neilus Kerameus. The church itself has some 600 staff, including 80 priests, some 250 deacons and deaconesses, almost 200 readers and chanters and 75 doorkeepers and guards.

Looping back along the northern coast of the promontory along the road that parallels the great **Aqueduct of Valens** that brings fresh water into the heart of the city, the traveller may catch sight of the towers and walls of **Galata** on the other side of the Golden Horn. This is a Latin, Catholic colony under Greek rule but dominated by Italians – sometimes the Venetians, but at the moment the Genoese. In time of war, a huge chain, into whose links have been cast hairs of the saints, can be stretched from a tower in the Galata to a tower along the sea wall of the city proper, to deny the Golden Horn to enemy ships. Only once has this chain been broken, in 1204, and then because the

Venetians came prepared with the unyielding jaws of the Greek Orthodox saint Charalambos and used them to snip through its links, turning their defenders' own magics against them, as none but devious and ungodly Italians would.

Eventually, the traveller nears the northern end of the walls separating Constantinople from the mainland and here, in the **Blachernae** district, are the more recent palaces the city's emperors built for themselves, including the Palace of the Porphyrogenitus, seat of John V Palaeologus. Here is also the **Church of Panagia**, holiest of shrines to the Theotokos, in which is kept Constantinople's most treasured relics: the robe and shroud of the Virgin herself. Beyond the walls, though, is a great necropolis, burial grounds said to be so thickly haunted that the very air ripples with ghostly energies on a moonless night.



LIFE AND CUSTOM

On one level, life in Constantinople is like life in any other major city, but the shrinkage of the population means that the city is also a village, in that there are farms within the walls. Or perhaps many villages – increasingly people cluster in particular districts, meaning that their real community is much smaller than the whole population of the city. Furthermore, while Constantinople still depends largely on food brought in from outside, whether a hunter selling a brace of rabbits or a fat-bottomed merchant ship unloading grain by the ton, farming and foraging takes place inside the walls, as well as scavenging. Many newer buildings, after all, were constructed from bricks and stone taken from crumbling and unoccupied ruins, and even an ancient rubbish pit might throw up unexpected goods which could fetch a few copper coins in the marketplaces. Broadly speaking, the closer to the centre, the more urbanised and prosperous the way of life.

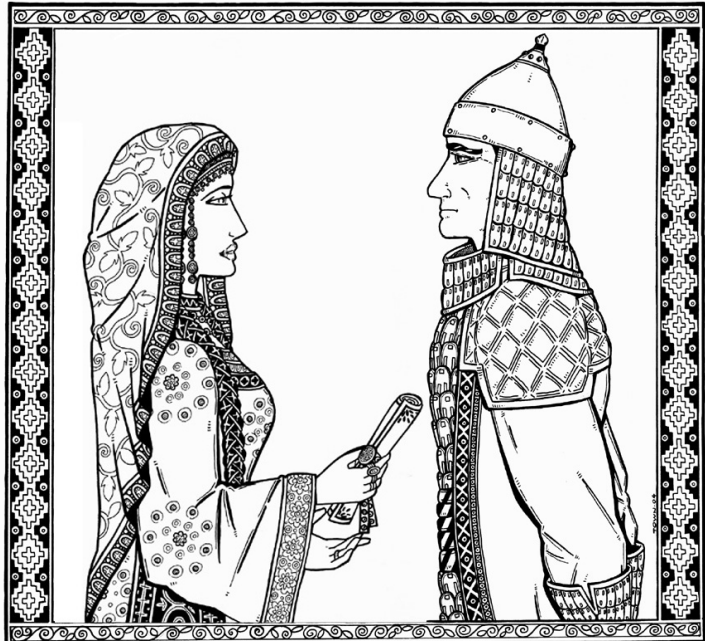
AUTHORITY AND POWER

This is still a very hierarchical society. The aristocrats may be impoverished, corrupt shadows of their ancestors, perhaps the final generation before the final Turkish onslaught, but they are fiercely protective of their rank and privilege. Likewise, even the ordinary cityfolk of Constantinople, while they may actually spend their lives tilling fields inside the walls, regard themselves as superior to the peasant in the countryside. And the peasant? He just shrugs and charges an extra *tetarteron* (copper coin) for each basket of food he sells the cityfolk for each casual insult.

The Rulers...

The *Basileus* is in theory an absolute monarch, who rules by divine right as the anointed representative of God on earth. In practice, he is often also deeply in debt to many of his own officials, magnates and noble families and unless especially powerful of will must tread carefully around them. His authority over the outlying regions, which have their own emperors under him, is also often weak.

Likewise, the civil service meant to administer the emperor's realms and enact his wishes is hardly the efficient machinery of government for which Constantinople was once famed. Instead, it has become staggeringly corrupt and inefficient, while at the same time ever more ritualistic and complex. Appointment and promotion depend on favouritism and kick-backs, while there is little that cannot be arranged with the right contacts and suitable bribes. Theophilus Apokaukos, a rich and notoriously self-indulgent merchant, even bought himself the honorific title of 'Master of the Golden Horn' for a chest-full of silver, just



to give him an excuse to wear an obscene costume (with of course, a huge gilt phallus – rich and self-indulgent, yes; subtle, most definitely not) at his brother's birthday feast.

Outside the offices in Constantinople, the Byzantine state has assumed a structure similar in many ways to the feudalism of Western Europe. Land is the key source of wealth, power and position, distributed by the emperors amongst their followers and officials for past favours and future service. These holdings are called *pronoia*, and over time most became hereditary, with the holder gaining the right to collect taxes from the peasants living on his land. Some of these landlords are 'soldiers,' with small *pronoia* containing perhaps just a few peasant families. Such a man is also a farmer, albeit a little more prosperous than his tenants, with a proper house. However, the annual revenue of perhaps fifty gold coins (*hyperpyra*) largely help keep his family and his weapons and maybe retainers ready for when they were called up by the empire. At the other end of the scale are the great magnates, including the emperor's own family, and the Orthodox Church, which is the largest landlord of them all.

Well-to-do Greeks who can afford it eat delicacies from across the known world, although often they must make do with the same simple meat and fish dishes that grace the tables of their more humble neighbours. They also continue to wear clothes in a style centuries old, as if to turn back the clock to more secure time. Some even affect togas, although this is very rare, but they do survive in the flowing over-ropes sometimes worn at official events. More often, men wear long robes or a

tunic over trousers, with a cloak over that and a skull cap or headdress. Women wear several layers of dresses and turban-style or other headdresses. The style is ornate, richly embroidered and as sumptuous as your pocket or line of credit can afford.

...And the Ruled

The peasant, known as a *paroikos*, is legally bound to his landlord, who not only can tax him but also take a proportion of his crop and demand labour service. He is also tied to the landlord's *pronoia* and officially needs the landlord's permission to leave, move house or marry. That said, the peasant is no slave and a wise landlord knows that he has to keep his peasants happy, or else face resistance. This could simply be their wilful refusal to work at anything more than the slowest pace when on his fields, through to their hiding crops (to reduce their tax), fleeing to another region where there may be a shortage of workers and thus the landlord will turn a blind eye to newcomers, all the way to violent resistance. In the final analysis, after all, the landlord and his family and retainers are likely to be few, and the peasants many. Once, such resistance would have led to punitive suppression by troops within a day or a week or a month, but these days, unless the landlord was well-connected, the peasants have little to fear from a state

without the troops or the will to do much.

Indeed, while most *pronoia* are tied to their land, there are also the 'free peasants', the *eleutheroi*, who have fled or been exiled, whose landlords have freed them or who have otherwise slipped through a loophole. They may set up a homestead in disputed or unowned land, or whose landlord has died and not been replaced.

While peasants work hard, as peasants everywhere must, if anything life is getting easier for them. It certainly seems sweet by the standards of their Rus' counterparts. The landlords are less powerful, while Constantinople's population is shrinking, it still offers a regular and rich market for food and other staples. A typical village of several dozen households will be wealthy enough perhaps to have a small church, and a mix of fields, olive groves and pastures for their sheep and goats. Their diet is simple but healthy, with a mix of meat and fish supplemented by fruit and vegetables and often eaten in or with the flatbread known as pitta.

Women in Byzantium

In the family, as in all other aspects of Greek society, men are assumed to be dominant. When a woman marries, she takes her husband's surname, moves to his house (or his father's) and her property, legal



EGERIA EIRENIKOS

If titles, noble ancestors and pretensions were silver, Egeria Eirenikos would be one of the richest woman in all Constantinople – indeed, she could almost even afford the kind of lifestyle she believes she deserves. Sadly, though, a proud pedigree counts for little when half the petty traders in the market are the descendants of dukes, so she has had to resort to the demeaning and unfair extreme of actually having to earn her keep. Fortunately, she is very, very good at what she does. She is an emissary, a mediator, a broker of deals. Whether this means arranging a good marriage for your daughter or ending a war, securing the services of Rus' mercenaries or ensuring that your wife's lover leaves for some distant land with his mouth tightly closed, Egeria is the woman to turn to if it really matters that the job gets done. Often, she acts as an agent of the government, but just as often (or even at the same time) she is working to private commission. She is haughty, terribly conscious of her status, and will use every opportunity to save or earn even just a single *tetarteron*, which will end up spent on robes, entertaining or other attempts to maintain the appearance of a Greek magnate. At the same time, though, she is fluent in a dozen languages, a devastatingly acute political analyst and able to cut through to the very heart of a problem and identify the participants' real interests – and price. Even while complaining of the cost, of the damage to her silk robes or the impossibility of finding dried figs and some sweet Cretan wine to wash them down, she will not hesitate to set out in the Russian winter, to pass between warring armies or to berate some Mongol khan who dares block her way. A formidable woman indeed.

Greek Noblewoman 20M, Grand Pretensions 20M, Deal Maker 1M3, Contacts Everywhere 10M2, Initiate of Theotokos Hodegetria 15M.



obligations and all other rights and duties transfer to him. However, the practice is often very different, especially within the *élite*. The empire has had empresses, and there are powerful women within the city, including the 'Circle of Mary Hodegetria.' This secretive and informal group named for the aspect of the Theotokos who 'shows the way' is rumoured to be an influential cabal with its own secret designs on Constantinople's future. Even so, for every confident and forceful woman ignoring or subverting customs, there are a dozen wives forced to limit her world to entertaining and child-rearing and daughters kept in pampered but irrelevant minority until it is time to marry them off for dynastic reasons.

Further down the social order, the formal and practical opportunities for women narrow. Their marriages must be approved by their fathers, and outside the nunnery, opportunities for any kind of formal learning are limited. Only within the small but cosmopolitan merchant class, in which Greek blood is freely mixed with that of entrepreneurs from across Europe and beyond, including Levantines, Britons and Africans, is there a greater role for women, who may become shopkeepers or the like in their own right or book-keepers and clerks for their menfolk.

A CITY BESIEGED

The armies of Constantinople are a varied mix of Greek levies and *pronoia*-holders and mercenaries drawn from present and former imperial territories and beyond. Indeed, in many ways the emperors prefer foreign mercenaries, regarding them as more trustworthy than Greek forces which might have political allegiances to competing factions. That, plus the cost of maintaining large standing armies, means that Constantinople's permanent forces are relatively small, albeit generally of good quality and working to exacting standards and regulations. The most famous of the mercenary forces are the Varangian Guard, but Constantinople is not only always looking for reliable and effective units and men

FAITH AND MAGIC

The Greek Orthodox Church is a Christian faith which regards itself as the direct descendant of the church founded by Christ.

For nearly a thousand years, there was a single Christian faith, with the Roman Pope considered one of the five hierarchs, or leaders of the faith. The Greek Orthodox Church split from its Latin, Western counterpart in the Great Schism of 1054, to a large extent over the Pope's claims of authority over the eastern church, too. As far as the Greeks are concerned, the Latin Church is recognisably Christian, but in many ways an unruly and arrogant younger child that will some day return to the fold. However, the Latins do use different rites and even

The Varangian Guard

Originally recruited from Scandinavian raiders and warrior-traders who made their way to Constantinople through Russia, this is an elite force at the emperor's personal disposal: whether as palace guards, garrison troops or thugs and enforcers. Although they now include recruits also from England, Russia and elsewhere, the core of the force is still made up of Northmen, and they bear their characteristic axes, long coats of mail and conical helmets.

but also a marketplace for recruiters looking to raise troops for other princes, other wars.

The Greeks also maintain a relatively high level of technology, not to Western European standards, but often impressive to less developed peoples such as the Rus'. Their ships mount dragon-carved projectors which can spew out the napalm-like mix known as Greek Fire, which can also be hurled in barrels by catapults or even in clay vessels like hand grenades. They have also begun to supplement their stone-throwing siege engines and huge crossbows with early cannon. Beyond this – especially when defending their lands and their city – the Greeks can rely on spectacular displays of magic, such as the animating gargoyles around the Blachernae Gate, which throw rocks which can shatter a horseman and his mount or hurl streams of blistering insults which can send a company of hardened mercenaries running for home.

The concentration of relics also helps inflame and mobilise the city's inhabitants when they are under attack. Numerous would-be conquerors have sometimes been surprised by the effectiveness of the city's militias, and a discipline verging on the fanatical, not realising that just as the Greek Orthodox faith stresses respect for divinely-ordained hierarchy and authority and thus funnels magical energy up towards the emperor, so too it allows the *Kurios Poli* to forge its people into a weapon for the defence of the city.

a different language, so the gulf is in practice quite wide between them.

By contrast, the Russian Orthodox Faith is much closer to the Greek Faith, from which it derived directly. When St Vladimir of Kiev brought Christianity to his city in 988, he was explicitly bringing the Greek form, and while the Russian Orthodox Church is functionally separate, has its own perspective on its saints and rites and uses Russian as its language, nonetheless it is still formally subordinated to the Patriarch of Constantinople. He appoints the Metropolitan of Moscow, in theory, although in practice this power is limited to rubber-stamping the choice of the Russian bishops, as it is clear that if the Greeks try to assert their





authority, the Russians will simply repudiate them. As in so many other things, the Greeks would rather cling to the pretence of power as long as possible rather than face the rude facts of their declining authority.

THE GREEK CHURCH

While the Latin Church a hierarchy with one dominant leader – the Pope – the Greek church rejects this. The Patriarch of Constantinople is ‘First Among Equals’, but he just chairs meetings with the other three patriarchs (of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem). However, within Constantinople itself, his religious authority is unchallenged. Beneath the patriarchs are bishops (*episkopoi*), responsible for a region or town, priests (*presbiterioi*), responsible for a church and deacons (*diakonoi*), who may run small churches, or be assistants to priests or bishops. There are many specific ‘ranks’ within these broad categories: the Greek Church may be democratic at the top, but is complex and competitive below. A bishop has absolute spiritual authority over his see, but only so long as he upholds the teachings of the church; indeed, his priests and local worshippers have a moral duty to ignore, reject and even topple a bishop who appears to stray from those teachings. ‘Mutinies’ are thus not unusual, and the internal politics of the church can be, well, byzantine!

Only men may be ordained into these ranks; priests and deacons may be married, if they wed before their ordination, but bishops may not, as they are chosen from the ranks of monks, who must be celibate. Women can generally only become nuns, although in the early years of the church there were also deaconesses, a practice which has largely died out by now.

Monasteries and nunneries are powerful centres of religious, political, moral and often economic power. They are also places of learning, often with extensive libraries and also scriptoria where monks and nuns copy out manuscripts to spread their messages across the world. While some join the monastic life to escape from the outside world, this is by no means the norm. Indeed, given that the bishops and patriarchs must have been monks, this is also the career choice for many of the more ambitious members of the Greek faith. There is

also much competition between monasteries and nunneries, for authority and also to win patrons and the donations they bring. Thus, most will do everything they can to emphasise their own unique features, whether these be unusual icons, saintly relics, famous current and former members or even architectural grandeur or reputed miraculous qualities. It is even not unknown for monks or nuns to spread rumours about their rivals or otherwise engage in dirty tricks in order to protect and glorify their own institution.

THE OTHER WORLD

The Greek Orthodox Ideal World is a mournful place; like most others, it is larger-than-life, but the sense of loss and retreat is almost tangible. Its colours are often pale and washed-out, ruins abound, and even the wind whimpers sadly as it blows.

The Representational World is much brighter and more striking, characterised by a mix of icon and mosaic. On the whole, it resembles an icon, or rather an iconostasis, the screen dividing an Orthodox Church, on which a number of separate icons will be mounted. Thus, each particular location will seem like its own icon, with a definite sense of ‘division’ while moving from one to the next. Icons representing urban locations will generally feel like frescos painted on plaster, while others are more likely to have a ‘wooden’ texture. However, there are substantial regions analogous to those in which Byzantine political authority no longer holds sway, but whose otherworlds are still predominantly Greek Orthodox in form. Here there may still be regions in which the prevailing imagery is mosaic, and places and people appear to be moving forms of coloured tile fragment. Within the Greek Representational World, the air is often thick with choral music and drifting incense.

The only remaining Boundary Realm within the Byzantine lands, or at least generally-known one, is above Constantinople itself, a towering stairway stretching up from the location of the Hagia Sofia, towards the incandescent walls of heaven – a city which, when glimpsed from the Greek Representational or Boundary Realms, looks a lot like Constantinople in its glory days!

PATRIARCH NELUS KERAMEUS

Just as evil can lurk behind the fairest face, so too can weakness behind a stern manner. Patriarch Keramus appears every inch the masterful man of God, from his penetrating gaze and ascetic build to the resonant voice that can as easily gently spread encouragement as flay a sinner. Behind the gaze, though, is a dull, blunt mind that thinks in clichés and routines. Tapeworms rather than self-discipline explain his angular frame, and what is a voice with nothing worth hearing to say? Fortunately for him, he just about had the sense to attach to himself a clever and subtle aide, Protodeacon Modest Gashi. Or is it that Gashi made sure he attached himself to Kerameus? Either way, as an Albanian, Gashi knew that his ambitions within the church were not likely to be achieved directly, so he has made himself indispensable to the patriarch. He clearly enjoys the power, but does he have some wider agenda? Is it he who is behind the campaign to restore genuine Greek control over the Russian Orthodox Church?

Byzantine Patriarch 111, Devotee of St Basil the Great 511, Look and Act the Part 10113, Take Gashi’s Advice 2011 (Good Advice from Gashi 5112)



Special Advantage: The Hierarchy of Authority

The Greek Orthodox Faith teaches the importance of acceptance of higher authority – so long as that authority respects and obeys true doctrine. **Worshippers may freely augment attempts by their direct superiors to cast magic using their *Worship God* ability.** This takes place automatically, and can be combined with other augmentation. However, the superior must have a *Worship God* ability equal to or greater than the subordinate's and not be casting magic for some purpose which could be considered hostile to the beliefs of the Greek Orthodox faith. For the purposes of this ability 'superior' means higher in a specific, identified hierarchy – it is not enough, for example, just to be of higher social standing. This helps explain the powers of a suitably pious Emperor, as he can in theory be augmented by every single Byzantine citizen in the vicinity!

MAGIC OF THE GREEKS

Greek Orthodox magic relies upon the invocation of the saints and Theotokos. Minor magic may be manifest simply in the glittering of an amulet sacred to the saint or a crucifix, perhaps an almost imperceptible choral hymn in the air. However, the main visual manifestation is a halo around the caster's head, one which becomes brighter and more complex the more powerful the magic. At the same time, hymns and the smell of incense may fill the air and the light of heaven shine down.

SAINTS OF THE GREEKS

Like the other Christian churches, the Greeks revere both God and Jesus, but look instead to saints for their magic. Every prayer, every good deed, is an act of worship to God, but to try and emulate Him would be impious, and more like the pagan practices of the Romans rather than the enlightened and correct practices of the Orthodox Church. Almost all of these saints are also worshipped within the Russian Orthodox tradition, but often with a slightly different take. All good Greeks know full well that the Russians are wrong whenever their doctrine varies!

THE THEOTOKOS

The Theotokos, the Mother of God, is extremely important in Greek theology. While all Christian churches revere the Virgin Mary, within Greek Orthodoxy she is one of the most important saints of all. Indeed, she is possessed of a bewildering variety of aspects, of which a few are noted here, celebrating a

WAYS OF THE GREEKS

Central to the Greek Church's worship is the Divine Liturgy, celebrated every Sunday morning and on all holy days. Services are up to two hours long, and conducted almost entirely in song: hymns, the priest's liturgy, the congregation's response, prayers. The priest conducts most of his rites hidden from the congregation's view behind the iconostasis, a wall dividing the altar from the bulk of the church, on which are mounted numerous icons of saints, with its central doors thrown open to show the altar and priest at key moments of the rite.

Priests

The priests of the Greek Orthodox Church range from the scruffiest of village holymen, who don their threadbare robes on a Sunday but otherwise must work in the fields, through to the resplendent hierarchs, who are as much aristocratic powerbrokers as religious figures. Lesser priests will tend to wear black vestments and hats, deacons a more ornate over-tunic as well, possibly coloured, and bishops even more extravagant costumes and hats. When officiating at services, they will also have a thin cloth stole round their necks, again ranging from the simple cloth of the village priest to the brightly-coloured and embroidered silk of a bishop.

Holy Days

There are numerous special days within the Greek Orthodox calendar, especially linked with the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, including her 'dormition', when she was taken into Heaven.

wide range of roles she plays and places in which she manifested herself. She is represented generally as a cowed woman, holding the Christ-child and all her aspects are celebrated on the key dates associated with Mary, as noted above.

THEOTOKOS ELEUTHEROTRIA

The Ever-Pure

Meaning 'She Who Is All Pure', the Eleutherotria aspect celebrates her cleanliness of spirit and thus her chastity.

Entry Requirements: None; devotees must observe chastity to retain their magical powers.

Abilities: Cleaner, Devotee of Theotokos Eleutherotria or Initiate of Theotokos Eleutherotria, Good Health, Life of the Theotokos, Sense Lustful Thoughts.

Virtues: Chaste, Cleanly, Modest.





Affinity: **Purity** (Banish Lust, Cleanse Wound, Purify Water, Silence Blasphemy, Silence Profanity, Tidy Up)

Secret: **Divine Chastity** (The devotee is surrounded by an invisible aura of innocence and prudery. All lustful thoughts in her immediate proximity, all gluttonous delight in food, all fiery passions, all self-indulgent vices – indeed, almost any passions beyond those for God and His works – are dampened by this. In effect, relevant character traits, relationships and even certain abilities are temporarily reduced by the secret's rating.)

Rites & Representations: She holds the Christ-child square on her lap, and both look out at the viewer. [Ell-ey-yoo-thair-ROT-tree-ya]

Worshippers: The tidy, the modest, the chaste and the prudish.

THEOTOKOS GALAKTROPHOUSA

The Feeding Virgin

The 'Milk-Feeding' Mother of God is the patron of mothers and children.

Entry Requirements: Only woman may become initiates or devotees.

Abilities: Care for Children, Cook, Devotee of Theotokos Galaktrophousa or Initiate of Theotokos Galaktrophousa, Life of the Theotokos, Know Location of Children.

Virtues: Maternal, Nurturing.

Affinity: **Mother** (Make Child Feel Better, Mother's Milk, Predict Danger to Child, Predict Mischief from Child)

Secret: **Feed the Hungry** (Somehow, even in the most unpromising conditions, the devotee will be able to find some scraps of food and water for those who are hungry and helpless. This is just a sustenance level, and she can find enough to look after one adult or two children for every mastery or fraction thereof in this secret.)

Rites & Representations: She is gazing at the Christ child, who is symbolically clutching her finger; the scandalous 'Feeding Mary' icon, in which her bare breast was visible, was reportedly destroyed, but every now and then there are rumours of its continued existence. [Ga-lack-troff-o-OO-sa]

Worshippers: Mothers, above all.

THEOTOKOS OF GREAT GRACE

Blessed

This aspect of the Ever-Virgin Mary stresses the extraordinary blessing imparted on her by God, and is thus both a celebration of her own virtue and also a patron of luck and recognition for good deeds.

Abilities: Devotee of Theotokos of Great Grace or Initiate of Theotokos of Great Grace, Graceful Presence, Good Cheer, Life of the Theotokos.

Virtues: Pious, Serene.

Affinity: **Grace** (A Little Luck, Aura of Tranquillity, Bring Serenity to the Bereaving, Cheer the Unhappy, Encouraging Smile)

Secret: **Blessed by the Divine** (Each time the hero uses a hero point, he may use the secret against a resistance of 14: on a victory, the hero point is returned – or one is returned, if using several at once.)

Rites & Representations: She is represented cradling the Christ-child, who is touching her face.

Worshippers: Those seeking grace under pressure or just a little luck to see them through hard times.

THEOTOKOS HODEGETRIA

She Who Shows the Way

This aspect of the Theotokos celebrates her foreknowledge of the coming of Christ, and thus her prescience in other matters. Her sanctuary, the Church of the Guides, is also famous for miracles returning sight to the blind (whether they are literally blind or simply unable to see something of great importance to them).

Abilities: Devotee of Theotokos Hodegetria or Initiate of Theotokos Hodegetria, Life of the Theotokos, See Far, See What Is Hidden.

Virtues: Wise.

Affinity: **Know the Way** (Find Way Home, Know Best Route, Know What's Round the Corner, Pick the Right Door, Retrace Steps)

Secret: **Show the Way** (Acts as an affinity with the feats Cure Blindness, Force Another to Face Facts and Teach Route)

Rites & Representations: She holds Christ in one arm, crooking her other hand to indicate the way. [Ho-day-GET-tree-yah]

Worshippers: Those who travel or want to know where they are going.

THEOTOKOS SKEPE

The Protectress

This aspect, the Mother of God Protectress, watches over the innocent and the virtuous, and is also a guardian of Constantinople itself. As such, she is one of the more militant aspects of the Theotokos.

Abilities: Brave, Devotee of Theotokos Skepe or Initiate of Theotokos Skepe, Face Down Bully, Good Judge of Character, Life of the Theotokos.

Virtues: Militant, Protective.

Affinity: **Protectress** (Disarm Attacker, Hearten the Innocent, Shame Aggressor, Shield Victim, Turn Blow)





Secret: Turn the Other Cheek (The hero may ensure that an attacker also suffers from his aggression rather than fight back actively. A successful use of this secret to resist an attack, of whatever kind, reflects it upon the attacker, who must then resist normally. For example, Timofey Greyhair has a total of Knife Fighting 5 \mathfrak{M} with which he attacks Echephyle of Thessaly, who has the secret at 2 \mathfrak{M} . However, Echephyle is successful and Tomifey fails, so he now must resist his own attack. He uses his Dodge 17, but nonetheless fails and looks down in stunned horror at the wound which suddenly opens in his side.)

Rites & Representations: She and the Christ she cradles both look out at the viewer. [SKEP-eh]

Worshippers: Those who would defend the weak and the innocent, but ideally without drawing blood themselves.

PANAGIA

The All-Holy

Panagia (the Greek word means 'All-Holy') is an aspect of the Theotokos which stresses the cooperation between mortal and divine, as Mary willingly took on the role of Mother of God. As such, she stands for the use of self-will to choose obedience and the right path.

Abilities: Assess Character, Devotee of Panagia or Initiate of Panagia, Life of the Theotokos, Remember Promises, See Through Excuses.

Virtues: Dutiful, Moral.

Affinity: Do The Right Thing (Do What I Said I Would Do, Humble Shirker, Refuse to be Coerced, Powerful Will, Silence Excuses)

Secret: Strong Will (Provides a bonus of 1/4 the secret's value to any contest relating to willpower.)

Rites & Representations: She is looking out at the viewer directly, with hands raised on either side of her and the image of the Christ-child on her breast. [Pan-na-GEE-yah]

Worshippers: Those who think it is important always to Do The Right Thing – and make sure others do, too.

WARRIOR SAINTS

From the 9th century, the Greeks have revered as part of their religious tradition a growing number of specific warrior saints. To the Greeks, on their death and martyrdom, they assumed a role within the Celestial Army of Heaven, and became the holy patron of some aspect of the military defence of Byzantium, as the true Rome. Indeed, the Archangel Michael is also considered amongst them, not least because *Revelations* describes him fighting a dragon. In some cases, warrior saints are worshipped in pairs.

What follows is just a small sample of those available, which means that narrators and players are free to create their own to suit the needs of their heroes and stories. The other major Warrior Saints are: St Arethas, St Artemius, St Demetrius, St Eustathius, St Hieron and the Martyrs of Melitene, St Kyrion and the XL Martyr of Sebasteia, St Menas of Egypt, St Mercurius, St Procopius, St Martin of Tours, St Phanourios and SS Sergius and Bacchus. The minor Warrior Saints are: St Christopher, St Cornelius the Centurion, The Holy Five of Sebasteia with SS Orestes and Eustratius, St Joannicius, SS Juventinus and Maximinus, SS Nestor and Lupus, St Nicetas, St Philotheus of Antioch, St Phoibammon, SS Polyuctus and Nearchus, St Sabbas Stratelates, St Sissinius of Antioch, St Speusippus and companions and St Zosimus.

THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

Sword of the Lord

The Archangel Michael commanded the Heavenly Hosts which crushed Lucifer's rebellion, and he is still God's staunchest and most militant agent. He is a mighty warrior (and nemesis of dragons) and a general who makes up with inspirational and unyielding zeal what he may lack in subtlety.

Entry Requirements: Worship God 5 \mathfrak{M} +

Abilities: Deeds of the Archangel Michael, Devotee of the Archangel Michael or Initiate of the Archangel Michael, Ignore Discomfort, Lead From the Front, Sword Fighting, Take The Direct Route.

Virtues: Direct, Not Fear Dragons, Self-Sacrificing, Unyielding Zealot.

Affinity: Fight the Good Fight! (Back, Vile Heathen!, Follow Me!, Smite the Ungodly!, You Shall Not Pass!)

Secret: Fight Dragons (Gives the hero a bonus of 1/2 the secret's value when fighting dragons. He'll need it.)

Rites & Representations: A warrior in archaic armour, holding a sword before him. His day is 29 September.

Worshippers: Warriors full of zeal, masochism or a yen for martyrdom.

Disadvantages: The Archangel Michael is as unsparing of his worshippers as himself; they (and especially devotees) are expected never to succumb to earthly frailties, pass up on a just fight or yield to heathens (and generals following him tend to be careless with the lives of their men, so long as the battle is won). Narrators should penalise them up to and including temporarily denying them their magic or reducing their Piety, as and when they prove only human.

ST GEORGE

Defender of the Faith

The archetypal Christian warrior-saint, defender of the faith, protector of the innocent, slayer of dragons and upholder of the truth. A lot to live up to, really.

Entry Requirements:
Only men.

Abilities: Devotee of St George or Initiate of St George, Lengthy and Uplifting Speech, Life of St George, Ride, Spear & Shield Fighting.

Virtues: Brave, Martial, Uncompromising.

Affinity: **Knight** (Blade of Truth, Hammerblow Charge, Hymn of Bravery, Smite the Foe)

Secret: **Onward Christian Soldiers** (Multiple target penalties are ignored when the hero is casting magic on the members of a unit of which he is the recognised leader. He may also choose to direct a single attack directed against any of the unit at a time to himself instead.)

Rites & Representations: St George is represented usually in the typical pose of a warrior saint, with a shield in his left hand, resting on the ground, a spear in his right, clad in armour and wearing a cloak and a commander's sash tied around his chest.

Worshippers: True holy warriors, pious, unbending and perhaps a little tiresome.

Connections: The Greek *cultus* of St George is to the fore of those hostile not only to the Latin Catholic Church but also the backsliders of the Russian Orthodox faith; while followers of either of the other church's versions of St George may hold them in good esteem, followers of the Greek St George are expected to treat them as heretics, nothing more.

ST THEODORE STRATELATES

Theodore the General

A general of ancient, pagan Rome, when his superiors discovered his Christian faith they offered him the chance to recant, in the light of his exemplary service and great skill. Instead, he burnt down a pagan temple, and when he was again arrested again, he refused demands that he renounce God. He was then tortured, his flesh torn from his body before he was burned to death, but throughout his ordeals he simply recited the psalms. St Theodore Stratelates is thus revered as much for his strong will as his talents as a general.



Abilities: Command Troops, Devotee of St Theodore Stratelates or Initiate of St Theodore Stratelates, Endure Pain, Life of St Theodore Stratelates, Tactics.

Virtues: Resolute.

Affinity: **Tactics** (Anticipate Enemy Tactics, Cunning Feint, Identify Enemies' Weaknesses)

Secret: **This is But Clay** (The devotee can shrug off pain and injury to his mortal body. It can be used to make or augment a Final Action or else in effect to heal damage in combat, but only while under immediate threat. As soon as the threat is lifted, all such 'healed' damage – really only ignored – applies at once.)

Rites & Representations: A bare-headed warrior bearing a spear and wearing a cloak. His day is 7 February.

Worshippers: Generals and warriors.

ST LONGINUS

The Centurion Who Saw

A minor warrior saint (who thus has no Secret), Longinus was the Roman centurion presiding at the crucifixion, who pierced the side of Jesus with his spear. He was so struck by his victim's fortitude that he exclaimed "truly, this was a noble man!" When his poor eyesight was healed by the blood flowing down his spear, and he witnessed the darkness which followed the death of Christ, he was converted. He is now a warrior god of guards and watchers. The actual spear he used is lost, but it is considered by many to be an extraordinarily powerful magical artefact, and rumours of its current location are always followed by a sudden exodus of the faithful and the power-hungry. It is also said that recovery of the Spear will unlock his Secret.

Abilities: Devotee of St Longinus or Initiate of St Longinus, Keep Watch, Life of St Longinus, See Virtue, Spear & Shield Fighting.

Virtues: Patient, Respect Bravery.

Affinity: **The Spear** (Eyes Sharp as Spearpoints, Find Spear, Piercing Thrust)

Rites & Representations: He is represented as a soldier, either in contemporary Greek or ancient Roman armour, bearing a spear. His day is 15 March. [Long-GEE-nus]

Worshippers: St Longinus is followed by guards, those who defend rather than attack, and also those who have converted from paganism and see him as a role model.

OTHER GREEK SAINTS

It is worth noting that the Greeks recognise most of the saints celebrated by the Latin and even Russian churches, albeit often with a subtly different take on them. Below are just a few more sample saints revered within the Greek church as well as notes as to which



saints from other chapters can be used (with obvious changes to the names of the *Life of...* and similar abilities)

ST ANTHONY THE GREAT

The Saint-Abbott

Anthony was a country boy from Egypt who rejected book-learning but nonetheless showed a wit and a wisdom which shamed the scholars of Athens. He lived as a hermit in the desert, during which time he healed the sick and defeated armies of devils. As much as he sought solitude, though, petitioners and would-be disciples kept disturbing him, until he founded two monasteries. He is now a patron of monasticism, especially loved by those who would try to keep the monasteries out of Byzantine politics.

Abilities: Desert Survival, Devotee of St Anthony the Great *or* Initiate of St Anthony the Great, First Aid, Life of St Anthony the Great, Meditation, Wise Thoughts.

Virtues: Modest, Pious.

Affinity: **Monastic Life** (Aura of Holiness, Ignore Discomfort, Ignore Disturbance, Ignore Hunger, Sense Devil)

Secret: **Banish Devils** (The hero may cast out devils and other forms of otherworldly possession – including heroforming.)

Rites & Representations: A bearded and cowled monk, holding a cross with a bell upon it. His day is 17 January.

Worshippers: Monks and those who support the ideals of monasticism or feel drawn to his example.

ST BASIL THE GREAT

As **St Basil the Great** in **SAINTS OF THE RUS'**. St Anthony stands for a form of monasticism which tries to keep out of politics; St Basil is the patron for those who enthusiastically meddle in politics at every opportunity.

ST CATHERINE THE MARTYR

As **St Ekaterina**; see **SAINTS OF THE RUS'**.

THE BLESSED EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

The Great

Bizarrely, while sainted, fourth-century Roman Emperor Constantine was in many ways a sinner and followed a form of Christianity the Greeks condemn. However, he legalised and then promoted Christianity within the

Roman Empire, a great deed which, to the Greeks (but not the Latins) excuses all else. However, it does mean that very few people explicitly initiate or devote to him, and those who do generally do so because they appreciate the example of a sinner able to be blessed for one extraordinary act. His pagan past and sinful background also denies him a Secret. He rebuilt Byzantium, though, and is thus a patron of the city, as well as one of fortune-tellers, for his conversion came about as the result of one of a series of visions.

Abilities: Commanding Manner, Devotee of the Blessed Emperor Constantine *or* Initiate of the Blessed Emperor Constantine, Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine, Interpret Omen.

Virtues: Self Confident.

Affinity: **Basileus** (Know Way to Constantinople, Obey Me, On Your Knees!, See Inner Sin)

Rites & Representations: A Roman emperor in toga and laurel wreath, but clutching a large cross or the Greek letters chi and rho (looking like X and P, standing for the first two letters of 'Christ').

Worshippers: Often, he is seen as a saint of last resort, who will bless those who hope to expunge great sins with a single, greater act of virtue.

ST ELIAS

Pillar of Prophets

Elias, as the Greeks render Elijah, was the Old Testament prophet who was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot and is thus regarded as a patron of carts, chariots and other vehicles, as well as an outspoken preacher and spreader of news.

Abilities: Devotee of St Elias *or* Initiate of St Elias, Drive Cart, Drive Chariot, Life of St Elias, Light Fire, Loud Voice.

Virtues: Showmanship.

Affinity: **Bless Vehicle** (Bless Cart, Bless Chariot, Close Corner, Fix Wheel, Mend Axle, Right Overturned Vehicle, Speed Vehicle, Stay in Vehicle)

Secret: **Blazing Chariot** (A chariot the hero is driving bursts into magical flame and may ride through the sky. A single check against a natural resistance of 14 suffices to allow the chariot, the animals pulling it, the devotee and up to 3 others to be carried through the sky for half an hour in a day. Longer or repeated journeys or more passengers will increase the resistance, and additional checks of this secret and perhaps Drive Chariot may be required in case of acrobatic manoeuvres. The secret's rating may also provide a magical defence to those attacking the chariot.)

Rites & Representations: He is portrayed as a bearded prophet being taken to heaven in a chariot drawn by fiery horses. His day is 20 July. [ELL-ee-yas]





Worshippers: Any who use vehicles, especially the flamboyant charioteers of the Constantinople Hippodrome.

ST ERAMUS

As the Latin **St Elmo**, see **GUESTS AND FOES FROM THE WEST**.

ST GENESIUS

As the Latin **St Genesisius** – see **GUESTS AND FOES FROM THE WEST**.

ST GREGORY OF NYSSA

Father of the Fathers

The younger brother of St Basil the Great (see page xx), Gregory was a teacher of rhetoric who nonetheless tired of the academic life and instead became a priest, rising to become bishop of Nyssa and then archbishop. Nonetheless, he was notoriously tactless and poor at managing church funds, such that he was even accused of embezzlement. He was imprisoned, escaped and lived in exile for two years before being rehabilitated. He earned his title ‘Father of the Fathers’ for his steadfast defence of orthodoxy and his doctrine of *epiktasis* (‘constant progress’), the notion that humanity is embarked on an eternal journey towards divine perfection.

Abilities: Devotee of St Gregory of Nyssa or Initiate of St Gregory of Nyssa, Life of St Gregory of Nyssa, Read & Write Greek, Rhetoric, Teach.

Virtues: Optimistic.

Affinity: **Epiktasis** (Feel Better, Not Make the Same Mistake Twice, Rekindle Optimism, Remember Old Mistakes)

Secret: **I Learn from My Mistakes** (In any extended contest, the *second* time the hero rolls a failure, he may elect at once to roll again. For every full mastery in the secret, the hero may re-roll another alternating failure. Thus, with the secret at **1M2**, a hero could re-roll the second, fourth and sixth failures in any one extended contest.)

Rites & Representations: A dark-bearded man in ecclesiastical robes, bearing a book. His day is 9 March.

Worshippers: He is a patron of scholars but also those who consider *epiktasis* a life-affirming notion.

Connections: His worshippers and those of St Basil ought to give each other support.

Disadvantages: Devotees also acquire the Flaw *Poor Money Management*.

ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

As **St Ivan Chrystosom**, see **SAINTS OF THE RUS’**.

ST LUKE THE APOSTLE

As **St Luke**, see **GUESTS AND FOES FROM THE WEST**.

ST NICHOLAS THE TRAVELLER

As **St Nicholas of All Good Things**, see **SAINTS OF THE RUS’**.

ST PANTALEIMON THE COMPASSIONATE

As **St Pantaleimon**, see **SAINTS OF THE RUS’**.

ST SPIRIDON

The Shepherd Saint

Born of peasant stock on Cyprus, Spiridon was a shepherd who, although he later became a bishop, never abandoned the simple faith of his childhood.

Abilities: Devotee of St Spiridon or Initiate of St Spiridon, Life of St Spiridon, Shepherd, Simple but Compelling Words, Tend Sheep.

Virtues: Direct, Unaffected.

Affinity: **Shepherd** (Bless Lamb, Cleanse Sheep of Parasites, Drive Away Predator, Find Lost Sheep, Gather Flock, Heal Sheep, Untangle Wool)

Secret: **Shepherd of Men** (The devotee may use any feats in the Shepherd affinity on his followers and members of his religious congregation.)

Rites & Representations: A bearded man in ecclesiastical robes, but either wearing a peasant’s hat (in which case he will generally hold a book) or else holding a shepherd’s crook (but wearing an abbot’s hat). [SPEE-ree-don]

Worshippers: Shepherds and other peasants, as well as those who believe in simplicity in their faith.

Disadvantages: Those who follow St Spiridon may be considered slightly rustic in their faith.





ST THEODORA OF ARTA

The Muddy-Handed Empress

This thirteenth-century Byzantine empress fell from high office when her husband exiled her, but she showed great fortitude, not complaining even when she was forced to work in the fields. She was then reconciled with her husband, but after his death entered a nunnery.

Entry Requirements: Only women may become devotees.

Abilities: Devotee of St Theodora of Arta or Initiate of St Theodora of Arta, Dignified Manner, Life of St Theodora of Arta, Work Hard.

Virtues: Grace Under Pressure.

Affinity: **Unbroken** (Keep Working, Natural Authority, Shame Whiner, Unbroken by Bad Fortune)

Secret: **Unexpected Talents** (The devotee discovers unexpected knacks: she may use the secret freely to carry out *any* practical, manual task at which she lacks a more appropriate ability. This cannot be used to augment.)

Rites & Representations: An elegant woman in imperial robes, with crown, holding an icon. Her day is 11 September.

Worshippers: Nuns and women who make the best of their lot.

PLAYING GREEKS

The old empires are falling. The Mongols are in retreat and the Greeks face conquest. Nonetheless, a mighty history counts for something – especially in a world where magic is real. Greek characters will be as individual as any other, and are as likely to be merry as melancholy, but overall there should be some emphasis precisely on the passing of an era. Greek characters may have come to terms with it; they may seek to profit from it; they may hope to prevent it; they may even claim not to be interested in it; but, deep down, none can ignore the rapid onset of the scimitar of fate...

YOUR FIRST GREEK HERO

Here are a few general questions worth considering:

- ❑ **Am I Greek?** For all that outsiders may call them all ‘Greeks’ the people of Byzantium are a varied mix of peoples from across and beyond the lands Constantinople used to claim as its own. There may be still a slight social advantage to being a genuine Greek, but on the whole this is quite an accepting culture of different ethnic backgrounds.
- ❑ **Do I look forwards or back?** Many are still mired in nostalgia, escaping an uncertain present and future by dwelling on memories of former glory. Are you one of them, in which case you may well also resent the upstarts to the west and north and the barbarians all around? Or do you look to the future, whether dreaming of a revived Constantinople or simply looking for a way in which you and those dear to you can survive the forthcoming catastrophe?
- ❑ **How Orthodox am I?** The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches have split, even if many in Constantinople would prefer it were not so, even though they share the majority of their religious beliefs. Do you consider the Russian Orthodox Church a nest of traitors, especially those who turn a blind eye to *duoverie*, or do you prefer to dwell

on what unites rather than divides the two churches, sure that in due course the Russians will outgrow their little tantrum and return to the bosom of the *true* Orthodox faith?

- ❑ **What am I doing away from Constantinople?** The people of Constantinople are fiercely proud of their city – what on earth would drive one out into the barbarous wastes of **Mythic Russia**? Are you an emissary, trader or spy? Or have you been driven from the city by poverty, exile, politics or wanderlust?

Occupations

The permitted occupations for the Greek keyword are:

- ❑ **Cavalry Soldier** (Regular, Shock, Skirmish): Horses are increasingly scarce amongst the Greeks, but they nonetheless deploy a variety of cavalry. The handful of shock cavalry are dressed head-to-toe in mail and wield spears, longswords and long triangular shields. Their horses are armoured as well, with barding of metal scales. They are raised like Western knights, their families granted small land grants to keep and arm them until their services were needed. More numerous are regular cavalry, armed and armoured much the same but with unarmoured horses, and light horse archers. The latter are typically auxiliaries and mercenaries, hired from among the Bulgarians, Asiatic tribes of the Cumans or even Turks.
- ❑ **Child:** Children are children everywhere, but it is worth noting that children of especially aristocratic or pious families might initiate to a saint as early as 10 years old.
- ❑ **Crafter:** While Constantinople is a mighty market for goods from all over, there is still a strong domestic source of craft, especially as the Greeks are exploring with blending techniques and designs from Europe and the Middle East. St Luke is followed by many, although most simply revere aspects of the Theotokos or SS Nicholas or Gregory.



- ❑ **Entertainer** (Chorister, Organist): Many entertainers actually work within the Church, although there is also a market for secular entertainments of every kind. However, the present fad among the jaded aristocracy is for foreign singers, actors and other such entertainers.
- ❑ **Farmer:** Constantinople's huge population needs feeding, and although much is imported, where there is land, there are farmers ready to till the soil. Characters might well be 'free peasants' looking for a new life somewhere. Aspects of the Theotokos, SS Spiridon and Nicholas are widely revered.
- ❑ **Foot Soldier** (Archer, Regular, Shock, Skirmish, Artificer): The bulk of the Empire's armed forces are infantry. Most regular foot soldiers, whether regular or shock, wear shirts and leggings of mail or scale armour and conical iron helmets. The weapon of choice is the spear and long triangular shield, along with a longsword. Archers wear quilted cloth armour and iron helmets, and also carry swords for close combat. Skirmishers and some archers are often mercenaries – Albanians, Bulgarians, Turks and men of numerous other nations – armed with hand weapons and only lightly armoured, if at all. The elite Varangian Guard still bear their trademark axes, although they are better created using the Rus' or Lithuanian keywords and choosing the Foot Soldier or Warrior occupation. Many are now Christian, often following Warrior Saints, but a good number of the Varangians may cling to their native, pagan deities (Rus' and Lithuanian ones are appropriate, even for guardsmen from Scandinavia, as even if the names and details are different, there is considerable similarity between the respective pantheons).
- ❑ **Healer:** The Greeks have some of the finest healers in the Christian world: masters of the medical arts pioneered by such ancient greats as Hippocrates; monks and nuns devoted to healing saints such as Pantaleimon; and those who combine both magical and mundane arts.
- ❑ **Hunter:** In the countryside, there is still a strong hunting tradition – and the nobility still indulge themselves with hunts, for which they need scouts, beaters and guides.
- ❑ **Merchant:** Money talks in Constantinople; with so many of the aristocracy deep in debt and the city depending on imports of food and foreign mercenaries, it is no wonder that as well as a large class of shopkeepers and traders, there are also powerful commercial magnates, whose voice is a powerful one behind the scenes.
- ❑ **Noble:** Constantinople does not lack for aristocrats; indeed, some might even say that part of the problems facing Byzantium is that it has too many aristocrats, relics of its past glories, and too few ambitious and energetic commoners. Or maybe it just means that, looking at the bloated collection of their 'betters' they see too few opportunities for themselves at home and instead look for ways to create new ones, whether by travel abroad or else by working for some dramatic shake-up of the status quo... as Andronikos did. However, while there are many pampered and inbred idiots who pay little attention to the realities of the world around them and the dangers it faces, there are also pragmatic and decisive noblemen and woman

determined to do something about it. But are there enough?

- ❑ **Priest** (Greek Orthodox): Dreams of ancient glory cannot hold the Greeks together – increasingly it is instead their faith, and the monks, nuns and priests who espouse it, which provides a moral backbone for their people. However, they are no less affected by the corruption, factionalism and despair which afflicts so many of the Greeks. SS Anthony and Basil are especially favoured, but there are individuals and religious communities following the ways of all the saints.
- ❑ **Sailor** (Sea or River): Once a great sea power, the Byzantines now have no more than ten war galleys, but there are still many score merchant vessels plying the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, especially bringing in the food that Constantinople can live. Theotokos Hodegetria and SS Erasmus and John are popular among them.
- ❑ **Scholar:** The Greeks are justly proud of their learning and their libraries, and perhaps nowhere offers such a wealth of learning and knowledge. In keeping with the conservative nature of the Byzantines, most are historians, students of ancient writings and similarly backwards-looking, but there is also a small minority prepared to ignore the disdain of their peers and seek new knowledge.
- ❑ **Thief:** Constantinople is a large and still rich city, with a thriving and varied underworld. There are muggers and thieves who prowl the dark, winding sidestreets and then there are also the smooth fraudsters and blackmailers who prey on the rich and powerful.

GREEKS AS NARRATOR CHARACTERS

Even the meanest beggar in the streets of Constantinople is nonetheless heir to centuries of power and splendour. The central keynotes of Greek narrator characters ought to be this pride and sense of history, as well as relative affluence and political awareness. There are more developed political orders further from the heartlands of the Rus', from the Turkish court to the emerging Italian city-states, but as far as the Russians are concerned, even in its present, diminished conditions, Constantinople displays an extraordinary level of organisation and a complex political scene. Sure, while Constantinople has shrunk, Moscow has grown – but even so, Tsargrad still has a population more than double Moscow's!

Greeks thus have a reputation for being subtle and cunning, they talk fast and well and as effective haggling in the market as cutting political deals. It is still a status signal in some cities to have a Greek tutor for your children or a Greek scribe or accountant. The flip-side, of course, is that Greeks are often regarded as effete, shifty and too clever for their own good.



CONSTANTINOPLE IN YOUR WORLD

That the Turks will eventually reach out to take the city they call the 'Red Apple' is beyond question – the real questions are when, and how will the Greeks resist? John V Palaeologus has a reputation as a weak and foolish ruler, yet he has somehow managed to rule – albeit not without mishap – for forty years, and outlived seemingly more dangerous and powerful rivals. Is he just fortunate in himself or in having such supporters as Manuel? Or is there more to him than is generally thought. After all, there are those who claim that he is a powerful master of holy magics, even a true *Kurios Poli*, who will be able to defend Constantinople when the Turks finally decide to move on it, with powers beyond their pagan nightmares?

Basileus John's main talents to date appear to be seducing other men's wives, but he has outlasted seemingly more clever and ruthless men, so there may be rather more to him. Certainly there is a growing sense within the Greek aristocracy that they may have misjudged him – but is this just wishful thinking? Or might any of his heirs and local emperors such as Andronikos and Manuel offer greater hope to Constantinople?

Whether Constantinople's lot in your game of Mythic Russia is to fall to the Turks or whether it will survive once more is up to you, but here are a few plotlines which could be used to involve Tsargrad in the fate of the Rus' – and vice versa:



Return to the Fold: It is clear that Patriarch Kerameus is desperate to see the Greek Church reassert real authority over its Russian counterpart; whether this is because of Gashi's whispers or his own desperation to leave some kind of mark on history is irrelevant. Likewise, there are conservative elements within the Russian Church which favour this, in that they would prefer subordination to Constantinople if that is the price to be paid for ending the corruption that is *dvoeverie*. Kiev is the cradle of Orthodoxy; Kiev is at a low point in its fortunes; Kiev is the nearest Russian major city; Moscow is distracted. Is it true that Kerameus is hiring Rus' agents and mercenaries, ready to support a coup in the city by the hard-line anti-pagan local church, who have a new prince ready to anoint?



Tomb Raider: That Constantinople will fall is inevitable, and it will fall to Moslems, and with it the priceless array of relics and icons the city has accumulated. To steal the best of them and take them back to Russia is surely not theft, it is simply a matter of saving them from the unbelievers. Some would even regard this is a sacred duty...



Now, I am the Master: Once, it was the sumptuous churches of Constantinople which led the Russians to Christianity and the gold and silver of the city which hired the cream of their warriors. Now, Constantinople is bankrupt and in

mortal peril, while Russia is freeing itself from foreign domination. Could John or some other ruler decide that saving the city from Islam justifies turning to their erstwhile 'younger brothers'? Perhaps a new Orthodox alliance could be forged, but with Moscow as the dominant city, and the Black Sea again full of ships full of Russian warriors, but this time to defend Tsargrad rather than plunder it?



The Great Game: The mere rumour that the Patriarch is contemplating abandoning Constantinople and moving his See to Russia is enough to create a secret uproar in the churches, courts and monasteries of Russia. Would he seek to usurp the powers of the Metropolitan of Moscow? Indeed, if he moved to another city, would this shift the centre of gravity within the Russian Church away from Moscow and its princes? From all corners of Russia, agents and emissaries converge on Tsargrad. Some want to convince the Patriarch to move to their city or espouse their cause. Others might have more sinister motives. If, for example, there really is a danger to the Muscovites' grip on the Russian Church, would they really allow him to settle elsewhere? And what is the Patriarch really after – is it conceivable that he would abandon Constantinople, or does he have some plans of his (or Gashi's) own?

21. NARRATING

“As you cooked your porridge, so must you eat it.”

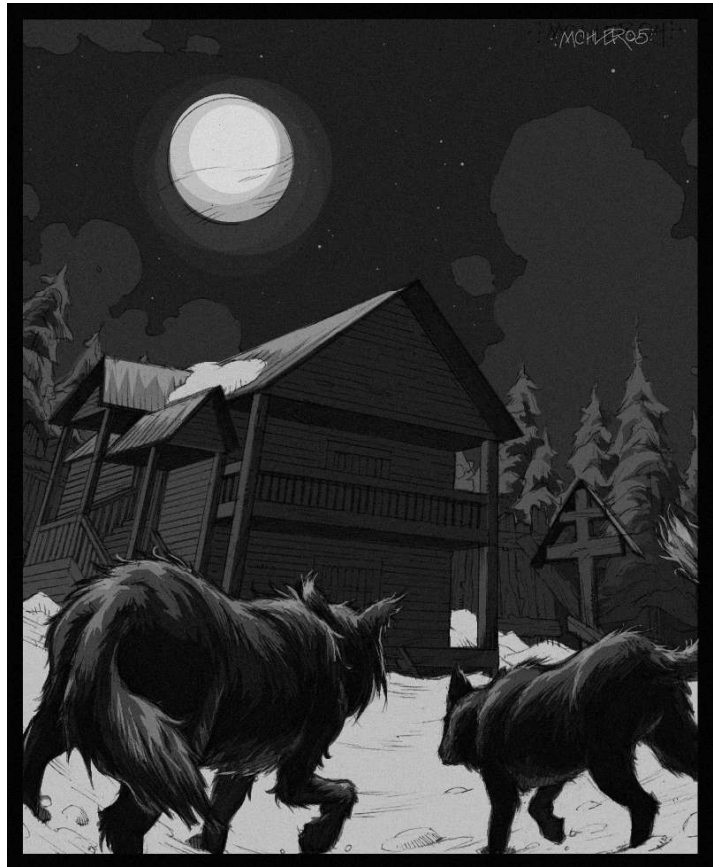
The narrator is the lynch pin of the game, the person who – even with the most enthusiastic and pro-active of players – must enliven the setting, understand the rules (and when to ignore them) and create the scenario the heroes will face or at least the initial context from which to start. That said, it should also be fun!

Types of Game

Mythic Russia allows for all kinds of games to be played, from subtle intrigues of princely politics through to over-the-top fairytale adventures in the Otherworlds, swashbuckling empire-building in the wilds of Siberia or gritty wheeling-and-dealing in the markets of Novgorod. How your games evolve depend on the interests of narrator and players alike, and they can also mix and match. After all, an episode of comic misunderstanding contrasting with subsequent tragedy doesn't just make for interesting play, it also fits the themes of much Russian folklore and literature. In order to help 'calibrate' your games, here are a few questions to consider:

What Power Level?

The core rules presuppose a **HEROIC** game in which the heroes are just that, already apart from the norm, with the capacity to become greater – even if there are always other powers greater still. This lends itself to a pretty freewheeling game, akin to the kind of heroics one might see at the movies or on TV. That said, the scale of play can be turned down to something more **GRITTY**, in which even a common militiaman with a sword can be a dangerous challenge. For this more realistic kind of game, starting abilities can be scaled down, but more effective is to be much more parsimonious handing out hero points, to ignore the **Plot Edit** rules, to make healing magic rare and also to use such options as **Weapons with Detail** and **Blind Hero Points** (in **CO&C RULES**) and **Pyrrhic Victories**, below. Alternatively, indulge in a game at the **BOGATYRS** level, making the heroes true movers and shakers of the land. This might be done by giving them exalted political or spiritual roles (they could, for example, all be rival princes of heirs to their respective thrones) or simply of great personal power: start them with higher keywords and more points with which to build up their abilities and keep the hero points as plentiful as the challenges are great. In such games, they may be leading armies and signing treaties from the first or else engaging in the kind of over-the-top heroics



found in folklore: throwing enemies over nearby mountains, drinking down rivers and cutting a path through a forest in a day.

What Kind of Game?

The default setting is, appropriately enough, **MYTHIC**: fantasy and folklore has been layered onto a foundation of genuine history and culture. However, the rules allow play to be entirely **HISTORICAL**, with magic and the supernatural completely relegated to people's imaginations. This particularly suits the more gritty kind of game, and as the setting is almost entirely anchored on historical fact, it is still entirely usable. Faith keywords and the like should still be used, as the abilities, traits and relationships are still relevant, and their cultural context ought to be stressed (there's little room for atheists in the fourteenth century!), but the magic can be ignored. At the other extreme is the **FAIRYTALE** game. This ought to be even more fantastical, and the Mortal and Ideal Worlds largely thought of as one, so any tree might speak, any fish



ROLEPLAYING FOR KIDS

Many roleplayers are, shall we say, in a more mature demographic and have children whom they would like to introduce to roleplaying. Setting games in fairytale-type realms and stories is a good way to do this. A few general points worth making are:

Keep death at bay: enemies can be knocked out, sent packing, or otherwise taught a lesson without the need for killing.

Closed-ended questions often work better than open ones at first: children may have great imaginations, but they may take some time to get used to using them in wide-open play. If 'what do you do now?' doesn't elicit a response, try presenting 2-3 options for them to choose from. They'll get used to taking a more active role.

Authority figures matter: Even confident children look for role models, and this also applies in play. Where adult players may chafe at the type of game which starts with them being given a 'mission', this is less likely often to be a problem with children, who can then concentrate on how they accomplish it. Likewise, praise from such figures can be very much appreciated.

Don't get hung up on the detail: It's most important that everyone has fun. If someone wants to be a wandering gladiator in Russia, just go with it rather than pointing out that Rome fell many centuries ago.

Or the rules: It's often best just to use the simplest of simple contests, at least with younger or less experienced players.

How long is enough? Different ages and children have different attention spans, but better several short (one hour?) sessions in which the fun can be kept sustained.

Support failure: Adult gamers often react badly enough to failures – to make it OK for children, consider offering alternate responses or even try to make it funny (a little slapstick)? Ultimately, though, this is also a learning opportunity, to show how sometimes things will go wrong, regardless – but that it need not be the end of everything, and there are always new opportunities.

could grant wishes. Such games often can dispense with much of the harder-edged information here – the Mongols can be a distant threat, while the focus is on personal quests, wooing princesses and saving golden horses from Baba Yaga. Indeed, this is often a good way to run games for children, using the Soft-Centre approach below.

What Kind of Approach?

This is the final means of tuning your game to your and your players' preferences. What kind of stories do they want to tell and hear? This ought to have some bearing

on how you narrate and what kind of characters are developed. **HIGH ADVENTURE** is the default, mixing all kinds of challenges and opportunities, but essentially rewarding exciting play and daring schemes. Let the villains plot for years in darkened chambers, heroes ought to draw their swords, kiss their doting mothers goodbye, and leap into action! Then there are subsets of this, such as the **MILITARY** game which stresses combat on both personal and mass level, **INTRIGUE**, which covers everything from espionage to foiling evil plots, and **EXPLORATION**, in which the heroes boldly go to new places, often in the hope of looting, conning, conquering or saving them. **DARK** games pit the heroes against overwhelming odds and/or an uncaring and essentially dangerous universe. In heroic or gritty games, this could see them trying desperately to hold back a new Mongol invasion or confront insidious plots of the Kam, in which everyone could be a secret spoiler or depraved cultist. Either way, this is a world of shadows and ambiguities, in which no one is entirely good or selfless and today's ally could easily be tomorrow's foe. An alternative is the **SOFT-CENTRE**, in which laughter is more important than horror. This fits especially well with fairytale games but also works for the heroic. Losers in battle are captured, beaten or simply knocked out; people are essentially good or irredeemably (and obviously) bad; and right triumphs at the end of every episode, just as it should.

How Is the Game Played?

The rules are in this book, but it is also worth being aware of just how the game is being played and thus if everyone is getting what they want out of it. For example, many groups game as much as anything else as a social activity: there is lots of out-of-character joking, the conversation veers off the game into general chit-chat, etc. This is fine, so long as it is what everyone (or at least a clear majority) want. However, there may be other players who really like to immerse themselves in the game and find all this an unwelcome distraction. Be aware of such potential tensions, and if necessary take time out during or, better yet, before or after the game explicitly to raise them. It may well be that 'social rules' can be established (for example, avoiding such conversations in play but having a short 'drink and chat' break every hour or two) which can satisfy everyone.

Of course, there are many other kinds of game and adventure, and also it always helps to vary the pace and tone from time to time.

RUSSIAN THEMES

Russian folklore and legend (and, indeed, history) does not always follow the same conventions as the familiar ones of Western Europe. Here are a few indications of how they differ, to ignore or adopt as you choose:

► **Virtue is not always its own reward.** The world is a tough place 9there is a reason why one of the words Russians use for 'life' is *borba*, 'struggle'). Good guys don't always win. The question is, are you willing to do



DESTINY

Prophesies and destinies figure large in Russian tales, but are hard to work into games. If a hero is told he cannot die in battle, what tension will there be in his next fight? In some cases, this can be resolved by the narrator and player agreeing on some future 'arc' for the hero, but options include the **twist in the tale**. If the player is abusing the destiny, the narrator can introduce some unexpected twist. Sure, the hero does not die in battle, but trips and breaks his neck while heading to the battle, or maybe does not die, but it permanently cripples. This is a last-ditch option, though. Far better to give the player control, to help him play a part in making an exciting story for everyone. For example, the **price of destiny**. A prophesy is given a rating, like any ability. It is used in a contest, but every time the player chooses to invoke it, the narrator can then also call on it that session, to introduce some complication of her choosing. For example, the hero with Will Not Die in Battle 20ff can use it to stay safe, but in that case the narrator will use it to say that as a result, a fearsome champion from the opposing side has deemed him a worth challenge. Alternatively, rely on **ambiguous omens** which both narrator and players can make what they choose or else finite or **conditional destiny**. What vedun worth his salt would simply say "you will not die in battle" when he could say "you will not die in battle until the red sun rises while you sleep." Does this refer to a simple red dawn, or is it a metaphor for a particular enemy, perhaps one who bears a red sun motif? Or did he say 'red son'? Such uncertainties can keep players engaged and on their toes, while giving the narrator scope for future story ideas.

the right thing, even though you know you'll probably fail? Such cosmic justice as there is generally concentrates on punishing the wicked, the stupid and the selfish, rather than rewarding the good.

► **Family and community matter.** When life is hard, you need to work together. Loners and rules-breakers may turn out to be heroes, but on the way are probably inconveniences to communities which rely on teamwork and conformity and are may fall foul of leaders, whether village elders, the monastery's abbot or a formidable grandmother. Everyone's business is everyone else's – friends will think nothing of borrowing your horse, and even a stranger might stop to give you some good (or bad) advice. Everyone also has some kind of family somewhere – and they can expect that family to call on them for favours and help, and nag them about wrapping up warm on winter days.

► **Hospitality and manners matter, too.** As a corollary of the above, there are basic rules to behaviour

that only the most wicked and alien entities ignore. You greet strangers with bread and salt, offer them a place by the stove for the night, and they in turn share what they have and do you no harm when under your roof. If an upyr is going to break those rules and plans to drink your blood, he would be expected to tell you first. Likewise, even Baba Yaga will give a peasant who treats her right a chance to escape being thrown into the cookpot. On the other hand, being *nekulturny*, boorish, is likely to bring trouble.

► **Generosity is the greatest virtue.** It is not just right to be generous, it proves your own wealth and confidence that tomorrow will be good. Even wicked or magical creatures respect this trait. It may not stop them from eating or killing you, but may mean that they give you that one last wish or final meal, just long enough for you to come up with some way of getting out of this plight.

► **If in doubt, laugh and drink!** Travellers to Russia were always surprised not just by the Russians' eagerness to drink themselves into a melancholy stupor but also their capacity to find joy and laughter in the hardest times. A Russian will find some bitter humour even in tragedy, and there is always a last bucket of vodka and a pickled fish for an impromptu party.

► **Expect Omens and Portents, even if you may not understand them until too late.** The world is not random or unformed, but full of meaning and purpose. This constantly manifests itself in all kinds of signs, omens and superstitions, even if they are rarely easy to understand.

► **Animals are People, Too.** Well, not necessarily, but they may be. In a world in which a surprising number of animals talk and think as humans, heroes often acquire animal sidekicks of one kind or another (talking or not). Furthermore, as each of the main species has its own Beast Tsar, wantonly mistreating one may eventually bring retribution, just as you never know when helping an animal in need will bring you unexpected assistance. It is not unusual for a hero to save an animal, only for this good deed to be repaid in an unexpected way days, week, even years later.

► **The Forest is not a place for Humans.** As the Russian proverb put it, "If you're afraid of wolves, don't go into the forest." The forest represents the deep, dark, magical wilderness before humans came with their fires and their axes, and it begrudges them every planted clearing, every whittled log. Stray from the river or the track and you can easily stumble into magical places, even the Otherworlds, and while creatures of the forest may be helpful to an individual human, especially a child or an innocent, they are by no means friendly to humankind as a whole.

THE NARRATOR'S TOOLKIT





The focus of **Mythic Russia** is the story, not the rules. Nothing is more galling than having to spend limited preparation time generating pages of game statistics instead of working on the characters, experiences, and surprises of the campaign. Let the narrative direct what happens, and turn to the rules only when drama demands that chance make the outcome uncertain. Apply common sense, and do not make a decision that seems wrong just because it is what the rules say to do.

THE FIRST RULE

The first rule for narrators is that this is your game now. In telling your story, do not confine yourself to events described in the rulebook. Instead, create the events your story demands. Change, ignore and develop whatever you want. Break the rules at will if it will make a better game for you and your players. To an extent, this depends on your own style and also your players' expectations. On the whole, though, if everyone is enjoying themselves and you are fair about it, no one will mind if, in effect, you cheat. If the heroes are having too easy a time of what was meant to be a climactic fight, then have some reinforcements arrive for the enemies increase their leader's ratings or give him some hero points of his own, enough not necessarily to tip the balance, but to make them feel like they really *earned* victory. Likewise, if the players have some wonderfully imaginative idea, even if the rules suggest that it shouldn't work, feel free to fudge things. Perhaps it kind of works, but leaves them in some precarious position with a new set of challenges:



see “Yes, but...” below.

HERO POINTS

Hero points are the currency of the game, because they allow the players to change their characters permanently or “cheat fate” at an opportune moment. And you, as narrator, control hero points. Start by giving players HP as suggested in the **HERO POINTS** chapter. However, if the heroes consistently crush their opponents because they have a large stock of HP, you are probably awarding too many. If the players can only afford to raise one or two abilities, or are reluctant to use them on bumps, you may be awarding too few. It is easier to start out giving too few HP than too many.

You might need to take into account how often you play **Mythic Russia**. If your group meets weekly, the heroes may advance too quickly if you give HP every session. On the other hand, if you play irregularly and there are long gaps of time in the game world between adventures, you may have to give out more at the end of each session to ensure that your players receive enough.

Free Abilities

You may assign gifts to a hero because of what happens in the story. You can give them a magical power or mundane ability at no cost in hero points; or a flaw, perhaps a fear or hatred. When you dispense these abilities consistently and plausibly it should help to make the hero's character sheet reflect what they are becoming.

HEROES

Heroes are beyond the ordinary. Compare your game with a TV or book series. The heroes are the permanent cast, the individuals chosen by the creators as the most interesting characters. They are both the focus of trouble and the ones who solve problems. Colleagues or allies who are not series regulars are just not as good at working things out as they are, regardless of their rank or supposed expertise.

Character Creation

This book assumes that beginner player heroes are competent and have heroic potential but are not yet among the mighty. Instead, you might want the characters to start as

ordinary farmers or advanced champions. Your **Mythic Russia** may be more or less tough to survive in than the norm. A simple way is to start young or inexperienced heroes with lower ratings (such as abilities at just 13 and only 15 extra points to distribute). Powerful heroes should start with higher ratings, perhaps 5¹¹ for



keywords, 20 for other abilities, and 25 or 30 points to distribute.

Remember that the rating of an ability reflects its impact on the game. Let's say that a player wants his hero to be the Strongest Man in the World. However, even putting all his points into that, he will not have a rating high enough to merit that title. One answer is simply to say that he is not the Strongest Man yet, but that he has the potential, so one of his motivations will be to develop to that level. Or maybe he once was the Strongest Man, but has suffered some failure that reduced his strength to merely heroic levels. His efforts to restore his strength to its previous level can then help to drive the story forward. Similarly, an item called The All-Powerful Eye of God might have the potential to become all-powerful, but it should start the game at a standard rating, perhaps reflecting that the hero is not fully attuned to it yet or does not know how properly to call on its powers.

You can use the advanced experience rules in **HERO POINTS** to develop experienced heroes. For minor improvements, however, just assign extra points or give a hero a particular skill or relationship. If you and the player agree that it would be interesting to have a hero begin with an overwhelming love or hatred, for example, just have him start with a higher rating. Just be sure that the hero and his passion do not become pivotal to the story at the expense of the other heroes. You could also permit secondary occupation or, in rare cases, homeland keywords. For example, a Russian who was enslaved as a teenager by Lithuanians before fleeing might have the Russian keyword at 15, Lithuanian at 9.

“Yes, but...”

Mythic Russia requires cooperative creation. Let the player help determine what is important or fun. When players insist on their actions, it is a sign that they are establishing their hero's character. Let them, when you can.

Players will come up with all sorts of wacky plans, schemes, and ideas. Your main job as narrator is to make sure that everyone is having a good time. To that end, you should cultivate a “Yes, but...” attitude when the players ask for something outrageous. Unless it will totally derail the game, try never to give a flat “No” to a request. “Yes, but...” allows you to give the player what he wants, as long as he understands that there is a downside to it.

Player: Can I have a Flaming Gaze?

Narrator: Yes, but you'll get a negative reaction from just about everyone you meet. You'll set stuff on fire.

Player: Can I jump across the Pit and attack the monster with my sword?

Narrator: Yes, but if you fail your Leap it's a long way down...

Player: I'll leap in front of the Kam's Cursed Spear before it hits the princess.

Narrator: How heroic! You'll save her life, but will probably die in the attempt.

Always give the player the consequences of the “but” before he goes ahead with the action — he might not have realized the circumstances, or perhaps he had a different picture of what was going on than you did. If he persists even after the “but,” then be sure to follow through with the consequences.

“How about...”

When you offer alternatives to players, do it in a way that will enliven the game:

“How about if you can make your gaze inflammable at will?”

You can use the occasion to state what you think the hero needs to do, perhaps as one of several options:

“OK, your hero can try to jump the chasm, but don't forget that you picked up the Greek's bow.”

Sometimes, however, you should just state the obvious:

“Or you could just drag the princess into the magic circle.”

CONTESTS

Mythic Russia does not have hard and fast rules for how long a contest takes to play out. You can emphasize an activity by making it an extended contest, or dispense with it quickly using a simple contest. One of your tasks is to use common sense and dramatic logic to determine how long it should take to complete a given task. Use the different contest types to pace the story's action. If you want to represent months of negotiations among squabbling princes with one simple contest, you can. But if you want to play out encounters with each minor potentate as detailed extended contests, you can do that too. You should not spend an entire session in a series of extended contests; one or two at climactic points is enough. Knowing when to use an automatic success, simple, or extended contest is an important part of being a narrator.

Give Everyone Something to Do

Nothing is more frustrating than having one player dominate every scene. Try to prepare encounters and situations that involve all the player heroes, or which give each of them a chance to shine. Even when there is a contest that one hero dominates, try to make sure everyone has something to do, whether it is taking on the villain's henchmen or just adding augments to the foremost hero. If you make some players sit around, they will soon go investigate your refrigerator or book pile instead of playing the game, and that is not why they (or you) are there.

Allow Repeat Attempts

Normally, a single contest covers all of a hero's attempts to over-come an obstacle. Time's passage allows for new



attempts, of course, and as narrator you control the passage of time. For example, failing to swim across a river deserves another try awhile later. The rule of “no repeat attempts” exists to give you the tool to shape opportunity. If another attempt contributes to the excitement, suspense, and fun, allow it. If it is just someone rolling again and again to get across the damn river when every-one else is already across, then just make it so! (Though perhaps with an appropriately embarrassing description.) Of course, you should not require a roll for unimportant or meaningless tasks in the first place.

Failure can be Good

Players often see failure as an unmitigated Bad Thing. However, in **Mythic Russia**, failure in a contest simply means that the hero did not set out to accomplish what he intended. Players ought to be encouraged to see this as just another episode in an exciting tale: how often, after all, does the hero in a story actually get the chance to win the day precisely because of some intervening failure, which leaves him captured (isn't that the best way to get into the villain's lair?) or means he takes a wrong turning which unexpectedly leads him to a new ally or opportunity. Thus failure generally should not lead to a dead end; maybe the alternative is harder, dangerous or unexpected, but it should generally be there. So the hero failed in his attempt to stop the Mongol spy escaping with the plans for Moscow's fortifications? That's not the end of the game, it's the start of a whole new episode, as the hero now has to try and find or chase down the spy to get them back!

Abilities

You will often have to decide how large a penalty a hero will receive for improvising an ability. By deciding how close the use of the ability is to the action, you can judge whether to apply no modifier, a slight modifier, a significant modifier, or a serious modifier. Unless broadly defined, most magical abilities cannot be improvised from. *Heal Dying* is very specific, and you might therefore rule that it can only be used to heal (or augment an ability used to heal) a patient who is dying. If the patient only suffers from a hurt, the magic would not help at all.

Simple vs. Extended vs. Episodic

In **Mythic Russia**, a whole battle can be resolved as a single simple contest, if it seems appropriate, just as a five-minute back-and-forth of repartee could be an extended contest. In general terms, keep extended contests to a minimum, and use them for especially dramatic moments.

There are some situation which could be considered episodic extended contests, in that each round takes place over an extended period of time. Actions taken in between rounds may give modifiers to the next roll, but new abilities may be used while the APs are retained as usual. This could be used, for example, to resolve a hero's efforts to woo the object of his affections from date to date, or a long-term trade war between mercantile houses.

One use of this particularly relevant to **Mythic Russia** is to track political intrigue. Obviously it is possible to measure a hero's standing with a ruler, city or other entity through his Relationship with them, but sometimes this is a more active process, and the hero is trying to build something stronger – such as seeking to be selected as a prince's heir or election as the next mayor of Novgorod. In this situation, the narrator should set a resistance and an AP total. These could be treated separately: for example, Constantinople's politics are fickle but also bureaucratic, so a long-term campaign to be recognised as Count of the Green Shore might face a relatively low resistance (as no one wants this now-empty title) but high AP (even so, it takes a long time to get any resolution). The resistance should be high enough to represent a serious challenge, but the narrator should freely apply modifiers based on the hero's actions between rounds – and of those supporting and opposing him. It may be appropriate to rule that hero points cannot be used in such momentous conflicts.

Example: Oleg's Ambition

After years of successful adventure as mercenary and kingmaker, Oleg returns to Novgorod and begins a campaign to be nominated as its new prince. The resistance is set at 5¹¹³ because his absence from the city and common birth count against him, with 65 AP. Last year, Oleg used his Famous General 20¹¹, with a +10 augment from his supporters (using the community support rules), giving him 50 AP and a bonus for his victory over marauding Lithuanians. He successfully reduces the resistance to 45 AP. Today, as he has just lost a duel, which would penalise his reputation for generalship, he decides instead to rely on his Wealth 1¹¹², representing generous gifts to mob and nobility alike. Unfortunately, his rival has managed to secure a new trade deal, so Oleg suffers a -5 penalty: even with his +10 bonus from his supporters, he is at 6¹¹², or 6 against the city's 5¹¹. Wisely, he bids just 5 AP, which he is not surprised to lose. If he is to do better next season, he better come up with something to improve his chances.



Chained Contest Results

| Player's Roll | Opponent's Roll | | | |
|-----------------|--|---|---|---|
| | Critical | Success | Failure | Fumble |
| Critical | Narrator decides outcome. | Opponent Hurt . If already hurt in this contest, Injured . If already injured, Dying | Opponent Injured . If already Injured in this contest, Dying | Opponent Dying : player has him at complete mercy. Contest is over. |
| Success | Player is Hurt . If already hurt in this contest, Injured . If already injured, Dying | Low roll wins +3 bonus to next action in contest. If tied, no effect. | Opponent Hurt . If already hurt in this contest, Injured . If already injured, Dying | Opponent Injured . If already Injured in this contest, Dying |
| Failure | Player is Injured . If already Injured in this contest, Dying | Player is Hurt . If already hurt in contest, Injured . If injured, Dying | Low roll wins +3 bonus to next action in contest. If tied, no effect. | Opponent Hurt . If already hurt in this contest, Injured . If already injured, Dying |
| Fumble | Player Dying : opponent has him at complete mercy. Contest is over. | Player is Injured . If already Injured in this contest, Dying | Player is Hurt . If already hurt contest, Injured . If already injured, Dying | Both make a mistake. No effect on contest. Side effects at narrator's discretion |

Optional Rule: Chained Contests

Some people find the AP rules hard to use or counter-intuitive. An alternative is to use Chained Contests. Essentially, this is a sequence of simple contests, with cumulative effects.

A simple contest is resolved by *each* side, with success levels determined as usual. Once both have their success level, these are compared on the Chained Contest Results table. After applying the results of this contest, run another and so on until a clear winner is decided – someone is too hurt to continue, surrenders, runs away, whatever.

Optional Rule: Pyrrhic Victories

In extended contests, but instead of just keeping a tally of current AP, also tally how many each participant loses in the course of the contest. At the end, resolve the contest usually but also assume that the victor suffers a level of 'damage' based on final AP minus total AP lost, using the Contest Consequences table as usual (so that if the winner had 25 AP, but in total had lost of 40, even if subsequent successes had brought him up to positive levels, nonetheless he is Injured, as indicated for 15 AP).

This means that long back-and-forth contests can be very bruising, and raises what may seem the paradoxical situation of a hero winning a contest, but ending up in a worst shape than his enemy. This is, however, intentional: first of all, the contest may not simply have been about who kills whom; the hero might have been holding the bridge while his friends escaped, for example, which he did successfully at terrible cost to himself. It also raises the question of just how badly a player wants to win: is the hero going to give up as things begin to look dangerous, or hang

in there in the hope of eventual victory, even as bones break and blood drips...?

Death

Death is a part of the world, and heroes risk it every time an insult is hurled, a weapon drawn, or magic flies. Death should not be completely absent, but neither should it be ubiquitous. Its threat must be present to lend excitement and meaning. To remove it completely trivialises the game and gives players a feeling of invulnerability that robs the game of tension. If they know they cannot be defeated then no drama exists.

Death never occurs simply because of a roll of the dice. It must always be a conscious decision on the part of the narrator or player. Players may wish to end the life of a villain or his henchmen, and may state "I kill him." How you handle this statement depends on your campaign, the circumstances of the story, and the importance of the villain in question.

At the low end of the scale of character importance, you might just say, "Okay, he's dead." This falls under the "No Self-respecting Hero" rule. Low-level guards and followers are easily disposed of in this manner. An especially bloody campaign might have even high-ranking villains dispatched by this method.

Midway up the scale of importance, you might want the player to roll a parting shot to actually inflict the fatal wound. This gives the villain a chance to duck away from the blow, possibly even turn the tables on the hero. Of course, the villain will resist the blow with his best ability, and not necessarily a combat ability. Fast Talk ("If you kill me you'll never know my secret."), Wealth ("My ransom is a thousand pieces of silver."), Relationships ("I am your father."), even Infectious



Laughter might stay the blow, at least long enough for the villain to escape.

At the top end of the scale, you might make the player use a hero point to “cement” the villain’s death. Sure, the villain plunges over the waterfall to certain death; but if the hero does not actually see the body, can he ever really be sure that he died? As narrator, you ultimately control if the villain stays dead or will return later, perhaps due to major healing magic or resurrection. Even if the villain does die, events may follow that the heroes are unprepared for, such as an angry son or vengeful mob of supporters, political repercussions, or feelings of remorse.

The Death of a Hero

The death of a hero is always difficult. Players have invested time, creativity, and concern in their heroes. The *rules* will never kill an important character — for example, a contest leaves a hero dying at worst. Nor should death be an accident: the heroes’ ship should not sink in the middle of the sea (sending them to a watery grave) without a reason. Instead, death should result from plot elements and failed opportunities. Death might come if a hero does something stupid, such as leaping off a thousand-foot cliff or into the ocean while in full armour. Both actions deserve a quick death unless the hero has taken some clever precautions; even then, although plot twists or bizarre circumstances can alter fate, you should not twist reality to suit the whim of foolish or manipulative players. If a hero does something stupid, regardless of your warnings, let him die.

Death may also come in heroic circumstances. Deliberate self-sacrifice for the greater good provides one of the most moving and meaningful moments in roleplaying. A single hero staying behind while his companions escape should not be trivialised. It might be that there will be some eleventh-hour escape, but

will this improve the game, or cheapen the player’s heroic actions?

When a hero dies or otherwise leaves, the player will want to continue to play in the game. The easiest way to do this is to allow him to play a new, yet equally competent character. How to work him into the game? This may be easier if you introduce the new hero during an adventure, as part of the story. Think of it as adding a new character to a TV show after a series regular leaves. He may be a new arrival, or promoted from a sea of background characters. Although this convention of series fiction may seem phoney, it is used again and again because it works emotionally. People want to relate to a small number of characters, and adventure narratives demand that the central heroes solve most problems.

There are many ways to rationalise the new hero. A follower might prove more capable than once thought, perhaps a prince in hiding or a magician testing the heroes to see if they were worthy of his aid. There may be forces that will not let their purpose fail— if one servant falls, they send a new one. A relative of the hero, perhaps a brother or cousin, may show up to avenge his death or take advantage of his glory.

It’s Their World, Too

As narrator, you have the task of presenting the world as a place of adventure. However, the players will have more fun (and your job will be easier) if you let them help with presenting and even creating the world. Let the players provide story elements, create minor bits of scenery or bystanders, reinterpret backstory to suit the current plot, and so on. If you do not know the details of a culture or what kinds of animals live in an area, do not contradict a player who suggests something just to “stay in control.”

Some Russian Terms

| Word | Pronunciation (stress on syllables in capitals) | Meaning and usage |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Auntie | | Affectionate term for any older woman |
| <i>Babushka</i> | BA-bush-ka | Grandmother (affectionate term for any older woman) |
| <i>Da</i> | DAH | Yes |
| <i>Dedushka</i> | DYEH-dush-ka | ‘Little Father’, Grandfather (affectionate or respectful term for any older man or a monk or priest) |
| <i>Dos vidanya</i> | DOSS-vee-dan-ya | Good bye |
| <i>Durak</i> | Doo-RAK | Idiot |
| <i>Eto zhizn</i> | AIR-tah ZHEEZN | Such is life (typically a resigned comment when things go wrong) |
| <i>Khorosho</i> | Ko-ro-SHO | OK |
| <i>Molodets!</i> | Ma-la-DYETS! | Good Man! Well Done! |
| <i>Muzhik</i> | MOO-zhik | Peasant |
| <i>Nyet</i> | NYET | No |
| <i>Pozhaluista</i> | Pa-ZHAH-lass-ta | You’re welcome, or Please |
| <i>S novym godom</i> | Ss NO-vim Ga-DOM | Happy New Year |
| <i>Slava bogu!</i> | SLA-va bag-OO | Glory to God! (exclamation of pleasure or surprise) |
| <i>Spasibo</i> | Spass-SEE-bo | Thank you |
| <i>Tsar</i> | ZAR | Emperor (Russia has no tsar yet, though) |
| <i>Verst</i> | VERST | Unit of distance: 2/3 mile or around 1 km |
| <i>Zdrastvuite</i> | ZDRAS-vwee-tveh | Hello |





Languages

Language is one of the factors that keep different peoples isolated, but in play it is often something worth ignoring or only applying when relevant to the story. Follow literary convention and let characters from different cultures converse freely. Any character with a rating in a language automatically succeeds in understanding and speaking it in simple conversation, as any self-respecting hero would. Only especially challenging or sophisticated uses of language require contests.

A Little Russian Goes A Long Way

A separate language-related issue is how heavily to use Russian words and idioms. In most cases, the answer is probably as little as possible. Some use, especially when relating to particularly distinctive features or characters (*volkhv* rather than priest, for example) helps distinguish the setting. However, if you find yourself saying that “the *muzhik* invites you into his *izba*” then ask yourself if this really is better than saying “the peasant invites you into his hut.” That said, a smattering of words, proverbs and expressions can help create the mood of the setting, as well as the occasional use of accents (perhaps to make non-Russians more identifiably foreign).

Indeed, the Russians have a great passion for proverbs, some obvious, some truly opaque. Many are scattered through the book, and others are given here. After all, the peasant elder could just tell the heroes that the ‘adulterer’ they caught is innocent, but it is more evocative if instead he mutters “Sasha rustled the sheep and the wolf gets the blame.”

Mass Effort

Mass effort is any contest that involves large numbers of individuals to work together, such as a battle between armies, a race between rowing teams, or governing a town. Such conflicts should not be run as an extended contest where each side has thousands of AP. Instead, individuals are subsumed within the whole military unit, group of rowers, or political organisation. Most people have mass effort skills as part of their occupation — soldiers fight in formation, sailors sail a ship, and so forth. A [Mass Effort] rating represents a hero’s ability to follow leaders, take pride in his group, and work as a member of a team. If he has no relevant mass effort ability, he may use any appropriate keyword or ability with an improvisational modifier. Thus, trained soldiers have a [Unit Style Mass Combat] ability, while other heroes would have to use their highest fighting ability with perhaps a -10 modifier.

In a contest, average the [Mass Effort] abilities of the members, then add any augmentation from leadership abilities, magical aid from a guardian, and the like. Circumstances can also affect the rating. Next, refer to the Community Support table in **PERSONALITY & RELATIONSHIPS**. The size of the support bonus added to the group rating depends not only on the number of

Some Russian Proverbs

- “A lone man in a field is not a warrior”
- “Beware of a quiet dog and still water.”
- “Don’t dig a hole for somebody else; you’ll fall into it.”
- “Even a Bishop will steal if he’s hungry.”
- “Even a sick wolf can kill a lamb.”
- “Fear not the clever enemy, but the foolish friend.”
- “Following the hare’s tracks may lead you to the bear’s den.”
- “God comes with leaden feet, but strikes with iron hands.”
- “He who does not weep in this world will weep in the next.”
- “If you want to find the Devil, look behind the cross.”
- “It never troubles the wolf, how many the sheep may be.”
- “Nobody has seen the Devil, but everyone blames him.”
- “Not all who walk with long knives are cooks.”
- “Poverty is clever.” (Necessity is the mother of invention)
- “Save your food for tomorrow, but do your work today.”
- “Stormy weather cannot last for ever; the red sun will come out, too.”
- “The beauty of a house lies not in its walls, but its pies.”
- “The church is near, but the road is icy; the tavern is far, but I’ll be careful!”
- “The fool will cook a feast; the wise man will eat it for him.”
- “The further into the woods you go, the more logs you’ll find.”
- “The icon and the axe come from the same tree.”
- “The scythe ran into a stone.” (The immovable object and the irresistible force)
- “Trouble never comes alone.” (It never rains but it pours)
- “Two bears don’t live in one lair” (This [whatever] isn’t big enough for the two of us)
- “What soberness conceals, drunkenness reveals.” (In vino, veritas)
- “When the woodsman swings his axe, the chips will fly.” (You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs)
- “Who is silent, is guilty”
- “You go up the hill and the devil grabs your foot.”
- “You need a sharp axe, for a tough bough.”

members, but also on their level of commitment and how effectively they work together. For an organised and motivated group, use the total support bonus for their membership. However, groups suffering from clashes of egos, lack of organisation, or the like might provide only 1/2 or 1/10 of this bonus, or even none. This is when a leader is valuable. Mass effort needs a leader, for without proper leadership some of the participants often do more harm than good. The leader must use an appropriate leadership ability (such as *Prince of City*) or a related [Mass Effort] ability. He can augment the group rating with this ability, but more importantly, he can use it to motivate and organise the group so that it gains a better bonus. If the leader is a hero, you may or may not require that he engage in a separate contest to do this. The [Mass Effort] rating is matched against a resistance (often an opposing group’s).

Mass effort is such that most heroes cannot affect the outcome directly. Heroes who want to determine



individual outcomes, however, can engage in a separate contest. To see how they fare, have them use an appropriate ability (such as Survive Battle or [Mass Effort]), modified by any penalty from their group's defeat.

Wealth

The Wealth rating represents not only the cash (or goods) on hand, but also the ability to borrow small sums of money, ease of getting credit, reputation for honest dealing, and other nontangible sources of wealth. *Bargaining* (or similar abilities) can be used to augment Wealth. Groups can pool their money using the normal augmentation rules.

Bartering and Looting

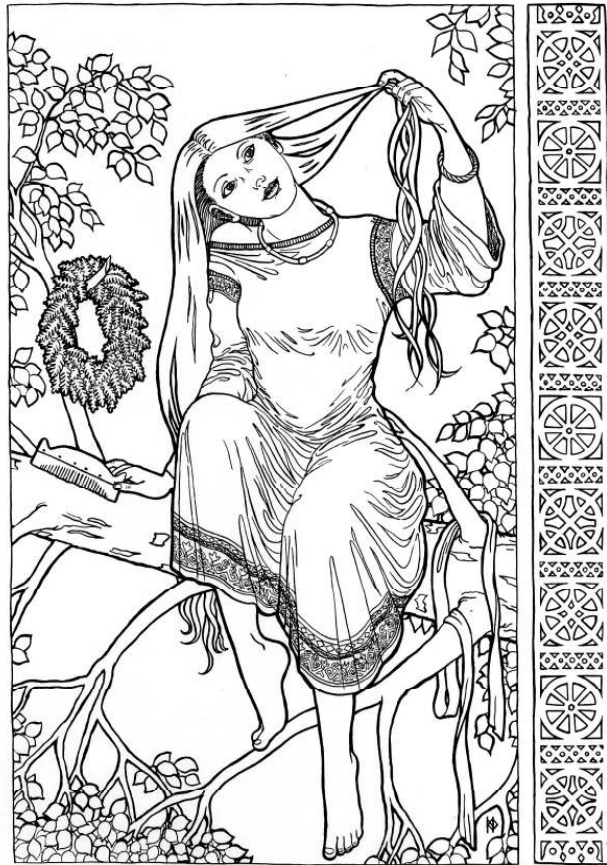
Not everything needs to be bought: most trade is by barter, swapping items for other items of similar value. Your hero will also pick up magical and valuable loot or gifts in the course of play. The most obvious fairytale examples are the magic weapons or items, but any item can have an ability, even if just simply very well made. Either way, such items are abilities, and begin with a rating of 13 or more, to be used on their own as a distinct ability or else, more often, as augments.

Just finding loot does not mean that you permanently gain the items in question or your Wealth rating increases. Unless you cement specific acquisitions with hero points, the narrator may decide they have disappeared by the next session, frittered away buying drinks, sacrificed to the gods or otherwise lost. 'Liberating' that casket of silver from the wicked tax collector will only increase your Wealth if you also spend hero points increasing it — but it would explain the increase, so the narrator will charge you the lower cost for increasing an ability, considering it related to that session's play.

Spending Money

These price lists are intended to be a crude standard for the world of **Mythic Russia**. They are provided to help the narrator and players gauge the relative value of various things. Any place will have a variant of this list. Some "standard variations" are: an item is always less expensive close to its origin; an item is always less expensive where it is common; seasons make food prices wildly variable; shortages tend to make things more valuable. In all cases, normal accoutrements of the item are included in the price. Thus, armour includes padding underneath, a saddle includes a blanket and stirrups, etc.

If the cost of something is half your Wealth or less, you can pretty much buy it there and then, out of your pocket change. It's yours. If you try to abuse this by, for example, buying ten such items in quick succession, then your irritated narrator will roll them all into one total Cost, though, so don't.



If the cost is greater, this requires a contest of your Wealth against the cost. Defeats mean that you fail to buy the item, or else may get the item but lose one or more points of Wealth. You can also seek to buy items costing more than your Wealth, but in these circumstances you definitely have had to liquidate some assets to afford it and even on a success you will lose Wealth typically equal to $1/5^{\text{th}}$ of the difference between your Wealth and the cost, and at least 1.

Example: Demetrea needs a new horse (Cost 5m), but her Wealth is merely 20. She successfully pits her 20 against 5m, but as the horse costs more than her Wealth, the narrator decides that she has to trade her favourite amber bracelet (an item made up on the spur of the moment) and her Wealth falls to 19.

Making Money

These are the costs to buy something retail; if you are selling, expect to gain wealth equal to $1/10$ the price shown, but unless cemented with a hero point, the extra wealth will disappear at the start of the next episode. The normal way of trading is to barter goods (or services) for items of equal wealth, rather than selling them and accumulating the wealth. To reflect this, it costs a hero point to cement Wealth gained through selling, but not to cement the ownership of a purchased item.



Some Typical Costs

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Cost</i> | <i>Item</i> | <i>Cost</i> | <i>Item</i> | <i>Cost</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Leather armour | 15 | Horse, war | 18m | Hire a mercenary, daily | 20 |
| Chainmail shirt | 5m | Horse, pack | 20 | Hire bearer, daily | 10 |
| Western plate armour | 1m3 | Horse, riding | 5m | An ounce of pure gold | 10m |
| Shield | 15 | Cow | 15 | An ounce of pure silver | 5m |
| Sword | 5m | Bull | 5m | Space in a public room | 5 |
| Spear | 10 | Goat, pig, sheep | 5 | Private single room | 15 |
| Crossbow | 3m | Trained dog | 10 | One week of preserved rations | 10 |
| Commoner's clothing | 5 | Troika | 20 | Build poor shack | 10 |
| Prosperous clothing | 10 | Hire a healer's help (for a Hurt) | 10/Hurt | Build peasant hut | 10m |
| Rich clothing | 1m+ | (for Injured) | 10m+ | Build small shrine | 10m |
| Locally-made book or scroll | 10 | (for Dying) | 10m2+ | Build rich country house | 1m3 |

Example: Alexei, Boris and Chingiz have each been rewarded with an ounce of pure silver (worth 5m). Alexei swaps his for a new sword (also worth 5m). Boris buys writing supplies (cost 5), and sells the remainder of the silver: it was worth 20, so he receives 2 Wealth, which he then spends a Hero Point to add to his Wealth ability. Chingiz needs to build a shrine to his patron spirits (Cost 10m) – however, with the 5m from the silver, the remaining Cost is only 5, which he can cover easily with his own resources.

SCENARIOS VS. SETTINGS

Some narrators like to run carefully pre-programmed games in which there is a clear linear path. Essentially, the idea is that the players will have the most fun if they are encouraged (or forced) to follow this path and reach the intended denouement. And that's fine.

Others create a setting full of potential conflicts, story hooks and possibilities, albeit with some sense of a wider timeline or possible outcomes. Then they just see where the heroes' own actions, interests and interactions take them. And that's fine, too.

The fact of the matter is that there is no right way to run **Mythic Russia**, except whichever way suits you and your players. The sample adventure in this book, **WOOD, BLOOD & SNOW**, is much closer to the latter: it creates a situation full of potential events and conflicts, injects into it heroes who all have their own agendas, and sees what happens.

However, the approach to adopt will often depend on what your players overtly and implicitly say to you. Some want to sit back and be the **cast** in your story. In other words, they are happy to be driven along a pre-planned route, trusting that you'll show them great sights and take them somewhere exciting, and confine their ingenuity to providing situational responses to

the challenges you throw at them. This kind of player is also typically happy with the kind of scenario which is assigned to them by a higher power: the prince/the Great Khan/the talking sparrow tells them they have to go do something or other...

Others want to be **co-producers**, in that they will be happier not just finding their own roads to a goal but also deciding what that goal will be. The story lines thus become more dependant on what motivates them and their heroes. One hero, for example, might have the long-term goal of finding his long-lost father, so the start of an adventure might be when he hears a rumour of a Russian captive who has languished for years as a Lithuanian slave. Whether he follows up on this tale (he ought: generally it is good gaming etiquette not to ignore such plotohooks the narrator dangles) is up to him; more to the point, so is exactly what he does about it. Likewise, the player can tell the narrator what his hero intends to do next (travel across Russia looking for his father, set up in some city and spread the word, whatever) – although again it is good etiquette to ensure that these plans do not directly impede how one of the other players wants to develop the story. Co-production works best when it is genuinely collaborative, not just between players and narrator, but also between the players.





22. BEASTS, HEROES & SPIRITS

“You can catch a goose, but can you hold onto it?”

The heroes of **Mythic Russia** will interact with all kind of people, monsters, animals and otherworldly entities – some will be allies, some enemies and others just passing through. This chapter provides details of some, but it is worth noting a few differences with the kind of ‘encounters’ familiar in fantasy roleplaying games.

First of all, the main antagonists heroes will face will not be generic monsters but individuals: one-off spirits, named animals or beasts or, far more likely, other humans. Thus, many of these entries are for people rather than ‘monsters’.

Secondly, variations are given in many cases. Where an encounter is unimportant, it is often not necessary to consider the details – a passing bear is a passing bear, unless the narrator wants it to be a talking one or else it is bothered or decides the bother the heroes. Generic encounters can often simple be abstracted to a single number, such that the pesky mink that is preying on the heroes’ chickens, and which he has vowed to catch this night, can simply be considered Sneaky Mink 5M of whatever. In order to help the narrator insert some variety when she wants to get into more detail, options are provided for many of these entries.

Thirdly, a surprising proportion of the animals of **Mythic Russia** are intelligent, talking possibly magical. Such animals will often have special powers, from the fish who promises to grant a wish if he is thrown back into the water to the cat who can sniff out traitors. This is a convention of the genre and should feature in the more magical games, but it should very much follow the dictates of the story. If, say, every twentieth pig is intelligent and voluble, then the farmer’s job will become a difficult one indeed! Intelligent animals make good narrator’s tools (such as the songbird which tells the heroes which way the bad guys went), sidekicks and allies, but should not crop up at every turn.

Definitions

This chapter gives typical abilities for common examples of various people and entities; large and exceptional creatures and leaders have higher ratings and more abilities. The narrator should adjust the numbers to fit her vision and challenge the heroes.

Typical Abilities: Only skills useful for play or of particular note are included. This indicates, in most cases, that entity’s specialty. These might be physical abilities, behavioural traits or innate magical abilities. It will also include any weapons and armour – weapons are typically as a bonus listed with the appropriate ability (such as Bite 17 +2).

Large and Small: Many creatures possess a Large or Small ability to reflect a size significantly different than that of humans. Ordinary humans are assumed to have no Large or Small, so these figures denote deviations away from the human scale. Thus, a horse has Large 5M, while a rat is Small 15M.

Generic Magic: Many entities have a generic kind of magic listed, such as ‘Sea Magic.’ Treat this as, in effect, an affinity from which they can improvise appropriate specific feats (such as, in this case, Raise Wave, Breathe Sea Water, Command Sea Fish or, with an additional improvisational penalty, Breath Fresh Water).

Unharmd by Non-magical Weapons: Many supernatural creatures cannot be harmed by non-magical weapons. When a hero engages such a creature in a contest, a purely mundane attack is not an appropriate ability if his goal is to harm the creature (although it can be used to defend against them). Fighting abilities augmented by magic are appropriate abilities in such a contest, although the attacker should not gain a bonus from an ordinary, non-magical sword.

HEROES, VILLAINS & PASSERS-BY

These are convenient templates for various types of people who may be encountered in Mythic Russia. They are, of course, purely indicative and can be modified

however the story requires. After all, even a simple Russian muzhik could turn out to be a saint or tsar of the Otherworlds in disguise...





Peasant

Keywords: Russian 20, Farmer 20, Initiate of [pagan god or Christian saint or both] 17

Typical Abilities: Brawl 17, Community-Minded 20, Likes A Drink 20, Love Family 5M, Works Hard 5M.

Variations: This template can also be used for the **Village Craftsman** (Crafter 20 instead of Farmer). Typical Stereotypes include the **Sly Rogue** (Cunning 10M, Amoral 20, and who may have the Thief keyword instead), the **Man Who Knows** (Ear to the Ground 5M, Eye for a Bargain 20, Nose Out What's Going On 20), the **Head of the Family** (Booming Laugh 10M, Love Family 20M), the **Village Drunk** (Mournful Drunk or Happy Drunk or Belligerent Drunk 10M, Sense Presence of Alcohol 5M, Luck of the Drunk 20). Depending on the location, the peasant may be a Devotee instead of an Initiate, and many will also have Axe Fighting or Archer 17.

Village Elder

Keywords: Russian 5M, Farmer 15M, Devotee of [saint or god or both] 5M.

Typical Abilities: Bamboozle Social Superior 5M, Find Compromise 2M, Relationship to Village 1M2, Tell Long Pointless Story 10M.

Variations: If the appointed **Starosta**, the lord's representative in the village, then Bamboozle Social Superior may be replaced with Creep to Social Superior, and Find Compromise with Bully Villager. Typical variations include the **Grandmother** (Berate Youngster 1M2, Womanly Wisdom 20M) and the **Veteran** (has the Warrior keyword, Sword Fighting 10M and Tell Tall Stories of Own Adventures 15M).

Child

Keywords: Russian 12, Child 15

Variations: There's the **Scrappy Kid** (Find Trouble 17, Run Like Hell 20, Throw Stone 20), the **Precocious Kid** (Unexpected Knowledge 17), the **Little Monster** (Graze Shin 17, Scream and Scream 20, Want Sweet 17) and many more... The keywords can be modified up or down to reflect the child's age.

River Boatman

Keywords: Russian 20, Sailor 5M, Initiate of [saint or god] 20

Typical Abilities: Hard Worker 5M, Stay Upright and Working While Drunk 20.

Variations: There are also **River Pirates** who will have Archer or Axe Fighting 20 and Ruthless 5M.

Hunter

Keywords: Russian 20, Hunter 5M, Initiate of [pagan god or Christian saint or both] 17

Typical Abilities: Archer 5M, Get Best Price for Furs 20

Variations: This is the template for a classic hunter of fur or food. It can also be used for a specialised **Bear Hunter** (Archer 5M, Fearless 1M, Set Trap 5M), for a

military **Scout** (Assess Enemy Forces 5M, Camouflage 20, Stay Still 20) or the **Bandit** (also has Axe Fighting and Ambush 20).

Townsperson

Keywords: Russian 20, Crafter 20 or Farmer 20, Initiate of [pagan god or Christian saint or both] 17

Typical Abilities: Know Home Town 10M, Known In Home Town 10M.

Variations: Many of the Peasant stereotypes apply. Some may have specialisms which should replace the keyword, such as a **Healer** or **Thief**.

Merchant

Keywords: Russian 20, Merchant 5M, Devotee or Initiate of [saint or god or both] 20

Typical Abilities: It's a Deal! 5M, Well Known in the Market 10M.

Variations: This is a merchant working from a shop or barrow in a town. A **Travelling Peddler** might not have Well Known in the Market but instead Sleep Rough and Walk Far 10M and Quick To Make Friends 20. A **Slave Dealer** might have Unsentimental 10M and Whip 20 +2. Assistants, guards, skills and sidekicks are quite common for the more successful.

Russian Soldier

Keywords: Russian 20, Foot Soldier 20, Initiate of [pagan god or Christian saint or both] 17

Typical Abilities: Berdysk or Axe Fighting 5M +3, Forage 20, Mass Combat 20. Mail shirt and shield +4

Variations: This is a standard urban soldier. A **Conscripted Militiaman** may have just Foot Soldier 17 and maybe Reluctant Warrior 20 and have a Padded Coat +1 for armour. On the other hand, a **Grizzled Veteran** might have Foot Soldier 5M-15M, Seen It All Before 5M and Me Old War Wound 20. A staple of Russian folklore is the **Comic Soldier**, who also has Entertaining Pratfalls, Droll Wit or Amusingly Dim 10M, but may offset that with Fights Like a Fury When Roused 5M. A **Crossbowman** would have Fire Crossbow 20 +4 and a mail shirt +3. An **Officer** (with Lead troops 5M) will also have appropriate followers.

Dvorianin

The petty local gentry – the pettiest are closer to the Village Elder, while the Boyar works best for the richest.

Keywords: Russian 20, Noble 5M, Initiate of [pagan god or Christian saint or both] 17.

Typical Abilities: Bully Villagers or Relationship to Villagers 5M, Keep Up Appearances 5M, Mounted Combat 1M.

Variations: Archetypes include the **Titled Bully** (Order Cossacks About 20, Take Offence Easily 20 Whip Peasant 5M), the **Caring Batyushka** (Adjudicate Village Disputes 10M, Find Solutions 20, Get On With Everyone 20), the **Ennobled Commoner** (often has an occupational keyword at a relatively high level





instead, plus Awkward in New Office 20 or Snob 20, Relationship to Prince 20) and the **Druzhina Captain** (who might also have the Cavalry Soldier [Regular] keyword, and in any case Ride 1M2, Mounted Combat 1M2, Sword Fighting 10M and Lead Troops 10M). They will generally have appropriate followers: from a few slaves to a squad of cavalry retainers and a household of servants.

Boyar

The greater aristocracy of Russia, typically at home in the cities or great landed estates.

Keywords: Russian 20, Noble 1M2, Initiate of [pagan god or Christian saint or both] 20

Typical Abilities: Politics of [Home City] 5M, Relationship to [Prince] 5M, Airs & Graces 5M.

Variations: Many will have greater levels of Initiation or even be Devotees and high levels of Wealth. Stereotypes include the **Traditional Boyar** (Conservative 10M, Honourable 20M), the **Muscovite Opportunist** (Opportunist 20M, Quick to Adapt 10M), the **Novgorodian Magnate** (may also have the Merchant keyword at 20, or Know Commerce 10M, and Wealthy 1M3), the **Martial Leader** (Lead Troops 1M2, Inspiring Speech 20M, Tactics 5M) and the **Idle Wastrel** (Spend Money 20M, Know Best Parties 1M2, Public Vices 10M, Secret Vices 10M), while there is also the specialised **Terem Lady** (Lady-like Pursuits 20M, Cloistered Life 20M and/or Bored 20, Sheltered 10M or Desperate for a Change 10M). Followers and sidekicks are common.

Orthodox Priest

Keywords: Russian 1M, Priest 10M, Devotee of [Saint] 8M.

Typical Abilities: Sonorous Voice 20, Know Parishioners 5M.

Variations: This is a common village priest, who might well also have Farming 17; a **Bishop** might have Priest 1M2 and Devotee 20M. Typical stereotypes include the **Fat Priest** (Fat 1M, Greedy 5M), the **Zealot** (Devotee 20M, Hate Pagans 15M, Whip Up Mob 5M) and the **Backslider** (Priest 20, Devotee 17, Anything for a Quiet Life 20M, Avoid Work 15M, Take Bribes 20).

Monk

Keywords: Russian 20, Priest 17, Devotee of [saint] 5M

Typical Abilities: Obedient 10M.

Variations: A **Monk-Healer** might have the Healer keyword instead, a **Copyist** Read & Write Russian 5M, Illuminate Manuscript 5M and Work In Dim Light 20. A **Senior Monk** might even have the Noble keyword, and in any case would have such attributes as Self-Righteous 10M, Instruct Brethren 20M and Church Politics 10M.

Wise Woman

Keywords: Russian 10M, Healer 5M, Devotee of [pagan god] 20M

Typical Abilities: Disconcerting Cackle or Motherly Bosom 10M, Good Memory 10M, Put Youngster in Place 20, Tell Parable 5M.

Variations: Many will have some standalone magical powers such as Command Man, Heal Cattle, See Future in Moon or Speak to Dead.

Pagan Volkhv

Keywords: Russian 10M, Priest 5M, Devotee of [pagan god] 20M

Typical Abilities: Know Worshipers 10M, Passionate About Old Ways 15M.

Variations: Many will have much greater power, as well as some standalone magical powers such as Close Wound, Command Animal, Fly or Shape Metal with Bare Hands. Human, magical or animal sidekicks are also common.

Scholar

Keywords: Russian 20, Scholar 10M, Devotee of [saint] or Initiate of [saint or god] 5M.

Typical Abilities: Esoteric Personal Specialism 20M, Long-Winded Exposition 20, Make Birchbark Scroll 20.

Variations: A **Monkish Scholar** would also have Piety 10M and Know Church Texts 1M2. Variations include the **Treasurer** (Accountant 1M2, Read Birchbark Accounts 20M), the **Family Historian** (Know Patron Family's History 20M, Embellish Patron Family's History 5M2) and the **Cartographer** (Make Map 10M, Geographer 20).

Entertainer

Keywords: Russian 20, Entertainer 10M, Devotee of [god] or Initiate of [saint] 5M

Typical Abilities: Cheeky Good Cheer 20.

Variations: The pagan **skoromokhs** have Devotee 15M and maybe Relationship to Bear 5M or Magical Songs 15M.

Foreign Adventurer

This is the kind of foreigner most likely to be encountered in Russia, a competent adventurer.

Keywords: [Homeland] 10M, [Occupation] 15M, Devotee of [deity] 15M.

Typical Abilities: As appropriate – typically a professional skill at 20M and a reason for being there, such as Adventurous, Exile or Fugitive.

Variations: This terribly broad category includes everyone from the **Lithuanian Mercenary** (Warrior 15M, Sudlice Fighting 20M, Devotee of Kovas 15M, Resent Catholic 5M) to the **Greek Merchant** (Merchant 15M, Exotic Appeal 20, Know What Sells in Constantinople 20M).



Teutonic Knight

Keywords: Teutonic Knight 2M, Devotee of St George of the Teutons 2M, Cavalry Soldier (Shock) 10M.

Typical Abilities: Arrogant 5M, Disciplined 10M.

Variations: The **Half-Brothers** may be Foot Soldiers (Shock) instead, with ratings possibly of only 20. More experienced Knights will have higher ratings and may also devote to another saint. **Priests** among them have Priest 1M2, Devotee of St George of the Teutons 1M2 and another saint 20M, and some trait such as Foaming Zealot, Inspirational Leader or Born Martyr 10M. See the next chapter for the elite flying **Rauhewesteritter**.

Cossack

Keywords: Cossack 5M, Nomad 10M, Devotee of [saint] 5M

Typical Abilities: Ride 15M, Wilderness Survival 10M, Free Spirit 10M.

Variations: This is the baseline Cossack. A **Soldier** would instead have Cavalry Soldier 15M, a **Personal Retainer** the same, plus Relationship to Master 10M, Whip 10M +2 and Bully Peasant 5M.

BEASTS

Talking Animals

At a minimum, talking animals ought to get Speak Russian 17. Most will also have at least one additional quirky ability such as Know Forest Secrets or Mathematical Genius and a character trait such as Grumpy or Helpful. Many will also have one or more innate magical abilities or they may even have a keyword, like the bear who is also a Devotee of Perun the Thunderer or the goose who is an Initiate of St Tryfon. Ability ratings can default to 17, but in practice should be determined by the narrator to best suit the needs of the story.

Bear

Bears are mighty beasts; they rarely attack humans for food, but many become violent if they or their cubs are threatened. Bears come under the jurisdiction of Tsar Medved, King Bear – see below.

Typical Abilities: Charge Foe 2M, Forage 5M, Grapple and Bite 8M +4, Large 15M, Move Quickly 15, Scent Intruder 15M, Strong 10M, Swim 19. Fur and thick skin +2.

Variations: for a **Polar Bear**, Endure Cold 1M2, Large 17M, Swim 5M.

Mongol

Keywords: Mongol 2M, Nomad 5M, [Little Ancestor] 20, Devotee of [Great Ancestor] 5M.

Typical Abilities: Endurance 5M, Horse Archer 10M, Ride 10M.

Variations: This is a normal Mongol. A **Warrior** will have the Cavalry Soldier keyword, Horse Archer 15M, Mounted Combat 10M and Sabre Fighting 10M. A **Noble** will have the Noble keyword, Mounted Combat 10M, Sabre Fighting 10M and Assert Authority 15M.

Sibiryak

Keywords: Sibiryak 10M, Nomad 10M, Initiate or Devotee of [Shape] 5M.

Typical Abilities: Quiet 20, Relationship to Community 5M.

Variations: There are others distinguished by their occupational keyword, such as **Crafters**, **Healers**, **Hunters** or even **Warriors**. A **Chieftain** might have Authority in Clan 10M, Know Old Ways 20M and Devotee 10M. Sibiryaks who have spent much time amongst the Russians might have Know Russian Ways 20, and perhaps also a Flaw such as Addicted to Vodka or Losing Touch With Sibiryak Ways 20.

Bird

Typical Abilities: Claws 10, Aerobatics 10M, Fly Fast 15, Small 20.

Variations: This is a largish bird; a **Bird of Prey** such as a falcon will also have Pounce 2M and Spot Prey 18M; an **Eagle** has a bird of prey's stats but Small 10; a **Goose** has Peck 10, no Fly Fast, and Honk Alarm 17.

Deer

Deer are generally harmless and flee at the slightest sign of danger. Male and female deer live in separate herds which come together only during the autumn rut.

Typical Abilities: Dodge Combat 18, Hide in Cover 15M, Large 10, Leap 12, Nervous 18, Scan for Danger 18, Scent Predator 12M, Sprint 18M. Males only have Wrestle with Antlers 13 +2.

Dog

Typical Abilities: Bark 15, Bite 18 +1, Run Fast 15, Scent 17, Small 10, Work As Pack 17.

Variations: for a **Large Dog**, Bite 20 +2, Small 5. For a **Very Large Dog**, Bite 20 +2, no Small. Trained **fighting dogs** get +5 to their Bite; herding dogs get Herd Flock 17; specialist **trackers** have Scent 10M. **Domesticated** dogs usually have Loyal to Master(s) 10M.





Cow/Bull

Typical Abilities: Butt 15 +1, Large 5 \mathbf{M} , Run Fast 18, Strong 5 \mathbf{M} . Thick skin +1. Bulls also have Charge 2 \mathbf{M} .

Deer

Typical Abilities: Dodge Combat 18, Hide in Cover 15 \mathbf{M} , Large 10, Leap 12, Nervous 18, Scan for Danger 18, Scent Predator 12 \mathbf{M} , Sprint 18 \mathbf{M} . Males only have Wrestle with Antlers 13 +2.

Horse

Typical Abilities: Jump 18, Kick 15 +1, Large 5 \mathbf{M} , Run Fast 10 \mathbf{M} , Strong 2 \mathbf{M} . Thick skin +1.

Variations: **Different breeds** may have one of Sure-Footed 3 \mathbf{M} , Run Fast 20 \mathbf{M} , Run Long Distance 3 \mathbf{M} , or Strong 12 \mathbf{M} .

Mammoth

Mammoths are hairy elephants that generally no longer live on the Mortal Realm, but do inhabit northerly and eastern parts of the Ideal World, and sometimes stumble through the Veil, as individuals or small family herds of . Mammoths travel as solitary males or in small herds led up to 5 adults and 2-5 young.

Typical Abilities: Gore 2 \mathbf{M} +4, Hardy 18 \mathbf{M} , Large 2 \mathbf{M} 2, Run Fast 2 \mathbf{M} , Scent Food 15, Strong 18 \mathbf{M} . Thick hide and fur +4.

Mink/Lynx/Wolverine

These stats can apply to a wide range of small, fast, furry beasts: mink, weasels, foxes, the Siberian polecat and so on.

Typical Abilities: Claw & Bite 12 +1, Climb 15, Cunning 15, Dodge Attack 17, Move Silently 2 \mathbf{M} , Small 10, Sprint 15.

Variations: The rather more formidable **Wolverine** is Small 5, and has Bite 17 +3, Survive in Cold 20 and Sprint 17.

Moose/Reindeer

Typical Abilities: Hardy 20, Hide in Cover 15 \mathbf{M} , Large 15, Leap 18, Nervous 10, Scan for Danger 18, Run Fast 18 \mathbf{M} . Males only have Wrestle with Antlers 17 +2.

Rats and Other Small Pests

An individual rat is no threat to any but the weakest and most incapacitated humans, but a swarm of them, perhaps summoned by magic, could be treated as a single Biting Rat Pack 17. The same is true of clouds of mosquitoes, a flock of angry sparrows, etc.

Snake

Snakes are common in some parts of Siberia, mostly harmless but some venomous.

Typical Abilities: Strike 15 -5, Hard to Hit 20. The venom of poisonous snakes turns the Strike to 15 +5.

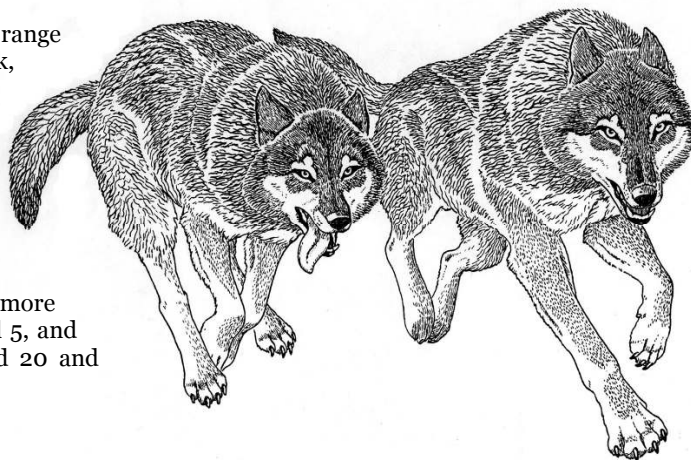
Tiger

The Siberian tiger is a solitary predator, especially dangerous in the snows where its white and black markings give it considerable camouflage.

Typical Abilities: Ambush 2 \mathbf{M} , Camouflage in Snow 6 \mathbf{M} , Claw & Bite 5 \mathbf{M} +2, Large 2 \mathbf{M} , Move Silently 18, Strong 5 \mathbf{M} , Sprint 18, Terrify Prey 5 \mathbf{M} . Fur & Thick Skin +2.

Wolf

Wolves are a perennial threat in rural Russia, working efficiently in packs. Unless especially hungry, they will usually not attack humans. Usually. Wolves are the subjects of the Grey Wolf – see below.



Typical Abilities: Claw & Bite 18 +1, Corner Prey 12, Endurance 5 \mathbf{M} , Run Fast 18, Scent Prey 20, Small 6, Work with Pack 17.

Variations: for a **Very Large Wolf**, Claw & Bite 20 +2, Strong 10, no Small. **Children of the Grey Wolf** (see below) are as Very Large

Wolves but also can speak, are intelligent, have Adopt Human Form 1 \mathbf{M} , Adopt [One Other Form] 1 \mathbf{M} and Wolf Magic 10 \mathbf{M} .

MAGICAL BEASTS AND BEINGS

Some of these are generic types of entity, such as the spirits of home and hearth, while others are individual. In general, if a being is going to play a substantive role in a story, it is best to make it individualised, even just by adding a few quirks and traits. All are intelligent, and

where they have a generic or specific magic power, they can typically use this to travel through the Veils between Worlds and to survive in Otherworlds to their own.

GREAT POWERS

Baba Yaga

Baba Yaga is a frightful and evil witch, a hideous and ancient crone with iron teeth and a squinted gaze that can make hardened warriors faint and beasts flee. She lives deep within the forests, behind a stockade topped with glowing-eyed skulls. She can fly through the air in a huge mortar, rowing the air with a pestle, or be carried in her hut, which walks on great chicken legs. She eats human flesh when she can, thinks nothing of throwing children into her iron stove and is generally one of the most wilfully evil beings ever to live in **Mythic Russia**. That said, she is also a representative of the old ways and old days and is not without a capricious sense of honour of her own. Those who stumble into her grasp will often be given some chance to save themselves, being set some admittedly near-impossible task that those of virtue and spirit may nonetheless complete. She will abide by her world in those circumstances.

She is part of the Old Russia, the dark side – backside, some would say – to the bright heroes and goddesses. The spread of Christianity is slowly driving her further and further from the lush, warmer lands, and so not only does she reserve particular spite for Christians but she may unexpectedly intervene to help pagans struggling with the New Faith.

Abilities: Immortal Witch 1M6, Hideous 20M1, Terrifying Visage 10M1, Even More Terrifying Cackle 1M2, Turn Up In Unexpected Places 1M3, Just Plain Nasty 1M4, Own Sense of Honour 1M3, Begrudge Christianity 1M3, Flying Mortar 1M4, Chicken-Legged Hut 1M4, Skull-Sentried Stockade 1M2.

Chudo-Yudo

Chudo-Yudo is a malign beast like a huge octopus, which lives within a great, freezing lake in the far Otherworlds, but periodically may emerge in a lake in the Mortal, Ideal of Representational Worlds, to seize a ship and drag it to its doom or carry out some similar act of destruction. Sometimes, it simply appears and waits to be placated with sacrifices (or driven away by heroes).

Abilities: Whipping Tentacle 20M1 +15, Another Whipping Tentacle 10M1 +15, Yet Another Whipping Tentacle 20 +15, Huge 1M4, Strong 1M4, Travel Between Lakes 1M4, Malign 20M1.

The Firebird

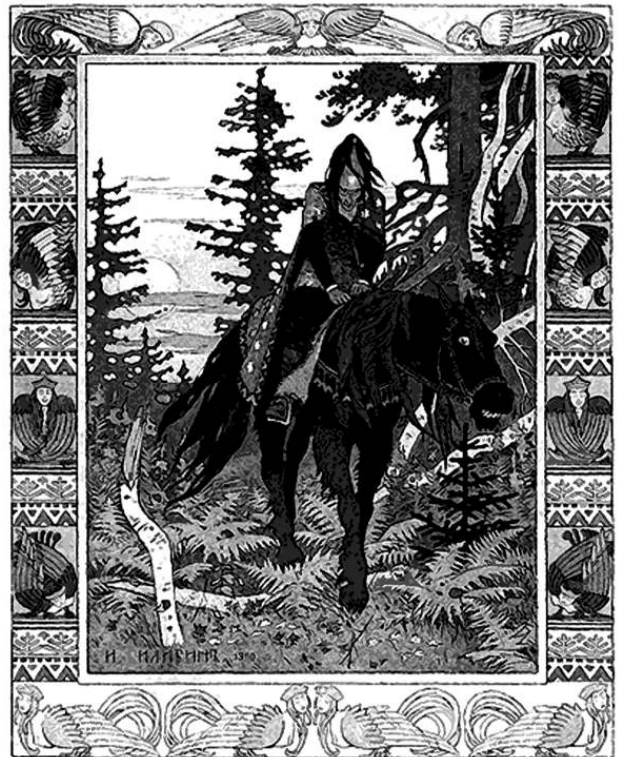
The Firebird is a representation of the primal glory of Russia, a bird with glowing, blazing golden feathers. If 'killed' it will return to life in a blaze of fire. It is a benign force, known sometimes to rescue those lost in the woods and lead them home, and can heal those who deserve healing, just as its touch can burn and scar those who deserve punishment. A feather from the Firebird glows forever and emits a gentle warmth.

Abilities: Immortal Bird 1M7, Goodwill 1M2, Gentle Warmth 1M4, Blazing Glory 1M3, Discern True Character 1M4, Fly Through the Otherworlds 1M6.

Grey Wolf, the Wolf Queen

Grey Wolf is the queen of the wolves, who mated with the World Wolf in her wild days, before turning her back on his unquenchable thirst for blood. In her natural form, she is a huge, shaggy wolf, but she can also take other forms, such as a horse or a still-handsome older woman. She is fierce, proud, a creature of the wilds. She kills when she must, and is unsentimental in nature, but also knows the difference between good and evil and the importance of honouring one's word.

Abilities: Wolf Queen 20M4, Claw & Bite 18M2 +8, Change Shape 1M3, Corner Prey 12M2, Endurance 5M3, Large 20, Run between Otherworlds 20M4, Run Fast 10M1, Scent Prey 20M3, Wolf Magic 1M4.



Koschei the Undying

Koschei is an amoral sorcerer who through his magics has made himself virtually immortal, hiding his life somewhere almost impossible to find (some say it is inside an egg, inside a duck, inside a rabbit, under an oak tree, on an island in an unknown ocean). Unless that is found, he cannot be killed – even if chopped to pieces and burnt, eventually his components will reunite themselves. And he will not be happy. He is greedy and selfish, evil for sure, but not so much evil for the sake of it like Baba Yaga as completely dedicated to the achievement of his own goals. At various times in his life he has been rich, powerful, loved, feared, and it is hard to know just what he wants now. One thing is certain: like Baba Yaga, he fears the onset of Christianity, but unlike her he is thought to have active plans to resist it.



Abilities: Mighty Sorcerer 1m6, Hidden Life 1m7, Secret Plans 1m4, Self-Centred 1m4, Bored 20.

Strukis the Pike King

Strukis the Great Pike once lived in Poland, but was pushed east by the rise of Christianity. He now swims the colder rivers of Russia, moving effortlessly between Mortal and Otherworlds, wondering if he will have to move further east as Christianity also takes root there, too. In his natural shape and size, he is a talking pike, glittering silver, the length of two men. He can grant wishes, equivalent to Plot Edits using up to 4 hero points, only once per person in their lifetimes – but he is reluctant to do so.

Abilities: Change Size 20m (the following attributes reflect his full size), Large 20, Bite 1m3 +10, Command Fish 1m5, River Magic 1m5, Swim Fast 20m, Swim Through Veils 1m6, Speak 20, Resent Christians 10m.

Tsar Medved, the Bear King

Tsar Medved is one of the mightiest of the Beast Kings; he has no home but roams all the Worlds. He is proud, fierce but fair.

Abilities: Bear King 1m5, Charge Foe 20m3, Grapple and Bite 8m3 +10, Large 15m2, Proud 20m, Strong 1m5, Bear Magic 1m5. Fur and thick skin +10

Zmei Gorynich

Zmei Gorynich is the First Dragon, the Greatest, who fathered a brood of beasts on Goryshche. Killed on the Mortal World, he nonetheless lurks in the furthest, darkest corners of the Representational and sometimes Ideal Worlds. He is a huge beast, glittering black like the night, longer than twenty man-heights, and with wings which shut out the sun when they unfold, fangs the size of greatswords. He also performs the role Svarog forced upon him, fighting back the occasional onslaught of dead souls wishing to return en masse to the Mortal World. If you are going to have a have an Otherworldly guard-dog, it makes sense to have one the size of a cliff.

Abilities: Snapping Bite 1m5 +20, Lashing Tail 1m2 +10, Breath of Death 10m4, Huge 1m5, Strong 1m5, Vicious 10m2, Deadly Magic 15m3. Thick metal scales +20.

SPIRITS OF HOME AND HEARTH

Bannik

The bannik is a spirit found in some bathhouses. It is a jealous and unpredictable spirit, who can nonetheless predict the future. A gentle touch while immersed in the steam presages good luck, the lashing of its birch-like claws bad. The recipient of this prophesy may also hear a screeched or whispered phrase or two expanding on the prediction, especially if he has properly honoured the bannik by pouring some vodka onto the fire.

Normally, it is never seen, but rarely it will manifest itself as a smiling, bearded little man. However, if surprised, its form will be an elongated small human shape of birch twigs.

Typical Abilities: Not Be Seen 1m3, Predict Future for Bather 20m, Unpredictable 10m, Whipping Claws 20 +2.

Domovoy

The domovoy is a spirit of the household, although few are lucky enough to have one. It hides, unseen in the house, typically living by the stove or by the threshold, and can change its size from a grain of dust to a small humanoid form with gnarled skin, long hair and beard and sad eyes. The domovoy wants to be a happy household – so long as a saucer of milk and some bread is put down for him at night and the home is well-run and harmonious, he is generally content. He will show his presence in small favours and services, repairing leaks in the roof, tugging a sleeping mother's hair to wake and warn her if the children are in trouble, and keeping vermin and evil spirits and curses at bay. A domovoy is thus a great boon, and even many Christian households stretch a point and consider it a guardian angel.

However, if a domovoy is slighted or otherwise upset, he can become a serious irritant. Items can be lost or moved, or broken in the night, he can weep and moan, drive away family pets and otherwise cause all sorts of minor problems until either placated or banished.

Typical Abilities: Petty Household Chores 10m, Petty Household Magics 20, Predict Misfortune to Household 20, Protect Home 20m, Unseen 1m3.

Variations: The **Kikomora** is a female equivalent, who lives by the stove or in the cellar. Her boons are to carry out womanly work at night: housework, spinning, mending clothes. She can look like a peasant woman with chicken feet and a bird's head. A home with a married domovoy and kikimora is truly blessed! The **Dvorovoi** is a yard-spirit which instead looks after the yard and stables, protecting or persecuting the livestock, depending on his mood.

Ovinnik

This is a spirit of the barn or the threshing house; it can either look like a black hat with fiery eyes and a dog's bark or else a man with hairy goat's feet. When honoured and left blinies and a little beer, it will protect the barn from fire, rain, rats and other threats. Otherwise, it may open the doors in a storm, invite in vermin or, in truly extreme cases, bring down lightning to burn its barn and die in a paroxysm of rage and despair. Christian households are more likely by this point to have brought in a priest to try and exorcise this 'evil spirit.'

Typical Abilities: Not Be Seen 1m3, Protect Barn 20m, Jealous 10m, Angry Curses 10m.



Polevik

The field spirit, the polevik is a dangerous but vital ally. Russia's soils are grudging, and the polevik needs to be won over with ceremonies, sacrifices (ideally of the blood of an animal, mixed with alcohol) and often the observances of petty taboos (like only stepping into the field backwards or keeping a stalk of wheat in one's pocket while ploughing) to help the crop. Otherwise, the polevik will stunt the crop – or in extreme cases even take its sacrifice from the peasants, luring a child into its grip and leaving its broken, bloodied body half-buried in the earth. It looks like a humanoid form of tied corn stalks and husks, when seen at all.

Typical Abilities: Help or Hinder Crop 20^{mf}, Invisible in the Field 5^{mf}2, Spiteful 5^{mf}, Vicious Blow 20 +3.

Variations: The rare female version, the **Poludnitsa**, is Mischievous 10^{mf} rather than Spiteful.

SPIRITS OF THE WILDS

Disease Spirit

Disease spirits possess living things and cause illness. When manifested, they appear as grey clouds or as insubstantial figures with skeletal limbs and gaping holes instead of eyes and mouths. Some are sent as curses. There are hundreds of types and their effects range from mild inconvenience to deadly afflictions that can kill a victim in just a few hours. They seek to Possess a target, and if successful afflict him with a disease of a potency equivalent to its Virulence (which also augments its Hidden Possession rating).

Typical Abilities: Hidden Possession 20, Invisible 1^{mf}2, Virulence varies. Unharmful by non-magical weapons.

Variations: **Bubonic Plague** 1^{mf}4, **Cold** 20, **Dysentery** 5^{mf}, **Flu** 15^{mf}, **Hayfever** 15, **Leprosy** 20^{mf}, **Measles** 10^{mf}, **Smallpox** 1^{mf}2, **Trots** 15.

Dragon

These are the first-, second- and third-generation children of Zmei Gorynich. Each generation is generally smaller, less intelligent, but more vicious. Some have one head, some two, some three or more.

Typical Abilities: Snapping Bite 1^{mf}3 +10, Lashing Tail 20 +5, Breath Attack 1^{mf}2, Huge 1^{mf}3, Strong 1^{mf}3, Vicious 10^{mf}2, Deadly Magic 20^{mf}. Thick metal scales +10.

Variations: This is a single-headed, second-generation dragon. Its breath attack may be flame, a blast of cold or simply lethal vapours. **First-generation** dragons typically have one mastery greater Breath Attack, Huge and Magic, **third-generation** ones, a mastery less, but Vicious 10^{mf}2. **Two-headed** dragons have no Breath Attack and often have Disagree Between Heads 20^{mf}, but counterbalance this with Attack from Both Sides 20^{mf} (giving a +4 augment) and Smart 20. **Three-headed** dragons also lack a Breath Attack, and have

Multiple Attacks 1^{mf}3, which can either augment one attack or allow attacks on several targets.

Elemental

This is a generic term for spirits and entities of fire, water, earth, air or other substances not traditionally considered 'elements' such as ice, metal or even alcohol. They are defined by a single Might rating, which determines their power, strength and size – and also how difficult they are to conjure, control and dispel. The kind of elemental which could be summoned from a bowl of water or a small fire might have a Might of 10, one from a water trough, campfire or earth floor 20, one from a lake, windstorm, forest fire or ploughed field 10^{mf}. The elemental can vary its size a little but it is essentially will have a large equal to its Might less 20, so that 10^{mf} elemental is Large 10. Elementals of less than 1^{mf} Might are essentially mindless servants, those of up to 20^{mf} are sentient but neither bright nor able to show initiative. The greater ones are rare and intelligent – sometimes dangerously so. Elementals can do whatever might be natural for their form, so air elemental fly and may be able to carry others, and could fan but not start a fire. Conversely, a water elemental could flow across the ground, pour into a victim's mouth and drown him or hammer down a door, but not form a solid barrier. Likewise, they are vulnerable to whatever would affect their natural form. The narrator is the final arbiter.

Fear Spirit

Fear spirits take various translucent and horrifying shapes, radiating fear so that their mere presence makes animals and people uneasy. Many believe them to be the spirits of cowards, slain while fleeing battle. They may either attack with their Aura of Fear, forcing people to flee and, if they take damage, losing their morale or even, in an extreme case, dying from shock. Or they may seek to possess a target. If they possess a victim, he gains a Cowardly personality trait at the same rating as its Aura of Fear. The spirit acts any time the victim risks physical harm. It manifests as a flaw, giving a penalty to anything requiring bravery (such as combat). Additionally, if the victim has a Brave ability or the like, the spirit's entire ability rating might serve as an automatic penalty to that ability.

Typical Abilities: Aura of Fear 20, Hidden Possession 18. Unharmful by non-magical weapons

Variations: In especially terrible places, they may be rather more potent, up to several masteries. It is said that Kulikovo is now haunted by Mongol spirits of spine-chilling potency.

Ghost

Ghosts are the spiritual remains of the unhallowed or unhappy dead, trapped in the Mortal World and doomed to haunt a specific place or object. They can manifest as a shadowy image of their former self, often with any fatal wounds visible. They have insubstantial bodies that can be harmed by magic, but which nothing physical can touch. Some ghosts can move physical objects, such as throwing a knife or closing a door. Most



ghosts are hostile to living things, and are frequently insane. They seek to take over a mortal's body and then use the possessed victim to complete some act left undone (often vengeance on its killer) or to cause as much mayhem and destruction as possible. An especially malign or insane ghost may try to force its victim to kill himself or others.

Typical Abilities: Dominant Possession 20, Terrify Mortals 10M1, a suitable character trait (such as Murderous, Mournful or Make Sure Brother Gets Home) 20+. Unharmed by non-magical weapons.

Variations: A few retain some of the magic they knew in life. More powerfully-driven souls may become more powerful ghosts: essentially, the level of the Dominant Possession reflects the highest appropriate trait or relationship, so a ghost of a mother with Love Children 20M1 who returned to protect them, would have Dominant Possession 20M1.

Giant

Giants are huge people, typically 3-4 man-heights but sometimes even greater. They are stereotypically stupid, aggressive and argumentative, able to use their Contrary ability to resist emotion- or mind-affecting magic. It will usually augment its attacks with its Strong.

Typical Abilities: Contrary 10M1, Large 18M2, Short-Tempered 15, Slow 18, Smell Blood 18, Stomp 10M1, Strong 18M2, Throw Boulders 18 +5, Tough 10M1, Bash with a Tree Trunk 8M1 +8. Thick skin +3

Variations: An especially **Huge Giant** might be 20M3 Large and Strong. There are also those who are intelligent and even friendly, like the bogatyr **Svyatogor**, friend of Ilya Muromets, now entombed alive (Noble Nature 20, Initiate of St Vlasii 20M1, no Contrary or Short-Tempered).

Leshy

The leshy (both singular and plural) are the mighty spirits of the forest, who themselves look like great, animate trees. They are not inimical to humans as such – but the more humanity encroaches on their forests, cut down trees, burns out clearings to farm and otherwise seems to be inimical to them, the more they appear enemies. Besides, they respect the ancient pagan ways and those who follow them, who also know how to honour and placate the leshy. As the ways of the Christians spread, and they regard the leshy as demonic forces or simple peasant superstitions, this also does little to endear humans to them.

Typical Abilities: Crushing Blow 1M2 +10, Strength of a Tree 1M4, Size of a Tree 20M3, Long-Lived 1M4, Wood Magic 1M3. Thick Bark +6.

Variations: This is a typical leshy, the master of a hundreds of acres of forest. **Taiga Leshy** may be rather more hostile, having Dislike Intruders 20, while in general **Coniferous Leshy** may have such particular powers as Sticky Sap 10M1 or Sharp Needles for an extra +5 to their blows. In general, **Deciduous Leshy** are likely to have Sluggish in Winter 20. The most

powerful Leshy should have an extra mastery or two on many abilities, while a **young one** might be smaller and less powerful. **Leshy whose forests have suffered** from disease or human clearance might have less magic but the traits Insane and/or Angry at several masteries.



Rusalka

The spirits of drowned babies and maidens may become Rusalkas, spirits of the river. Taking the form of pale and beautiful girls with long, flowing hair, they are typically either nude or wearing long white dresses. They often lure men to their deaths in the water, steal children or tempt young men into impure thoughts. This is not generally because they are evil so much as that they do not remember their pasts or even understand the ways of humans any more. To them, human death or human life is all one, and if in the process they can for a while feel real and energised again, through passion, lovemaking or simply feeling another's life flow through their fingers, that is all to the good. They cannot stray far from their rivers.

Typical Abilities: Eerie Beauty 1M3, Flow Through River 1M3, Resist Damage 20M1, Sing in the Moonlight 20M1, Tempt Mortal 10M2.

Variations: Some rusalkas do retain or remember their pasts. They can usually leave their rivers, so long as they have something else to which to anchor their existence, such as a community, familiar location or person. If they abandon that, though, they will shortly die.



Upyr

An upyr is a Russian vampire: a dead person who, through a curse, suicide or dabbling in dark magics (including following the Kam) returns to a half-life, which needs to be sustained by drinking the blood and eating the flesh of the living. Those who willingly embraced this fate can rise during day or night, while the cycles of those cursed by vampirism depends on when they died. If they died at night, they rise during the day but fall comatose as soon as the sun sets, and vice versa, so they tend to establish secure lairs for themselves during these vulnerable times. They look like

weathered, emaciated versions of their old selves, although they will also often still show any fatal wounds.

Upyrs have no special powers beyond the strength and resilience of beings who are already dead and need to be hacked into pieces, burnt to a crisp or submerged in flowing fresh water to destroy them. However, so long as they feed regularly – a fresh innocent like a baby can sustain one for a week, an old man just a day or two – they are effectively immortal, and they may not only retain many of their old powers, they have the time to learn more.

Typical Abilities: Sharp-Fanged Bite 20 +1, Weapon 20

STORY SEED: FUR, WOOD, AND WATER

The fur-trading outpost of Yegoshchika (later known as Perm), deep in the Siberian forests, is becoming a thriving settlement. It is a sanctuary for wandering Cossacks and Russian muzhiks escaping servitude in more settled lands. The sale of furs to traders in the west ensures a steady supply of silver and goods. A recent addition to the village is a small community of monks seeking peace away from the politics of the cities. Little do the people know that they have become proxies in a battle between the powerful vodyanoi that inhabits the river in the centre of the village and the leshy of the surrounding woods. This battle has been a stalemate since the world was new. When the humans arrived, the vodyanoi saw a way to use them to break the deadlock. The vodyanoi's first act was to drown Marya, the daughter of Pyotr, the village headman, and turn her into a rusalka. The vodyanoi is using his hold over Pyotr to make him act against the leshy. Pyotr is also powerless to stop the vodyanoi expanding its realm: the centre of the village is turning into a swamp and the huts there are now uninhabitable, having subsided or sunk into the mire.

To protect itself against the encroaching vodyanoi, the leshy made an alliance with a powerful bear spirit. The bear lends the leshy the strength to resist the vodyanoi; in return, the leshy relies on the bear's urge to hibernate to signal when the trees should drop their summer leaves. Realising the leshy's dependence on the bear, the vodyanoi and Pyotr persuaded the newly-arrived monks that the powerful bear spirit in the woods was demonic and had to be killed. The abbot, Father Volkh, agreed and sent his most holy monk, Brother Daniel, to do the deed. Daniel confronted the bear, ripped its heart from its chest, and threw the heart into the river (where it was collected by the vodyanoi). Unfortunately for Daniel, the bear's alliance with the leshy allowed it to draw on the forest; it didn't die. The sight of the undead bear broke Daniel's mind and he remains in the Ideal World, hiding in a cave with blood continuously gushing from stigmata on his hands.

The "death" of the bear meant that the leshy was unable to respond to the changing seasons. Although autumn is over, the forest around Yegoshchika remains in full summer leaf. When the imminent frosts arrive, all the unprepared trees will die, as will the leshy. The vodyanoi will have won. An unfortunate side effect of the leshy's illness is that all the game animals in the area have fled, leaving little for the villagers to eat and nothing for the fur trappers to catch. This, coupled with the growing swamp in the centre of the village, mean that Yegoshchika will soon have to be abandoned by the humans and Pyotr will have to abandon his daughter to the vodyanoi. When the leshy dies, the vodyanoi will no longer need the humans and will force them to flee.

► **Death and Taxes:** A Russian boyar smells the profit that can be made from annexing Yegoshchika, extending his 'protection' to the inhabitants, and taking a cut of the furs that are produced. He has sent a team of emissaries to the outpost to make them an offer they can't refuse and ensure that the black gold keeps flowing.

► **Freedom in the Wild East:** Cossacks or other Russians have heard of the utopia of Yegoshchika and decide to move there. Perhaps they are fleeing persecution (or justice) or want to make their fortune on the frontier.

► **A Glimpse of Solace:** Devout Christians may have heard of the pious and adept Daniel and want to seek him out, perhaps to ask him to intercede on their behalf in some magical matter. First, they have to find him and heal his mind.

► **The Sibiryak Fight Back:** The Sibiryak spirit world is awash with rumours of the death of a powerful bear spirit near Yegoshchika and the upset in the Otherworlds that followed. Sibiryaks may decide to investigate and put right this affront. (Perhaps they want to discover what happened to the first Sibiryak party that went to Perm, who were killed by the vodyanoi and now haunt the woods by night as zalozhens.)

► **A Skomorokh in Need:** The bear, a giant of its kind, is suffering badly. Ilya, a skomorokh, found it and is taking care of it. Despite Ilya's best efforts, the bear is wasting away and will soon die. He has put out a call for devout Rus' pagans to help the bear. If the bear's heart can be restored, the bear will recover and the vodyanoi will be returned to its proper place. If the bear dies, it will seal the vodyanoi's victory.



+3, Strong 20¹¹, Undead Resilience 20¹², Terrifying 5¹¹, Crave Flesh and Blood 20¹¹.

Variations: This is an unwilling upyr. One who attained this state through **Moral Degradation** may well have Dark Magic Powers 1¹², while a few are Unwilling Upyrs who struggle against their condition, relying on their Self-Loathing or Self-Control 15¹¹-1¹² to offset their bloodlust and allow them to live off livestock (might just about keep them alive, but is very unsatisfying) or draining some blood from victims but not killing them (takes a great deal of self-discipline).

Vodyanoi

A vodyanoi is a powerful and deadly creature, a malign denizen of rivers and swamps. They are clever, malicious and magically-powerful, and rejoice in drowning mortals (tricking them to do it themselves is the most fun, but they have few compunctions about doing it the old-fashioned hands-on way if they must), turning fertile fields to swamps, blackmailing Rusalkas to be their brides and otherwise making the world a wetter and nastier place. They naturally are gross, pallid humanoids, like bloated, drowned humans with a wide-mouthed, toad-like head; while they can change their appearance, there will always be some clue as to their real nature. Perhaps their clothes will be wet, or a dead fish will poke out of a pocket. They can also travel between the Mortal and Ideal Worlds, although this takes time and effort.

Typical Abilities: Sharp-Toothed Bite 20 +2, Grapple 5¹¹, Convincing Lies 10¹¹, Hold Breath Underwater 1¹², Illusory Appearance 5¹¹, Slippery Strength 10¹¹, Swim 20¹¹, Water Magics 20¹¹, Cunning 20¹¹, Malicious 20¹¹.

Variations: This is a fairly typical vodyanoi; a few are weaker, and some are much more powerful and should have one or two masteries added to their magical powers.

Werewolf (Oboroten)

The werewolf was once just human, cursed to assume the shape of a great wolf by night. Sometimes, this curse comes from the gods or a powerful magician, sometimes from the bite of another werewolf, sometimes from eating the flesh of humans. In most cases, the victim is aware of his (or her) curse and can willingly initiate the change at night. Some are not, though, and change every moonless night, not realising that the beast ravaging their neighbourhood is themselves.

Typical Abilities: In human form, they will generally be a little more feral, acquiring the abilities Strong 20, Alert 17 and Carnivore 17. In wolf form, a typical werewolf uses the Very Large Wolf stats, with the addition of Heal Quickly 20¹¹, Inhuman Hunger 5¹¹ and Resist Non-Magical Weapons 18¹¹ (which in effect gives them +4 armour).

Variations: In Lithuania, they are known as **vilkolatis**, and change by drinking beer mixed with blood. The most powerful are **descendants of the World Wolf**,

and will typically have abilities one mastery higher and the generic power Wolf Magics 20¹¹.

Zalozhen

A zalozhen is a rotting, animate corpse, the body of a victim of an especially heinous death who was not granted a proper funeral service. It may seek to avenge itself on its killer, but is more often simply determined to wreak havoc on the living. To be killed physically, it needs to be chopped to pieces – but even then it will simply return as a Ghost, unless magically destroyed or put to rest through a suitable ceremony.

Typical Abilities: Throttle or Punch 20, Horrifying Putrescence 20¹¹, Unnatural Strength 1¹², Unnatural Resilience 1¹².

Variations: Some may retain specific skills or even magical powers from their mortal existence. To those who knew the zalozhen when still living, any Relationship ought to become a Flaw in fighting or otherwise resisting this shambling shell of one they once knew.

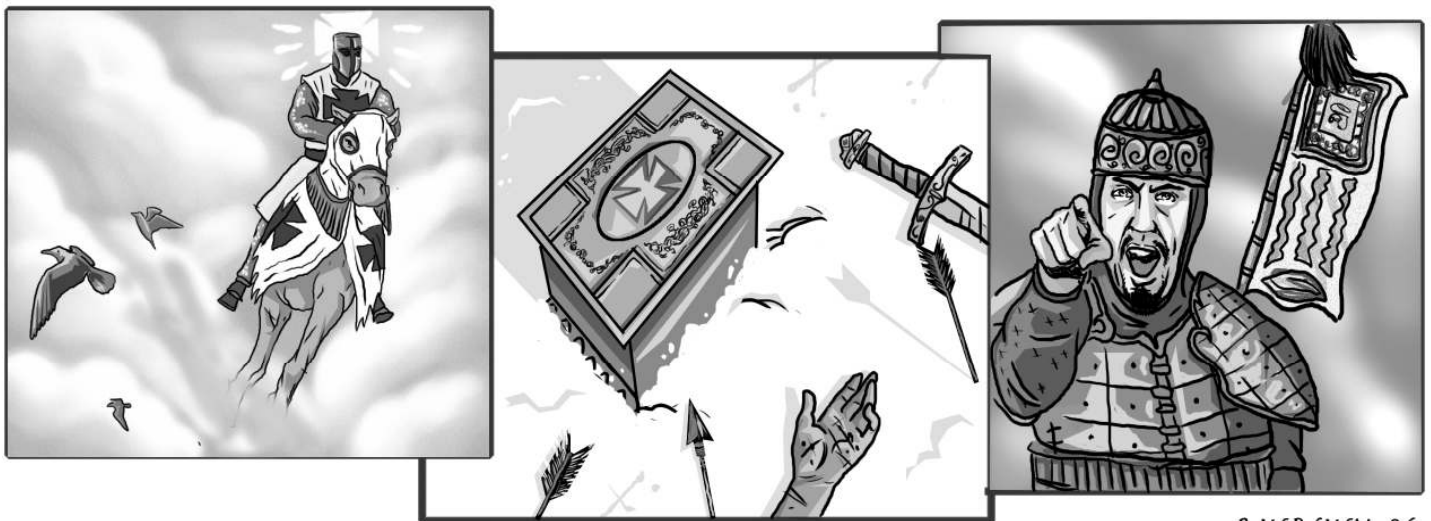
23. WOOD, BLOOD & SNOW

This is a scenario which will allow the heroes to experience not just the adventure of **Mythic Russia** but also a sense of the complexity of its politics and the relationship between peoples and faiths, and how loyalties of Church, family and people may conflict.

Who are the Heroes?

A series of pre-generated heroes are provided, and as the scenario is very clearly built around their interactions, bonds and conflicts, it is strongly advised that they are used, even if just as an introduction to the game before

generating new heroes to the players' own tastes. Narrators planning to use it with other heroes will either have to change the nature of some of the events quite dramatically or else retain the pre-generated heroes as narrator characters and find ways to involve the player heroes with them. Perhaps they are Dmitri's guards and troubleshooters, or they might even be allies and retainers of different narrator characters, giving them varying agendas.



R.HERSHEY-06

INTRODUCTION

BACKSTORY

The old Boyar, Baron Dmitri, has been persuaded by his brother, the Orthodox priest Fyodor, to make a pilgrimage to Zubovo, one of Dmitri's outlying towns.

- ❑ Fyodor is hoping that by praying at the icon in Zubovo's church, Dmitri will convert from dvoeverie to pure Christianity.
- ❑ Dmitri has agreed to the trip, as it gives him an opportunity to meet the Teutonic Knights with whom he is conspiring.
- ❑ Meanwhile, Dmitri's younger son, Boris, is hoping to meet up with the Mongols with whom *he* is

conspiring to support his attempt to usurp his father.

- ❑ These are the same Mongols that framed Orqina, Dmitri's new Mongol concubine, for a murder she didn't commit. His other son,
- ❑ Pyotr is eyeing Dmitri for any signs of weakness, which would make him an unfit leader.

STRUCTURE

There is no pre-determined plot to follow in this scenario. Instead, it presents a small group of strongly related player heroes, each with their own passions, motivations and goals. It then places these heroes into a situation where their passions will be tested and forces them to react. In this scenario, the narrator's job is not to force the players into one particular course of action or to "follow the plot." Instead, the scenario is described



as a series of possible events that require action or a decision from the player heroes.

The narrator should follow the players' lead when setting new scenes. Most times, the players will create enough drama in these scenes by themselves as they follow through their own hero's agenda. If a scene doesn't seem to be going anywhere dramatic, the narrator can either quickly skip through it and move on to the next scene, or throw one of the events below into play to introduce some drama. Most of the events can be placed in many scenes or settings and at any time in the scenario.

Be prepared for, and even encourage, the player heroes to make their individual choices in response to these events. If the players make different choices between themselves, they will spend many happy hours while their characters are struggling in opposition to each other. They are also likely to split up and pursue their own agendas. Allow them: events revolve around the icon, so they'll all end up interacting with each other sooner or later (probably sooner). For instance, it may well be that some of the players will decide to seek the icon, while others stay to defend Zubovo. "Splitting the party" like this is fine, and won't affect the gameplay. Both Timur's and von Skrunda's bands are highly mobile and they can approach heroes both out in the wilds and in the town. Also, having some heroes in

THE EVENTS

You will not use all these events during the episode; which ones you use will depend on the actions of the players. Also, this set is not exhaustive: if you can think of another event that would entertain your players, throw it in! While the events are listed in approximately the order you might like to use them, the ordering is not rigid. The right event to throw into the mix is the one that you think will cause the most fun for your players. If all else fails, have one of the narrator characters approach one or more of the player heroes and ask for help.

Into Zubovo

Caused by: Townsfolk; Affected: Dmitri, Boris, Fyodor

It is late winter in 1382. The scenario opens with the heroes riding through the snow to Zubovo on Fyodor's pilgrimage. It's mid-morning. Boris and Pyotr are on horseback, while the rest of the heroes are in troika sledges. They are travelling along a frozen river towards the town.

As they get close, heroes who are ahead or with abilities such as *Keen Senses* will be the first to notice a commotion in the town. As they investigate, they see Irina the volkhva fleeing from a lynch mob of townsfolk, complete with pitchforks and torches. Irina will call on Dmitri or Boris to save her from the townsfolk. The townsfolk will campaign for Irina, shouting that "She's taken it!" while Irina will insist that she "did it all for

ALL THE SENSES

Most roleplaying games are evoked and experienced through words, but we have many senses and it is worth considering all of them. When appropriate, describe smells and textures as well as sights and sounds: the sharp tang of ozone as a lightning-spear of Perun stabs from the heavens, the thick, pine-scented steam of the sauna. Background music, sound effects and even scents can also help create the right atmosphere. As the Knights attack, the narrator could play menacing choral music from the sound track of the film *Alexander Nevsky* or else Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' – as also featured in the film *Apocalypse Now!* Likewise, there are samples of Mongolian throat music available on the internet which could be played at strategic moments.

Zubovo will give the others a good reason not to simply cut and run if someone attacks the town.

There is no fixed end point to the scenario. Things will end soon after the fate of the icon is fixed, one way or another. If you want to wrap up the scenario, simply introduce an event such as *The Knight in the Window* or *Timur's Last Grasp*.

you, Dmitri!" Things will be tense, and the heroes may need to take drastic action if they want to oppose the townsfolk's intent to **slaughter Irina immediately 16m**.

If asked, the townsfolk will accuse Irina of stealing the icon from the town church. No-one saw her do it, but she was seen leaving the church (an unusual place for Irina to be) and the icon was discovered to be missing soon after.

The townsfolk will say that a group of Mongols was seen on the frozen river near the town earlier in the day. They hung around for a while, but did not enter the town. A band of Teutonic Knights have also recently been seen in the area, but not today.

Irina the Volkhva

Russian 20, Pagan Priestess 8m, Devotee of Mat-Syra-Zemlya the Earth 19m, Trusting 5m.

Irina Confesses

Caused by: Irina; Affected: Dmitri

If she is protected from the townsfolk or forcibly interrogated, Irina will (eventually) confess to Dmitri that she took the icon from the church and lent it to a group of Mongols for a while. The Mongols would have no interest in a Christian relic and promised to return it





in a week or so. The Mongols in question are led by Timur, which should interest Orqina, Boris, and Sasha.

Otherworldly Disturbance

Caused by: No-one (possibly Fr Mikhail); Affected: Fyodor, Orqina

With the icon gone, both Fyodor and Orqina will be able to sense that there is a disturbance in the Otherworlds near Zubovo. While the Ideal World remains the same, the Representational World is becoming less strongly associated with Orthodox Christianity. In the Ideal World, the site of Zubovo's church is marked by a large, glowing Orthodox crucifix; it acts as a portal to the Representational World. With the icon missing, the crucifix is starting to fade and shrink as pieces of it fall to the ground and disappear. It seems that the icon was acting as a magical anchor for the Representational World surrounding Zubovo. Fr Mikhail will confirm that the icon is here to anchor the Representational World to the Orthodox paradigm. With the icon missing, the magical nature of the lands around here could be easily changed; if that happens, the Orthodox faith will be much weaker.

Throughout the scenario, as time progresses, the crucifix here will continue to shrink and fade. You can use this change in appearance to keep up the pressure on the heroes, should they need it and anyone enquires.

A Pregnancy Revealed

Caused by: Fr Mikhail, anyone with Soul Vision; Affected: Orqina

While people are examining the Otherworld to see the effects of the loss of the icon, it is obvious to everyone using Soul Vision that Orqina is pregnant. Fr Mikhail will blurt this out and use the fact to condemn "that Mongol whore" and try to persuade Dmitri to exile the loose woman from his retinue.

Father Mikhail

Russian 20, Orthodox Priest 6M, Devotee of St Nicholas the Wonderworker 20, Devotee of St Andrew 19M, Worried 8M, Intolerant 20.

An Indiscretion Revealed

Caused by: Irina (or a skomorokh); Affected: Sasha, Dmitri, Pyotr

Soon after Orqina's pregnancy is revealed, Irina (or a travelling skomorokh, if she is indisposed or dead) will congratulate Sasha on his fecundity and start to push jars of vodka on him. Irina will start to sing songs of celebration and cheerfully announce the details of Sasha's dalliance with Orqina to anyone who asks.

The Townsfolk's Plea

Caused by: Yuri, Fr Mikhail, Townsfolk; Affected: Dmitri, Fyodor

As soon as the implications of the icon's disappearance become known (and the rumours will fly almost immediately, despite any efforts by the heroes), Yuri and a delegation of townsfolk will come to Dmitri and Fyodor for help. They realise that without the icon to give the town magical protection, its location far from anywhere will mean it will be open to all sorts of depredations from Mongols, Teutonic knights, bandits, and other threats. Both Mongols and Teutons have been seen in the area in the past day or two.

Some townsfolk will implore Dmitri to retrieve the icon (or try to persuade Fyodor to speak for them). They stress that, if it is not returned to the church soon, this parcel of Krasivy lands will soon become lost to the family. Others will emphasise the more immediate threat from the bands of Mongols and Teutons in the area, and beg the heroes to stay and defend the town.

Yuri Nikolayevich

Russian 2M, Farmer 12M, Initiate of Dazhbog Bright Sun 2M, Stolid 16M, Love Zubovo 7M.

Blood in the Snow

Caused by: Von Skrunda; Affected: Anyone

Any heroes that decide to find the icon can do so easily (see **The Icon's Resting Place** location below). Just as the heroes notice the icon, there is a sound on the wind from behind them as von Skrunda and the Rauhewesteritter ride over the trees towards the heroes. They're just far enough away that an attempt to quickly snatch the icon may work. The knights' prime objective is to retrieve the icon, but if they can kill any non-Catholics that get in the way, that will suit them just fine. If the knights take (or are given) the icon, they will immediately break off their attack and leave the area. The knights won't take their horses into trees if they can help it.

If the heroes try to grab the icon before the knights can get it, von Skrunda will shout at Dmitri or Sasha to give them the icon. If they agree, von Skrunda will halt the attack and take it, though his men will grumble about this and glare at von Skrunda with black looks. If they don't, the Rauhewesteritter will attack and attempt to snatch the icon.

The Teutons Want to Talk

Caused by: Von Skrunda; Affected, Sasha or Dmitri

Von Skrunda will ask Dmitri to meet him in private. This meeting could be arranged by von Skrunda shouting something in German to Dmitri as he and his men fly off, or it could be via a pre-arranged message drop with Sasha.

Dealing with the Man of Iron

Caused by: Von Skrunda; Affected: Dmitri

If Dmitri and/or Sasha manage to get to the rendezvous with Von Skrunda, they find him there alone. If the Teutons managed to capture the icon, von Skrunda will





congratulate the heroes for allowing him to take it, saying that it's just what he needs to convince his superiors of the benefit of Dmitri's plan. If the Teutons don't have the icon, Von Skrunnda will say that taking the icon back to Königsberg is just what is needed to cement the alliance between Dmitri and the Ordenstaat.

If asked, Von Skrunnda will explain that the Rauhewesteritter have been watching Zubovo since Dmitri told them that they Krasivy family would be travelling there. They attacked the Mongols simply because they had the icon and thought that they could win the fight. Von Skrunnda doesn't know anything about this Mongol band, but has heard of the new Mongol leader, Timur.

If anyone other than Dmitri or Sasha turns up, von Skrunnda will immediately fly off. If he is captured somehow, he will demand to be taken to Dmitri. If he meets Dmitri, von Skrunnda will demand to be released, or else the whole deal between Dmitri and the Teutonic Ordenstaat is off.

Someplace Warm

Caused by: No-one; Affected: Pyotr, Orqina

When there is a lull in the action and people have a chance to rest, Orqina and Pyotr find themselves somewhere secluded together, unlikely to be disturbed for a while. Perhaps it's in the bathhouse of their lodgings, or while they're out collecting firewood for a camp. It might be time for them to have a little heart-to-heart, and the warm glow of a flickering fire could set the mood nicely.

Timur's Deal

Caused by: Timur; Affected: Boris, Sasha

The heroes may **notice a mounted figure (5M): Keen Senses, Recognize Foe (-10)** lurking in the forests, apparently watching them. Anyone seeing the figure may recognize it as a Mongol warrior, perhaps of high status. Boris, Sasha, and Orqina may recognize the man as Timur.

If Boris or Sasha (or both) go to investigate, or leave the main group for any other reason, Timur will wait until

they are out of sight of the other heroes and then approach them. He will make his offer: if he is given the icon, it will consolidate his position with the Golden Horde and he will be able to aid Boris in his ambitions.

Timur would prefer it if someone can sneak the icon out to him. Failing that, he says that he can appear and demand the icon on the understanding that Boris will argue for Timur's position. If that fails, he will be happy to stage a mock attack and have someone pass him the icon in the confusion. If asked, Timur is happy to target people like Dmitri, Pyotr, and Fyodor.

Timur's Demand

Caused by: Timur; Affected: All

If the heroes still have the icon after the Rauhewesteritter leave, Timur and his band will appear and demand it. He will attempt to persuade the heroes to hand it over, threatening them with direct violence and more general threats of repercussions from the Mongol authorities. However, Timur is not really a patient man. If the heroes don't acquiesce quickly, he will appeal directly to Boris, demanding that he must hand over the icon or Timur won't kill Dmitri for him. If that doesn't work, Timur will change tactics and attempt to take the icon by force.

Timur Wants Orqina

Caused by: Timur; Affected: Orqina

As soon as Timur discovers that Orqina is present (either by someone telling him, or seeing for himself), he will fly into a rage and demand that she is turned over to him immediately. Until she is, Timur is almost incoherent with rage. He will be willing to bargain almost anything for her, including allowing the heroes to take the icon. It's quite obvious that he intends to torture her to death. If he is not immediately mollified, Timur will appeal to Boris to hand her over.

If the Teutons have the icon, Timur will offer to help the heroes take it from them in return for Orqina: see **Timur's Offer** below. If it comes to combat, Timur's prime objective will be to capture (or kill) Orqina, above all other arrangements.

MONGOLS IN RUSSIA?

As discussed in other chapters, the Russian victory at Kulikovo did not mean there were no more Mongols in Russia. First of all, this was just one battle and after it most Russian princes – Donskoi included – wanted to see how the Golden Horde would react next and did not follow up on their (lucky) victory. Secondly, notions of 'border' and 'territory' were much vaguer in the rolling forests and plains of medieval Russia than today. Away from the main cities and trade routes – and Zubovo is quite out-of-the-way – everything was rather more fluid. Passing Mongols might be ignored, paid off, attacked or even welcomed, depending on their strength compared with that of the community and such random factors as the attitudes of the local community leaders. Besides, many Mongols had settled in Russia, even been hired by Russians, and with intermarriage many second- or third-generation Russians might look Mongol, even if they were Ivan Ivanovich from Ivanovno. A whole Mongol army on the march would attract attention and be met with military force or locked gates; a Mongol clan might well be ignored so long as it did not seem hostile; a few Mongol riders, though, would scarcely merit attention.



Like Father, Like Sons?

Caused by: von Skrunnda; Affected: Pyotr, Boris

Von Skrunnda can see that Dmitri is not long for this world and this means that any deal between the Ordenstaat and the Krasivy family is in doubt in the longer term. To make sure that Teutonic knights will be able to use the Krasivy lands as a safe haven after Dmitri's death, von Skrunnda will approach both Pyotr and Boris (perhaps using Sasha as a go-between) to ensure that they're willing to continue Dmitri's arrangement. If the sons aren't prepared to accept the same terms as their father (the Teutons will protect the Krasivy lands from Mongols and bandits in exchange for a safe haven for their crusaders), von Skrunnda will offer cash for the lands and Teutonic military support for the Krasivy family, perhaps even against the Mongols.

You can use this event twice, one each for Pyotr and Boris.

Von Skrunnda's Offer

Caused by: von Skrunnda; Affected: Dmitri, Sasha

If the Mongols end up with the icon, von Skrunnda will approach Dmitri or Sasha and offer an alliance against Timur's men. He will offer similar terms to those described in *Dealing with the Man of Iron* above: if he can return the icon to Königsberg, it will cement the arrangement between the Ordenstaat and the Krasivy family.

If the temporary alliance is accepted, there will be much muttering from the remaining Rauhwesteritter: they are obviously not happy with being ordered to collaborate with pagans and heretics.

Timur's Offer

Caused by: Timur; Affected: Boris, Sasha

If the Teutonic knights have the icon, Timur will allow the heroes to assist him in getting it back from the knights. If he doesn't have Orqina, he'll exchange the icon for her. If he does, he'll try to move on the plot between himself and Boris, perhaps by asking Boris, in open conversation, when he wants Dmitri killed.

Timur's Hostages

Caused by: Timur; Affected: All

If he doesn't have both Orqina and the icon, Timur will attempt to gain some leverage over the Krasivy family by raiding Zubovo. His intent is to capture as many of the townsfolk as possible and use their lives as bargaining chips against whoever is protecting Orqina or the icon.

If there are any heroes in the town, they can either rally the townsfolk in defence, try to buy Timur off, or flee (with or without townsfolk in tow). If there are no heroes in Zubovo, they will get word of Timur's attack from a fleeing resident (perhaps Yuri or Fr Mikhail; if the players took a shine to either of them, they're still in the town and in mortal danger from Timur).

If he takes the town, Timur will round up the inhabitants in the central square. If and when any heroes enter the town, Timur will threaten to execute them, one by one, until he gets what he wants. He'll start with any townsfolk that the heroes have formed a fondness for, such as Irina (if she's still around).

The Fleeing Knight

Caused by: von Skrunnda; Affected: Dmitri, Sasha

The heroes see von Skrunnda thundering towards them on horseback. Von Skrunnda shouts to Dmitri for sanctuary. If given the chance, he explains that his men have had enough of his deals with non-Catholics and have turned on him. He is fleeing for his life and begs the heroes for sanctuary from them. He argues that, if he can secure the icon, it will be a political coup for him with the Ordenstaat and the remaining knights will be disgraced. If that doesn't happen, he will say that there's no way that he can prevent the Teutons attacking him and the Krasivy lands.

About five minutes later, the remaining Rauhwesteritter turn up. If they see von Skrunnda protected by the heroes, their actions will depend on how the heroes have dealt with the knights before. If the heroes have shown themselves to be no particular threat, the knights will charge straight in and attempt to kill von Skrunnda. Otherwise, they will stop and demand that he is handed over to them. If von Skrunnda is not visible (either hidden or forced away), the knights will probably ignore the heroes unless provoked.

Mongol Strife

Caused by: Khagatia; Affected: Orqina

If Timur gets his hands on Orqina, he will immediately ride off with her towards his camp. Once there, he will command Khagatia, his second-in-command, to prepare her for torture. As he does this, Khagatia will ask Orqina if its true that Timur killed the old khan, Jochi. If Orqina confirms it, Khagatia will offer to release her to get the proof that he needs to bring Timur to justice. Ideally, he wants to accompany Orqina while she get the proof. He also wants the icon, to further induce the khan to order Timur's death.

The Icon Crosses Over

Caused by: icon; Affected: anyone

If the icon is returned to the church in Zubovo, it immediately opens a portal to the Ideal World which remains open for some time. This, of course, attracts the attention of any magically-sensitive player heroes and Fr Mikhail. The magical commotion is also likely to be noticed by the Rauhwesteritter and Timur.

Timur Sweetens the Deal

Caused by: Timur; Affected: Boris, Sasha

If Timur doesn't have the icon when it reaches Zubovo, he will try to contact Boris or Sasha to sweeten the deal. In return for the icon, will be willing to offer Boris





protection on his lands and freedom from tribute for five years once (as is, of course, inevitable) the all-conquering Golden Horder revenges itself upon the Russians. Even if Boris agrees to this, Timur and his men will make a diversionary attack on Zubovo to focus the minds of the heroes.

The Knight in the Window

Caused by: Rauhwesteritter; Affected: anyone

The Rauhwesteritter's last attempt to snatch the icon is carried out through the Ideal World. If the icon has already moved into the Ideal World, the Rauhwesteritter will simply charge up and try to take it. If it is still in the mundane world, the knights arrive by enchanting the figures in the church's stained glass window, animating and inhabiting them as the images step out of the glass and into the church itself.

Timur's Last Grasp

Caused by: Timur; Affected: everyone

LOCATIONS

Zubovo

Zubovo is a typical Russian peasant town. It has a population of around 800. The people live in small, one- or two-room huts sunk into the ground. Surrounding the town are fields, currently still and lifeless under their thick blanket of snow. To the east of the town, the ground slopes down to the jetties standing in the frozen river. The town is the local centre of a small patch of Krasivy lands, ruled by Baron Dmitri, two day's ride north-west of Moscow. It is run by Yuri Nikolayevich, a quiet and staid farmer appointed as mayor.

The only notable thing about the town is the church, slightly larger than expected. It is made of wood, like all the other buildings in the town. The church has a large painted onion-dome atop a steeply pitched roof. The

walls of the church are pierced by large, stained glass windows that throw a beautiful light across the single chamber within, half divided by a wooden iconostasis, a screen on which most of its icons are mounted.

In the centre of the iconostasis is the empty space where the icon to St Andrew would normally be placed



Timur's last attempt to take the icon is simply to raid into Zubovo and snatch it. He will even attempt to raid into the Ideal World after it, if the portal is open in the church.

Breaking the Icon

Caused by: Fr Mikhail; Affected: Fyodor

The icon has been weakened by its time away from Zubovo's church. When it returns to the Ideal World, Fr Mikhail, and Fyodor if he's there, realise that the icon has become fragile. There is a chance to destroy the icon; this would release the fragment of the True Cross within it into the Transcendental World. This would prevent it falling into the hands of enemies of the faith. However, anyone who took part in destroying such a holy and powerful relic would almost certainly face at the very least censure from the Russian orthodox hierarchy and at worst be declared outlaw and heretic.

The icon has **Resist Damage 10ff3**; Fyodor will get a bonus of +20 to damage it and Pyotr a bonus of +10 (provided neither of them have renounced their faith or started to worship pagan gods).

for religious services, carefully removed from its chest which, in turn, is usually stored in a metal cage at the back. The priest at the church is Fr Mikhail, distraught at the loss of the icon.

The Icon's Resting Place

On the frozen river just outside the town, the snow is disturbed by the tracks of Timur's band. The Mongols are easy to track through the snow. The tracks head off towards the south-east, the opposite direction from where the heroes came from. **Examining the tracks (14): Tracking, Keen Senses (-5)** will reveal that there are about 20-25 Mongols on unshod horses (failure means that the heroes don't know how many horses there were), but astute heroes will **realise that Mongols ride with remounts (14): Mongol customs, Know Enemy (-5), Track (-8)**, so the would be about 10-12 Mongols in the group.

About one and a half hour's ride down the river, the heroes will come across the scene of a fight. In the middle of the river are the bodies of three Mongols, two Mongol ponies, and a single Teutonic knight and his horse.

The bodies are still lukewarm, indicating that they died only a few hours ago. Orqina and Sasha will recognise the Mongols as being members of Timur's personal band. The Teutonic knight is dressed in mail with a very scratchy hair shirt underneath. Dmitri and Sasha will recognise the knight as one of the Rauhwesteritter, fanatic holy warriors of the Teutonic Ordenstaat. If anyone examines the tracks of the knight, they will notice something odd about them: there are no tracks



for either him or his horse, until the skid marks that seem to mark where the horse was injured and fell, trapping the knight underneath. The heroes may speculate on teleporting or flying horses, but Dmitri knows about the flying abilities of the Rauhwesteritter.

The Mongols tracks continue along the river, but there is some blood mixed in the trail. There are no more tracks from the shod horses of the Teutonic knights.

An obvious trail of disturbed snow and blood leads up the river bank and across a frozen marsh. About 200 m away lies the body of a Mongol. The body is surrounded by a soft glow, clearly visible in the dull light. Anyone using Soul Vision to look at the body will instantly see the holy light of the True Cross in St Andrew's icon.

THE ICON

The icon a holy symbol of St Andrew, a patron saint of Russia. It is in the form of a triptych, three panels of painted wood hinged together (similar to a typical GM's screen). It derives its power from a small fragment of the True Cross embedded in the centre panel. The inner sides of the icon are painted with exquisite illustrations of the life of St Andrew, patron saint of Russia. The outside panels are ornately carved with Orthodox symbols and verses from the Bible. Gold leaf is used liberally inside and out. The icon's magical aura is

powerful: Soul Vision automatically detects it as being in the 10^{mf}4 range, and any attacks on the icon must overcome this resistance to damage it. Any attempts to conceal it from magical senses must also overcome its aura of 10^{mf}4 (though if it is still within its box, the icon only resists with 10^{mf}3).

The icon is kept inside a plain wooden box. The box is magically locked, again with resistance to opening and damage of 10^{mf}4. However, any devotee of the Orthodox faith can open the box without resistance, and Orthodox initiates must overcome a resistance of 10^{mf}2 with their best Orthodox Piety ability to open the box.

The icon has profound but subtle magical powers, mainly the power to put people in the right place at the right time (as per St Andrew's secret). These powers have no game mechanical effects, but they are the reason why the heroes are here, now, to determine its fate, as well as the reason why the Teutons and the Mongols will struggle so strenuously over it.

In addition, the icon is a powerful anchor for the Representational World. With the icon in the church and undamaged, it locks the Representational World in the surrounding area to being Orthodox Christian. Without the icon in Zubovo, the Representational World could be shifted to another belief system, permanently affecting the magical, and hence temporal, power that holds sway in the surrounding area.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Ability ratings given are inclusive of all normal augments, equipment, etc. Reduce the ratings appropriately if any of these characters are unprepared or surprised.

TIMUR

Kulikovo may have been a disaster for the Golden Horde, but it was good for Timur. In the subsequent chaos, it gave him the opportunity to murder Jochi, his predecessor as noyan of the Long Cloud Arrow omuk, or clan, and in the chaos claim the noyan's badge of office, the *paiza*, in Tokhtamysh's name.

The bulk of the Long Cloud Arrow is wintering to the east, in lands notionally in Moscow's control but in practice no-man's land. Timur himself, though happy to enjoy the prestige of power, has no enthusiasm for spending a winter adjudicating disputes over lost sheep and listening to the elders – especially not when so many seem keen slyly to question his authority.

He is a man of action and craves loot and glory. More to the point, he knows that his enemies in the omuk will soon enough find ways to discover what so far they only suspect, that Tokhtamysh has never heard of him, much less supported his elevation. So he needs to win that support retrospectively, by presenting him with some

great treasure. What better than the icon of St Andrew, which acts as a spiritual anchor for the Orthodox faith in these lands? If the icon were removed or destroyed, it would allow Tengrist animism to become more powerful in the area. It would also provide an incentive for the inhabitants to convert from Orthodoxy to Tengrism, thus weakening their links with the Russian boyars and tying them closer to the Golden Horde.

If, in the meantime, he can silence (or, preferably, capture then torture to death) Orqina, the only real witness to Jochi's murder, then so much the better.

Keywords: Mongol 2^{mf}, Tengrist Shamanism 19, Regular Cavalry 15^{mf}, Devotee of Gujir Tengri 7^{mf}, Devotee of Ulagan Burilgi 12^{mf}.

Significant Abilities: Command Mongols 10^{mf}2, Fearsome 3^{mf}2, Fight from Horseback 15^{mf}3, Mounted Archery 8^{mf}3, Never Take No for an Answer 13^{mf}3, Ride 15^{mf}2, See Advantage for Timur 18^{mf}, Wolf's Howl 7^{mf}

Personality: Bloodlust 14^{mf}, Greedy 7^{mf}, Hate Orqina 19, Violent 15^{mf}, Superior to Russians 20, Terrifying 12^{mf}, Love Fires 12^{mf}.

Affinities: White Lightning 7^{mf} [Gujir Tengri] (Bright White Flash, Burning Lightning, Eat Fire, Strike Like the Lightning); Kill and Burn 12^{mf}





[Ulagan Buri] (I Burn Your Home, Kill Who Hurt Me)

Tactics: Timur's tactics are typically Mongol. His first approach is to use his fearsome reputation and intimidating nature to cow people into doing what he wants. If this is somehow unsuccessful, he won't attempt to use force directly unless he's confident of an easy victory. Instead, he will provoke his opponent, retreat, and wait for an opportunity to strike. Attacks from ambush, particularly when his opponent is fatigued, are ideal. If he can make his opponents attack before they are ready, so much the better. He will also use smoke and fire, and the cover of the trees, to avoid direct battles with the Rauhewesteritter.

KHAGATIA

Khagatia is Timur's second-in-command. He is fiercely loyal to the Mongol nation and follows Timur because he seems to be a man who can get things done. Khagatia also has his suspicions about Jochi's death and is looking for evidence that will implicate Timur: after all, if he can reveal a regicide to the khan, that can only be good for Khagatia. Knowing of Orqina as a possible witness to the murder, he will attempt to find out what she knows. However, he will take no action that could be to the detriment of the Mongol people and if he can teach those upstarts Rus' a lesson, that can only be good.

Use the statistics of a typical soldier below, with the addition of Honourable 7M

MONGOL SOLDIER

Timur's personal band. There are six of these soldiers, including two injured Mongols (-20 to ability ratings). The Little Ancestor of the Long Cloud Arrow is Urekchu the Winter Rider.

Keywords: Mongol 2M, Tengrist Shamanism 19, Regular Cavalry 10M, Initiate of Tegus 3M

Significant Abilities: Fight from Horseback 8M3, Mounted Archery 3M3, Ride 15M2, Sabre Fighting 20.

Personality: Brave 3M, Superior to Russians 20, Menacing 4M

Affinities: Spirit-Swordsman 3M [Tegus] (Grab Spirit, Slash Spirit); Little Ancestor ability: **Ride Over Ice** 20.

Mongol Pony: Kick 15, Large 20, Run Fast 10M, Run Long Distance 3M, Strong 2M

KLAUS VON SKRUNDA

Klaus is a formidable man and intensely devoted to the Teutonic Ordenstaat and its crusade against the northern pagans. He is a stalwart member of the Rauhewesteritter and has recently been promoted and gifted with the Lithuanian estate of Skrunnda. He's also

having a bit of a crisis of faith, at least as far as the methods he employs. He's beginning to see that, sometimes, you can catch more bears with honey than with vinegar. This is why he's been having secret talks with Dmitri about using the Krasivy lands as a refuge for Teutonic forces in Russia. The icon would be a good bargaining chip in these negotiations, as well as weakening the Orthodox heresy in the area.

Unfortunately, he realises that there's a very good chance that he'll be turned on by his own men if they realise that he's going soft on the pagans.

He has only three other Rauhewesteritter with him, but that's enough.

His abilities are those of the other Rauhewesteritter, plus Propose Compromise 3M, Deal with Pagans 18, Hate Pagans 12.

RAUHEWESTERITTER

These are the elite shock cavalry of the Teutonic Ordenstaat. They are fanatical soldiers. The only thing they enjoy more than killing pagans and heretics is parading their piety to other Teutonic knights.

Keywords: Teutonic Knight 2M, Roman Catholic 2M, Shock Cavalry Soldier 2M2, Devotee of St George of the Teutons 6M, Devotee of St Hippolytus 18M, Devotee of St Wynfrith 3M

Significant Abilities: Ride 2M2, Mounted Sword Fighting 10M4, Ignore Injury 12M, Endure Discomfort 2M, Muscular 19

Personality: Combative 8M, Disciplined 10M2, Fanatical 17M, Fierce 19, Hate Pagans 7M, Intolerant 13M, Love Horses 16M, Superior 8M2

Affinities: Crusader 6M [St George] (Cutting Blade, Hymn of Victory, Resist Pagan Magic, Smite Pagan, Strength of the Virtuous); **Muscular Christianity** 19 [St Wynfrith] (Punch Pagan Out, Shatter Pagan Idol, Stronger Than You, Work Till Sundown); **Horse** 18M [St Hippolytus] (Heal Horse, Pray for Horse, Ride on the Wind, Speak to Horse, Speedy Horse, Stay on Horse)

Teutonic Warhorse: Kick 15, Large 10M, Run Fast 20, Strong 10M

Tactics: The Rauhewesteritter are shock troops, and they know it. Their preferred tactic is to charge down on their flying horses in a tight, iron-clad formation, drive through their opponents, fly up and away, regroup, and do it again. They have a large advantage from their superior arms and armour. If they get bogged down in a melee or there isn't enough room to charge, apply heavy penalties of -10 to -30.



PLAYER HEROES

For reasons of space, these are provided in a relatively abbreviated form. For example, specific abilities within keywords are only listed when they are unusual or have a different ratings, nor are affinities and the feats within affinities (assume that each character has all those available). These are presented as experienced heroes, with ability ratings higher than those of usual starting characters.

Fully-filled out character sheets for each, including all the specific feats and abilities, can be printed off from the Firebird website: www.firebird-productions.com.

BARON DMITRI IVANOVITCH KRASIVY

You are a boyar, ruler of extensive lands. The appanage system means that your holdings are scattered across an area south-east of Moscow. When you die, you lands will be divided between your two sons. You are an old man (now 63) and you can feel the weight of responsibility laying heavily on you. Your main concern is for the safety of your people after you have gone. Your two sons, Pyotr and Boris, are fine men but you doubt that either of them will make a capable boyar. Pyotr, your oldest, is a fine soldier but he is too honest and forthright for politics. Boris has the cunning to succeed as a leader, but he is too self-centred to make the necessary sacrifices for his land.

But strong leadership is needed in this time of breaking Mongol power and increasing predation from the Teutonic knights. Therefore, you have sent Sasha, your slippery manservant, to contact the Teutonic Ordenstaat to the west. He made contact with Klaus von Skrunda, a leader of the fearsome Rauhewesteritter, fanatical Teutonic knights on flying horses. You have secretly agreed to give Teutonic crusaders shelter and sustenance on your lands, in return for immunity from their attacks and protection from the Mongols. Such a deal could safeguard your inheritance, and you must do your best to convince your sons to honour it.

Your sole source of comfort now is Orqina, a runaway Mongol who has become your concubine. She has a secret from her past, but she demands little and is generous with herself.

Your brother, Fyodor (a Christian priest), has arranged this pilgrimage so you can “make your peace with God.” Perhaps you will. Perhaps you can use the icon of Zubovo to secure your lands.

Keywords:

Muscovite Rus' 19

Vodka Makes Me Melancholy

Rus' Paganism 18

Russian Orthodox 211

Noble 1811

Bibliophile

Hear Case Fairly

Initiate of Dazhbog the Tsar 611

Initiate of St Yaropolk of Vladimir 211

Other:

Ambitious 1811

Aristocratic 1811

Authoritative 1311

Opportunistic 711

Pragmatic 41111

Sentimental 19

Practical 18

Superstitious 18

Tactful 211

Noblesse d'Oblige 611

Frail 811

Persuade 1611

Rousing Speech 1211

Relationships:

Paternal to Vassals 19

Support Congregation 8

Respect Irina, Volkhv of Dazhbog 18

Love Pyotr 17

Love Boris 18

Tolerate Fyodor 9

Find Comfort With Orqina 211

Force Obedience of Sasha 19

Diplomatic Understanding with Klaus von Skrunda 711

2 Hero Points

FATHER FYODOR IVANOVITCH KRASIVY

Now is the Time of Reckoning for the Slavic peoples. It is the End of Times. The oppressive yoke of the Mongol overlords has been broken, but the Heathen scum still stalk Mother Russia. There is also the enemy within, those noble Rus' who have turned their back on the Son of God and still worship in their benighted ways, polluting pure Christianity with dvoeverie. But worst of all are the Heretics from the west, the Catholics who worship the False Pope in Rome. The Teutonic knights, with their so-called Crusade, are the greatest Abomination in all the Russias.

You have asked Dmitri, your elder brother and lord, to accompany you on this pilgrimage to Zubovo in an attempt to save his Immortal Soul from the sin of dvoeverie before his Imminent Death. You also need to get him to cast out Orqina, the Mongol Jezebel he has taken as a concubine. If you can save the Soul of his younger son, Boris, so much the better. Dmitri's older son, Pyotr, should be your ally in this, as he is a staunch Warrior of the Lord.





Keywords:

Muscovite Rus' 18
 Abhor Vodka
 Speak Russian 7¹¹²
Russian Orthodox 7¹¹
Priest 12¹¹
Devotee of St Basil the Great 4¹¹
Devotee of St Ilya the Thunderer 16¹¹
Initiate of St Vladimir 8¹¹

Other:

Authoritative 2¹¹
 Bushy Beard 7¹¹
 Despise Follower of Dvoeverie 2¹¹
 Evangelical 8¹¹
 Feel Superior to Pagans 3¹¹
 Fiery 12¹¹
 Hate Catholic 17¹¹
 Hate Pagan 8¹¹
 Intolerant 4¹¹²
 Long-Suffering 7¹¹
 Pious 3¹¹²
 Preach 13¹¹
 Self-Righteous 16¹¹

Relationships:

Concern for Dmitri's Immortal Soul 2¹¹
 Obey Metropolitan of Moscow 19
 Protect My Flock 8¹¹
 Despise Boris 19
 Hate Orqina 6¹¹
 Support Pyotr 2¹¹

3 Hero Points

PYOTR DMITRIVICH KRASIYV

You are a proud and noble man, a loyal son to Baron Dmitri, and an upstanding example of Russian warriorhood at its best. As Dmitri's oldest son, you will make a worthy successor to him when he soon dies. Although the appanage system means that your younger brother, Boris, will get half the lands, you will get the best and you are confident that you can soon conquer more.

It is the duty of all men to be all that they can. You have dedicated your life to the quest of bringing peace and justice to the world. But, in these troubled times, peace and justice is often best served with a sharp sword and a strong arm. This is how you serve your fellow man. You admire Father Fyodor, you uncle, for his unwavering devotion to the true Christian faith. While the power of the Lord is in his voice, Jesus guides your sword to strike down the enemies of the Orthodox faith, be they pagan or catholic. Your younger brother, Boris, has potential but he is too self-serving to ever amount to much.

You are of course totally loyal to your father, as he is a strong and decisive Lord. The people need a strong leader. But he is getting soft as his death approaches, and you are beginning to wonder if he perhaps is as noble and true as you once thought. If he is weak, is he fit to rule? There are rumours that he has had dealings with the heretical Catholics, the Teutonic knights. If so, that would show dreadful weakness on his part. Perhaps the rot started when he invited Orqina, that exotic and beguiling beauty, into his bed. You just don't know what her dark, flashing eyes see in such a withered old man.

Keywords:

Muscovite Rus' 2¹¹
 Drink Vodka Heartily
Russian Orthodox 18
Noble 19
 Knowledge of Chivalry
Cavalry Soldier 17¹¹
 Riding 3¹¹²
 Sabre Combat
 Javelin Combat
Initiate of St George the Brave 8¹¹
Initiate of St Mikhail the Archangel 3¹¹

Other:

Handsome 2¹¹
 Strong 8¹¹
 Ambitious 8¹¹
 Brave 3¹¹²
 Contempt for those who do not live up to their ideals 18¹¹
 Disciplined 12¹¹
 Dutiful 19
 Honourable 7¹¹
 Proud 17¹¹
 Sentimental 2¹¹

Relationships:

Admire Fyodor 18
 Loyal to Strong Baron Dmitri 2¹¹
 Patronise Boris 18
 Secretly In Love With Orqina 13¹¹
 Horse: Large 5¹¹, Run Fast 10¹¹, Strong 12¹¹

4 Hero Points

BORIS DMITRIVICH KRASIYV

As the younger son of a minor boyar, you've never had the material trappings that a man of your station should have. When Dmitri, you decrepit old father, eventually kicks the bucket, things will get worse because the appanage system means that you'll only get half his lands, and the better half will go to your arrogant do-gooder elder brother Pyotr. If Pyotr were out of the way, you'd get it all. And if Dmitri were to have an unfortunate accident, you'd get it all the sooner. But such a move needs support and protection, especially considering the increasing unrest caused by the Teutons. The Mongols are still a force to be reckoned with, and that's why you've made contact with Timur, a local khan, to help you out in exchange for increased tribute on the side. You know





he's got something planned at Zubovo; you don't know what, but you're hoping you can take advantage of it. Irina, your lover and volkhv, has gone on ahead. You hope she hasn't got into trouble.

Dmitri is overly precious about his estate and its well-being. Your older brother Pyotr is an arrogant oaf that thinks with his bulging sword-arm (though you've seen him eyeing up Orqina, Dmitri's new Mongol bimbo). Fyodor is a pompous windbag, but dangerous if crossed. You've used Sasha, Dmitri's manservant, to run some errands for you to Timur; he's a good drinking companion, but you're not sure you trust him.

Keywords:

- Muscovite Rus' 1rfl
- Sniff out Vodka 18rfl
- Russian Orthodox 17
- Rus' Paganism 2rfl
- Noble 12rfl
- Hunter 16rfl
- Initiate of St Alexis 6rfl
- Initiate of Perun the Prince 4rfl

Other:

- Carouse 16rfl
- Adventurous 19
- Ambitious 14rfl
- Aristocratic 17
- Cunning 7rfl
- Fierce 19
- Long-Suffering 17
- Masterful 4rfl
- Materialistic 16rfl
- Moody 1rfl
- Self-Centred 8rfl
- Snobbish 2rfl
- Superstitious 18

Relationships:

- Conspirator with Timur 2rfl
- Distrust Orqina 3rfl
- Fancy Orqina 2rfl
- Lover of Irina, Volkhv of Perun 4rfl
- Manipulate Pyotr 18
- Member of congregation 17
- Respect Dmitri 16
- Wary Conspirator with Sasha 18
- Horse: Large 5rfl, Run Fast 10rfl, Strong 2rfl, Sure-footed 3rfl

2 Hero Points

ALEXANDR (SASHA) THE LUCKY

Sometimes, you think you're the only one around here that actually does any work. You're meant to be Baron Dmitri's manservant, but you spend most of your time being his eyes and ears among the peasants (using vodka to free their tongues), using your fists to enforce his policies, and running errands everywhere behind people's backs. Dmitri's sent you several times to the Teuton knights in the west, trying to set up a deal where they leave Dmitri's lands alone in exchange for shelter on their raids. Some of them are okay, but you don't like the fanatics, especially the *Rauhewesteritter* and their flying warhorses; unfortunately, that's who the deal's with. Boris has also sent you out to talk to Timur, a Mongol khan, about some deal he's setting up with them. It'll probably end up with violence (which is fine by you) and with you getting a big payoff (which is even better). Neither of these men want these contacts to be public knowledge. There's got to be an angle in playing one off against the other.

You know there's something going on between Timur and Orqina, Dmitri's latest squeeze. It's probably because Timur never managed to cop off with Orqina. You did though, once. You were both drunk, you managed to talk her into it, and she's been avoiding you ever since. You don't think she's told Dmitri, but you've got to watch your back with her. You think she may be planning something. You do your best to avoid Dmitri's brother (Fyodor) and elder son (Pyotr), 'cos they're both Christian fanatic blowhards.

Keywords:

- Novgorod Rus 17
- Keep on Drinking Vodka
- Rus' Paganism 3rfl
- Thief 16rfl
- Word on the Street 18rfl
- Knock Out
- Initiate of Morozko 2rfl
- Initiate of Yarilo 6rfl

Other:

- Inflict Pain 6rfl2
- Put People at Ease 18rfl
- Personality
- Callous 18rfl
- Cunning 4rfl
- Devil-May-Care 2rfl
- Greedy 7rfl
- Lusty 6rfl
- Open-Minded 19
- Party Animal 4rfl
- Practical 3rfl
- Proud of Novgorod 18
- Self-serving 4rfl2
- Vain 18

Relationships:

- Conspirator with Boris 2rfl
- Conspirator with Dmitri 8rfl
- Fancy Orqina 4rfl
- Friendly with Teutonic Knights 2rfl
- Acquaintance of Timur 19

4 Hero Points





ORGINA THE OUTCAST

You were a servant and spiritual guide to Jochi Khan, ruler of the local Mongol horde, until he was murdered. You have proof that his right-hand man, Timur, was behind the plot. Timur had you blamed for Jochi's death, and you had to flee the Khanate's lands to survive. But you want to pay Timur back for what he did to you, and you've turned to Erglik to help you. This means you've had to suppress your normal kind and empathetic nature, but the circumstances demand it. You look forward to the time when you can go back to your normal self.

You ended up in Dmitri's lands and in his bed. It's a fair exchange – you keep him warm at night and healthy by day, and he looks after you and doesn't ask too many questions about your past. His brother, Fyodor, is a Christian fanatic and you do your best to avoid him. Fyodor has harangued Dmitri several times about you, and you think it only a matter of time before Fyodor makes Dmitri force you out. It's a shame that Fyodor's dominance extends to Pyotr, Dmitri's elder son. Pyotr is a good man, honest and forthright, as well as being strong and handsome. If only you could make him see something beyond Fyodor's narrow and bigoted vision. Once or twice you've caught him looking at you with something quite different from hate in his eyes, but he's never acted on it.

Apart from Dmitri, the only person who's taken a great interest in you is Sasha. He was asking you lots of questions about the Golden Khanate. One evening, to get you to talk, he plied you with vodka and you ended up in bed together. You don't know how he managed that, and it's something you regret. You don't want Pyotr to think you're a loose woman.

And you've just discovered that you're pregnant. You don't know whether Dmitri or Sasha is the father, and you're very worried about what Pyotr might think about it. But you're keeping the child.

Keywords:

Mongol 3
Tengrist Animism 12
 Respect Ancestors 2
Healer 14
Shaman 8
Devotee of Erglik 19
Devotee of Sube 2
Devotee of Umai 17

Other:

Calm 3
 Caring 16
 Empathetic 14
 Enduring 3
 Exotic Beauty 8
 Guilty over sleeping with Sasha 2
 Heartless 2
 Patient 2
 Practical 6
 Quick 2
 Seduce 19
 Selfish 6
 Take Revenge on Timur 6

Relationships:

Defend Unborn Child 18
 Unrequited Love for Pyotr 8
 Care about Dmitri 18
 Wary of Fyodor 2
 Suspicious of Sasha 17
Follower: Tabiti, Spirit of Fire:
 Consume with Flames 3, Burn
 To Essence 18, Never Go Out
 7, Change Shape 16

3 Hero Points





APPENDICES

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

MORE FROM THE FIREBIRD?

Mythic Russia was written to be an entirely self-contained book, but response has been so positive that a very irregular series of supplements called **The Birchbark Chronicles** will be produced.

For further updates, visit the Firebird Productions website from time to time @ <http://mythicrussia.wordpress.com/> and subscribe to the free email message service @ http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/Mythic_Russia.

OTHER GAMES SET IN RUSSIA AND RUSSIAN MYTH

To my knowledge, the only English-language game set directly in this milieu is **Rus'**, produced in 1980, which is frankly not worth spending more than three lines on.

GURPS Russia, a sourcebook for the workmanlike generic GURPS roleplaying system by S John Ross, transcends the often bland nature of the rules and is a thoroughly useful and readable work, which augurs well for a future Russian game he has promised.

Less inspired but still useful is the **Dragon and the Bear** sourcebook for *Ars Magica*, which actually derives much of its inspiration from Polish lore.

Minor works worth noting are a couple of scenarios for the popular d20 system which draw liberally on Russian history and folklore, **Tsar Rising** and **The Dancing Hut**.

Games Workshop's Warhammer world has a Russian-inspired realm, Kislev, and some interesting fantasy figures for its armies. For historically accurate figures, though, the best choices are the ranges from **Molniya Miniatures** and **Old Glory**. Cheaper, and still of a very high quality are the plastic figures produced by the Russian firm **Zvezda** and distributed by **Italeri**: Russian Knights, Mongols, Livonian Knights and Teutonic Knights

NON-FICTION SOURCES

The best history textbooks on the era are Janet Martin's **Medieval Russia** and Robert Crummey's **The**

Formation of Muscovy. Neither is especially fun to read, alas, and George Vernadsky's **Kievan Russia**, while a little dated, is broader in scope. Several of the military history books by Osprey are very useful visual guides, especially **Medieval Russian Armies, 838-1252** and **Medieval Russian Armies, 1250-1500**. Eric Christiansen's **The Northern Crusaders** and William Urban's **Teutonic Knights** are excellent on the Ordenstaat.

FICTION

Peter Morwood's Prince Ivan trilogy (**Prince Ivan**, **Firebird** and **The Golden Horde**) is at best a lovely evocation of the spirit of the times, although some of the later books needed slightly tighter editing. C. J. Cherryh is one of the greats of modern fantasy and her own trilogy of **Rusalka**, **Chernevog** and **Yvgenie** are, as with all her fiction, sometimes rather dense but nonetheless a rewarding read, which answer the question of just what is wrong with getting what you wish for. The *Tales from the Baltic* series by Skomantas is the best – OK, only – English-language Lithuanian fantasy fiction I know.

Mike Dixon-Kennedy's **Encyclopaedia of Russian & Slavic Myth and Legend** is an invaluable source, while Alexander Afana'ev's **Russian Fairy Tales** is one of the best collections, containing almost 200 folk and fairy tales

THE INTERNET

A regularly-updated list of useful sites and links is maintained on the Firebird site @ <http://mythicrussia.wordpress.com/>.



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