



PULP VILLAINS:

# THE RED MENACE



A SOURCEBOOK FOR

## THRILLING TALES



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# THE RED MENACE

*Thousands of prisoners were dead already, but for the Commissar Gradov, the life of traitors of the people and the Polish oppressors didn't mean much. Only the ultimate goal carried any meaning – the goal buried under layers of soil, ice and snow. Stone ziggurats, silvery towers and alabaster sculptures were completely out of place in the northern Siberia. The eggheads from the Marxist Institute of Unusual Research were wondering why, here, among the tundra, someone decided to build such a great city, and why did its architecture combined elements of ancient Egypt, the culture of Aztecs, the Kushitic Meroe and African empire of Monomotapa?*

*Gradov didn't care much about their guesses – the truth was secondary to the laws of Marxism-Leninism, after all. No, he cared more about the translation of hieroglyphics found on the central ziggurat, delivered by the friends from German Ahnenerbe... Hieroglyphics mentioning something about the most powerful energy on the world...*

*The chain of Gradov's thoughts was suddenly broken by the sudden*

*commotion between the prisoners. Soon, the pepeshas of the soldiers were on, and were joined by the machinegun mounted on a turret. And then, the blurry shape whizzed above the ground, deafening the Red Army soldiers with the howl of its rocket engine.*

*"Eagle of Vengeance!" Gradov shouted, reaching for his Tokarev pistol. The prisoners, predictably, assaulted the guards with their crowbars, pickaxes and shovels. This chaos was only increased by the mad Pole with a jetpack. His twin handguns blasted away, and almost every bullet punctured a Russian soldier. Gradov emptied the entire chamber at Eagle, but had to retreat into the command bunker. In vain. He felt a hit in his leg, and a warm wave of pain – not entirely unwelcome in the Siberian cold. In the red mist, he saw the Eagle, wearing his armored, red and white suit, slowly approaching him.*

*"But... but how did you find us?" Gradov whispered, staring at his nemesis.*



*The Pole approached his erstwhile torturer, and reloaded his pistol.*

*“Well, comrade, your plan wasn’t bad. You sent dozens of false trains in various directions, and the real prisoner transport was sent using your submarines. But you forgot one thing...”*

*Gradov licked his mouth, and felt drops of cold sweat freezing on his forehead.*

*“What was it?”*

*“I’m still smarter than you.” The Eagle pulled the trigger.*



## INTRODUCTION

Even though today we know that the Red Menace was at least as brutal as the Nazis, the Soviets seldom appeared as antagonists in pulp magazines, and only during the second half of the 1940s did the pulps start to feature communist villains. Then, the descendants of the pulp heroes (including superheroes like Captain America) clashed with the communists for the first time. During WWII, after all, USSR was an ally of the USA, a decent customer, and a staunch enemy of the Third Reich.

While Russian soldiers were among the most heroic of the WWII combatants, Stalin's Soviet Union was still a totalitarian empire.

Like with our earlier release covering the Third Reich, we don't want to mock millions of victims of the regime. Here, we present the evil face of Soviet Antagonists – while many of Soviet Union's crimes against humankind were real, we present them for the sake of drama. Any discussion of "Who was worse – Stalin or Hitler" is totally beyond a scope of a small RPG supplement.

The Soviet Union was a multinational state, and many of the worst villains and greatest heroes of the Soviet system were Georgians, Ukrainians, Poles or Jews. As was the case in the pulps, however, we'll refer to them all as Russians.





## SOVIET HISTORY

Though the communists seized power in Russia in October 1917, the underlying changes were far older. Tsarist Russia from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century was not the same state that managed to defeat Napoleon – or perhaps one of their problems was that it actually *was* the same state -- outmoded and oppressive.

The disastrous Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) only showcased the weakness of the Tsar's military. The result was the rise in revolutionary attitudes in Russia. In 1905 it skyrocketed in dozens of protests, escalating to bloody riots which became known as the Revolution of 1905. Various groups – workers and intellectuals, liberals and anarchists, and national minorities – rebelled and protested across the entire Empire. Even though Tsar Nicholas II did promise to respect the basic rights of the citizens, the crisis of the absolute power of the Tsars only grew larger.

One of major groups was the Russian Social Democratic Party. Inspired by Karl Marx' theories, they expected the Russian working class (despite Russia being the least industrialized country in Europe at that time), to rise up in revolution. The party eventually split into two fractions – more radical Bolsheviks, wanting an alliance with the farmers, and more moderate, liberal Mensheviks. Two other opposition groups were the Constitutional Democrats (or Kadets), appealing

to liberals and educated classes and Socialist Revolutionaries (Esers) – a revolutionary, terrorist group focusing on farmers and rejecting many Marxist theories.

The Great War and participation of Russia on the side of the Entente proved to be crucial for the upcoming changes. The initial frontline successes, including the victory over the Austro-Hungarian army were soon forgotten when the German Empire crushed the Russian armies at Tannenberg.

The Russian armies were driven from Poland, and even though Brusilov's offensive managed to eliminate Austro-Hungary from the war, eventually it brought heavy losses and the weakened Russian Army could not hold their own territory. Finally, the front stabilized between Riga (Latvia) and the Danube and Black Sea. The Russian society was exhausted, and the opposition was joined by factions that until then had supported the war – the conservatives and nationalists. A plague of strikes then paralyzed the economy, and jumpstarted the February Revolution.

On February 18 1917 (or March 3rd according to Gregorian calendar) workers from Putilov Company in Petrograd (then-capitol of Russia), stopped the work to protest against the lack of food. In three days all Petersburg's factories were swept by strikes, and riots erupted on streets leading to bloody clashes with the police. The Tsar ordered the army to pacify the civilians leading to massacres – yet, many soldiers

refused to shoot to civilians and many regiments rebellend. On Feb 27<sup>th</sup> (March 12<sup>th</sup>) the mob attacked the headquarters of the Tsar's secret police, the Okhrana, and three days later the Tsar abdicated.

The revolution initially was being controlled by the Provisional Committee of State Duma (*duma* being the state parliament) which later changed into the Provisional Government, led by the Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky (an Eser), but much of the power was being wielded by the military councils on the frontlines and worker's councils (*soviet*) in cities.

The Provisional Government of the new Russian Republic announced a general amnesty, and democratic election to the Constitutional Assembly. It introduced, for the first time in Russia, freedom of press and of creating political parties. The first state that recognized the new Russian Republic was United States of America. The government was also decided to go on fighting the Great War – but more defeats on the frontlines and worsening economic situation kept it from stabilizing, and so a certain secured train was about to change the history of Russia – and the entire world.

## COMRADE LENIN

Vladimir Ulyanov, using the pseudonym Lenin ('one of river Lena'), was already famous as a revolutionary, and had been exiled since 1905. Upon receiving the news in Switzerland of the overthrow of the Tsar, he decides to immediately

return to the country. The problem was that between Switzerland and Russia were the hostile central powers – Germany and Austro-Hungary -- and the sea routes were controlled by the Great Britain (an ally of the Tsar, who had not recognized the new Republic).

Lenin owed his eventual return home to a strange collaboration between various European communists and, astonishingly, the German intelligence services.

Fritz Platten, a Swiss communist, contacted the German ambassador, and with the help of the German intelligence services he was able to arrange a transport of Lenin, his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, and around thirty of his comrades. After reaching the Swiss-German border, the communists were placed in a sealed train, which reached the Baltic coast in Sassnitz. There, on the deck of a steamboat, Lenin reached Sweden, and then moved to Finland (then an autonomous part of Russian Empire), where he moved took a train to Petrograd.

Lenin created his 'April theses' during his travel, which postulated transforming the bourgeois revolution into a socialist one, and after arriving in Russia he started to work on these plans, leading the Bolsheviks. Even though the Provisional Government publically presented that the Communists were financed by foreign governments and outlawed their party, Lenin gained more and more support – partly because he claimed that Russia

would quit the war after Bolsheviks seized power.

The night of 24 to 25th October (or 6/7 November according to the western calendar), the Committee of the Petrograd Soviet ordered the troops to attack. The Bolshevik soldiers took over the most important resistance points in the city, and on 27th of October, the Winter Palace – the headquarters for the Provisional Government – was taken over without a single shot. While Kerensky managed to escape (and later died in exile), Lenin became the leader of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), a new government.

Across Russia, power was being seized by the revolutionary committees and soviets of worker delegates – completely controlled by the Bolsheviks. One of the major steps in creating the new Communist order was the reintroduction of censorship, and creating the Whole-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage – called Cheryezvichaika (abbreviated as “Cheka”), the first Soviet secret police. The Cheka was led by a fanatical Pole, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, known as the “Red Torturer” or “Iron Felix”. Rumors claimed that Dzerzhinsky became a Communist just to have an excuse to kill more Russians.

While the free elections had been won by the socialists, the new Parliament gathered only once, and was quickly assaulted by the Bolsheviks.

In March 1918 Germans achieved their goal – the Bolsheviks signed the Brest Treaty with the Central Powers, thus pulling Russia out of the Great War, and securing the Eastern Front for Germany.

## THE CIVIL WAR

The Bolsheviks introduced several reforms – and while they transferred the ownership of the land to the people and promised to push Russia into twentieth century, they also nationalized the economy, created concentration camps, and eliminated the opposition using the assassinations and arrests. Strikes and protests of the workers were suppressed by the military. The former revolutionaries were all too eager to become the present torturers.

Facing the revolutionary terror the generals Kornilov, Denikin, Vrangel and Admiral Alexander Kolchak (and others) formed a temporary alliance of various anti-Bolshevik movements, the so-called “Whites”, to fight against the Reds.

The civil war broke out, to end in 1922. The Reds were seemingly the weaker side – the north was dominated by General Miller, Ural and Syberia by Kolchak, while Yudenich was even able to threaten Petrograd. The activities of the Whites were being supported by English, American and French troops (based in Archangelsk), as well as the Czechoslovak Legion and 5th Rifle Division composed mostly of Poles. However, the leaders of



the Whites were often divided, and the foreign powers didn't devote enough support (or troops) to fighting Bolsheviks. The fighting in the European part of Russia was over by 1920, when the forces of Vrangel, Denikin and Yudenich were crushed, thanks the conflicts between leaders.

Numerous peasant uprisings were bloodily pacified. When pacifying the Tambov Rebellion, spurred by the cruelty of Red Army and increasing confiscation of grain, Marshal Tukhachevsky killed over 200 thousand peasants. Likewise, the Kronstadt rebellion of sailors and soldiers was also suppressed.

In the eastern parts of Russia the civil war was still ongoing. The Czechoslovak Legion became famous for its tenacity – its members refused to surrender to Bolsheviks, and they went East, fighting their way through each single station on the Trans-Siberian railroad. The Whites briefly dominated the entire Asian part of Russia, but the disciplined actions of the Red Army commanded by Lev Trotsky and lack of unity between Whites led to retreat of the Legion.

Eventually, Admiral Kolchak led a coup to overthrow the provisional government. While this decision finally created a unified government of opposition, it also discouraged the foreign allies (mostly Japanese but also Americans) to cooperate with the strongly nationalistic and Anti-Semitic Whites. After initial successes the Whites were finally defeated.

In 1921 the Red Army reached Mongolia, where they defeated the forces of the so-called Mad Baron, Roman Ungern von Sternberg – infamous for his fascination with Buddhism, Mongolian culture (he was even claimed the a title of “Khan”), and Eastern spiritualism. Sternberg believed fervently in monarchy, and hoped that he could become the next Tsar. He was among the last remnants of the Whites.

The defeat of the Whites was to Lenin just the first stage of the World Revolution. Even though initially he allowed the nations of the Russian Empire to freely govern themselves, after seizing the power, he immediately sought to bring them to heel.

## **USSR AND COMRADE STALIN**

In 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created, from Russia, Belarus, Transcaucasia and Ukraine. With time, it expanded into more republics, where the Red Army brought worker's paradise, usually using guns. The October Revolution eventually brought death to 15 million people.

The death of Lenin in 1924 has caused another power struggle among the Soviet elites. A previously relatively minor functionary, Joseph Stalin, worked hard on improving his position, and now saw his opportunity. Allied with Zinovyev and Kamenev, two of Lenin's most closest assistants, Stalin removed Trotsky from power (and from Russia). In 1929 Stalin



eventually defeated the opposition. He introduced the collectivization of farming, taking the land from the peasants, and creating “collective farms” – the state-ran kolkhoz. The newly liberated farmers did not take that easily, and started yet another rebellion, which led to a massive crack-down by the Red Army and OGPU (the descendant of the Cheka). Over a million of opponents of collectivization were murdered, and the result was the total halt of farming in the Ukraine.

The result of pseudoscientific theories and oppression of peasants was the Great Hunger in Ukraine – once the breadbasket of Europe. While entire towns were starving to the point that actual pies made of human meat were being sold, Stalin exported millions of tons of grain.

From August 1932 to December 1933 over 125 000 people were arrested and 5400 executed; in

comparison, during the Tsar’s rule between years 1825-1905 625 death penalties have been issued, and only 191 carried out.

All in all, the industrialization of farming, which ended in 1934 resulted in 15 million deaths – more than the number of Soviet soldiers who perished in WWII!

The Soviet state was being industrialized, but at a cost – mass terror and sending thousands of people to gulags, under authority of the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs). Many dissidents were sent to insane wards – after all, it was argued, you had to be crazy to not understand that Soviet Union was a perfect state. The omnipresent



propaganda and secret services disciplined people and in just a few years many new investments were made, but it did little to improve the lives of ordinary Russians. The economy was not invented to serve the people, and most of the investments were in weapon industry.

By the mid-thirties, Stalin's Soviet Union was a fully totalitarian state, with a massive state security ran by the NKVD – a secret service controlling criminal, political police, intelligence and counter intelligence, as well as courts and working camps. While there were many different secret services, (for instance military intelligence – GRU), the NKVD effectively encompassed them all. For game purposes, the NKVD can essentially be considered the only secret police force in the USSR.

Another wave of repression was the Great Purge of the 1937. Much like Hitler after gaining power, Stalin needed to cement his own leadership – by removing those disloyal to him. Many veteran members of the Bolshevik party, and great officers of the Red Army were exterminated. The NKVD itself was not spared, despite the entire process was overseen by the commissar of NKVD – Nikolai Yezhov, who himself was later killed by Stalin's orders.

## THE ROAD TO WORLD WAR

Poland and the Baltic states were historically in Russian sphere of influence, and so the Soviet government was eager to recover the 'lost lands'. While it might seem that Hitler's ideology would stop him from developing an alliance with Soviet Union, they found many similarities. In fact, in the 1940s some German leaders jokingly proposed to make Moscow the member of the anti-communist pact!

In September 17th 1939, USSR entered the World War II, as a *de facto* ally of Third Reich, attacking Poland from the East. The Poles were completely unprepared for the attack, and the western Allies did not react. Soon, the Third Reich and Soviet Union were throwing joint victory parades in Polish cities, and the Soviets turned their eyes on the Baltic states, and Finland, which proved a much more difficult enemy.

Soon afterward, Hitler would show his true colors by attacking the Russians -- bringing them onto the side of the Allies and insuring the Nazi defeat. That, however, lies outside of the scope of the traditional pulp period.



## SOVIET ARCHETYPES

Below we present the most common Soviet agents pulp heroes will encounter.

### THE COMMISSAR

The original political officer, the personification of the System. A heartless criminal, sending hundreds people to their deaths. Always wearing a recognizable hat with a round bottom and blue rim, waving his Nagant, the NKVD commissar should be one of the main opponents of the heroes. The officers blindly follow his orders, the common soldiers fear him. The NKVD officers aren't always that smart, but they're loyal and utterly devoid of scruples.

The following stats represent a fairly low-ranking NKVD, perhaps accompanying a small Soviet squad. He's quite often a Henchman. Truly major villains should have one or two extra Edges and always be a Wild Card.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8.

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Investigation d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Streetwise d6, Shooting d6

**Charisma:**-4, **Pace:**6, **Parry:**5, **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Bloodthirsty, Loyal, Mean.

**Edges:** Command, Fervor

**Gear:** Nagant M1895 (12/24/48 Damage 2d6-1, ROF 1, 7 shots, revolver)



## SOVIET AGENT

Elite of NKVD, a perfectly trained spy, master of camouflage, scout, assassin and commando. Before the English created SAS and Germans their Brandenburg, Soviets already had hundreds of perfectly trained killers.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8.

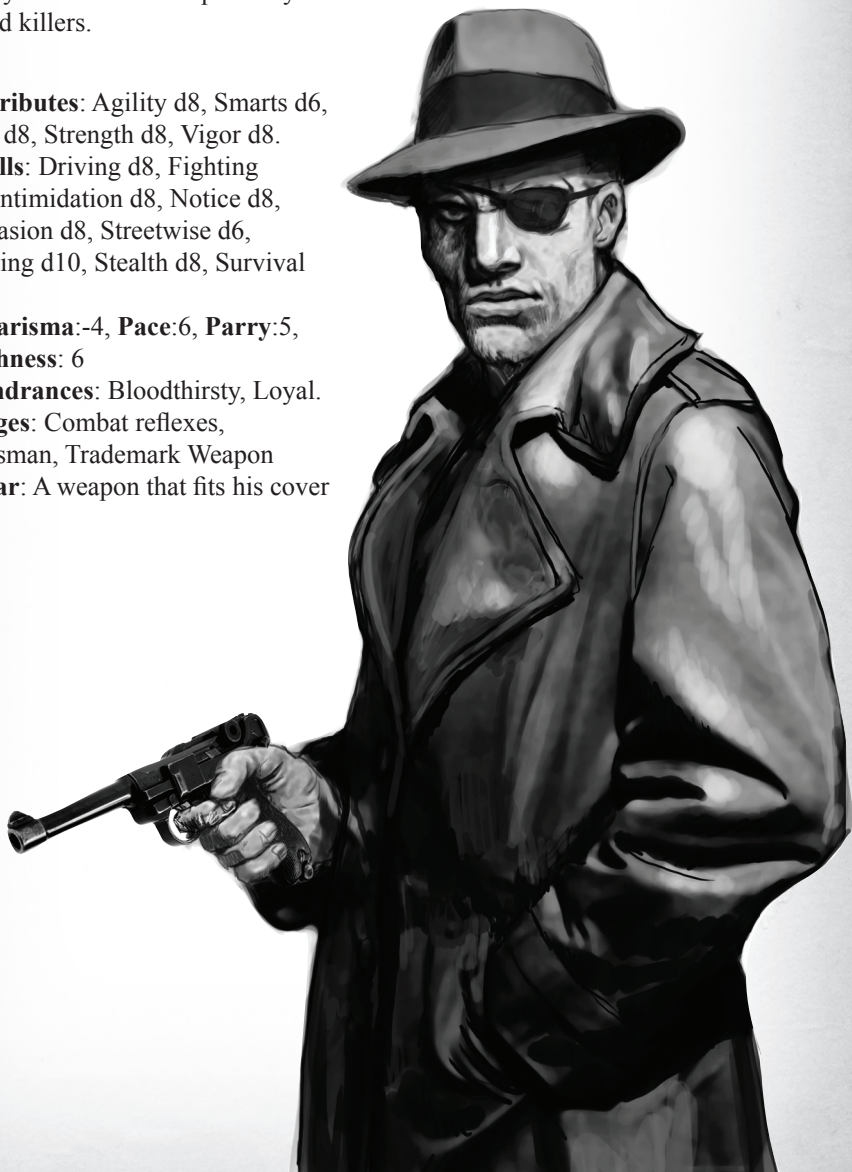
**Skills:** Driving d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Streetwise d6, Shooting d10, Stealth d8, Survival d6.

**Charisma:**-4, **Pace:**6, **Parry:**5, **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Bloodthirsty, Loyal.

**Edges:** Combat reflexes, Marksman, Trademark Weapon

**Gear:** A weapon that fits his cover story.





## SOVIET SPY

From the days of Ivan the Terrible, the Russians have a long tradition of spies and agents. This, less lethal spy is particularly adept at propaganda and dissemination; in Soviet Union he might be a constant companion to a group of journalists or travelers, while in foreign countries he works hard to convert the workers to the Bolshevik cause.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6.

**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d4, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Investigation d6, Knowledge (politics) d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Shooting d6, Stealth d8, Streetwise d6, Taunt d8.

**Charisma:** 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 4, **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Loyal, Yellow.

**Edges:** Linguist, Liquid Courage.

**Gear:** A weapon that fits his cover story.

## RUSSIAN OFFICER

The purpose of the Great Purge was to eliminate the ambitious officers – and so, most of the command of the Red Army was fairly mediocre. Before the Great Patriotic War most of officers didn't get promoted on basis of their commanding talents but on their devotion to Comrade Stalin and the Party doctrine. In practice, the NKVD commissar is responsible for major decisions of such an officer.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8.

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Tactics) d6, Notice

d6, Shooting d8, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** -2, **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5

**Toughness:** 7

**Hindrances:** Loyal, Bloodthirsty, Mean

**Edges:** Command, Hold the Line, Liquid Courage,

**Gear:** Tokarev TT-33 (12/24/48 Damage 2d6+1, ROF 1, 8 shots, AP1)

## RED ARMY SOLDAT

A typical private in the Red Army is a simple, courageous young man, blindly following Stalin's propaganda. The Army is usually a mixture of various nationalities and languages, but the soldiers are typically hard-drinking, swearing and prone to suicidal moodswings. Red Army is supposed to be the bravest but also the most cruel army in the world.

You might want to treat the Red Army troopers as Mooks – in this case ignore their Edges and Hindrances.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Driving d6, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Survival d6.

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Outsider, Bloodthirsty.

**Edges:** Brave, Liquid Courage.

**Gear:** Moisin-Nagant M91-30 (24/48/95 Damage 2d8, ROF 1, 5 shots, AP1), one grenade (5/10/20, 3d6-2, med. burst template).

# SOVIET WEAPONS

Below we present several common weapons of the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

Weapon	Range	Damage	RoF	Cost	Weight	Shots	Notes
Nagant M1895	12/24/48	2d6-1	1	\$20	4	7	revolver
Tokarev TT-33	12/24/48	2d6+1	1	\$50	4	8	AP1
Moisin-Nagant M91-30	24/48/95	2d8	1	\$80	10	5	AP1
PPD-34	12/24/48	2d6	3	\$85	13	25/70	Auto

## Nagant M1895

The last version of the 1890s-era revolver used as a sidearm for the Red Army



## Tokarev TT-33

Automatic pistol intended to be the replacement for the Nagant. It never completely replaced the earlier weapon, however, as many preferred the reliable revolver.



## Moisin-Nagant M91-30

The standard rifle of the Red Army. Later became a sniper weapon in World War 2, with addition of telescopic sights.



## PPD-34

Submachinegun in service after 1935, primarily found in use by NKVD forces and border guards. Uses the same 7.62mm pistol round as the Tokarev, and can be fitted with either a 25-round magazine, or a 70-round drum.





## RED MENACE PLOT IDEAS

The Soviets seldom appeared on the cards of Pulp, but they were antagonists of similar heroes after the WWII. During and after the war the true brutality of Stalin's regime was not widely known (or perhaps consciously ignored), and only the fifties with its Red Scare caused the Soviets to be viewed as antagonists. You might combine the "post-pulp" feel of later comic books and movies with the modern knowledge of Stalinist Russia to create interesting ideas.

While Nazis were preparing for the conquest of the entire world, the Soviets hoped that the workers of other nations would gladly overthrow their oppressors to build a happy future. On the other hand,

they feared any foreign influence on their workers' paradise. Heroes who would like to visit the Soviet Union should have a really good reason to do so!

The important thing to keep in mind is that Soviets shouldn't be Nazis with serial numbers filed off – they aren't racist (Anti-Semitism became really fashionable in the politics of Soviet Russia only after the war) nor are they particularly interested in supernatural. You won't probably find them subjugating natives or chasing mythical artifacts... but they are very future-focused, so they work really well in super-science plots.



Since so many Soviet sciences have been infested by charlatans, the communist researchers might employ international espionage or kidnap prominent weird scientists on their radar. Imagine a three-way struggle between heroes, Nazi occultists and Soviet spies over a new invention.

The Soviet biological sciences in particular was starting to become disorganized. They condemned genetics as bourgeoisie science – after all, we can't all be equal if you can inherit certain traits, and were very much opposed to the increasingly fashionable eugenic theories of the time. Their crackpot approach to biology (and many other sciences) meant that the scientific truth was secondary to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism (which eventually led to the Great Hunger and many similar disasters). A smart Soviet officer would therefore rather rely on someone else's research than to risk failure.

A relatively common combination in recent fiction is Soviets and Aliens. This is not that far from the truth – after all, Soviets were the first to put a man in space later on. Some more extreme conspiracy theories or recent video games even suggest that Communism itself was an alien manipulation. A spin off theory, but without strong evidences, were the alleged Soviet psionic program. Perhaps in your campaign the PCs could discover the Real Reason behind communist revolution?

One of the most interesting concepts would be breaking

someone out from a gulag or a hospital. Maybe an important scientist, major ally or a relative, citizen of one of conquered camps could be rescued from a labor camp on Syberia. The first major challenge would be tracking them down, and dealing with NKVD – but the characters would also have to deal with harsh Siberian nature. On their road from Siberia through Mongolia and Tibet to India the characters could encounter Red Army, tigers or maybe even more mystical and exotic creatures.

Another archetypal Red Menace plot idea is uncovering Soviet spies working to undermine Western governments. This situation lends itself to cat-and-mouse mysteries to uncover the threat, followed by action as the characters work to eliminate it.

As always, the Random Adventure Generator on pages 170-181 of the main **Thrilling Tales** rulebook can be used to generate fiendish plots for the Red Menace to undertake.



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