

G U R P S[®]

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RUSSIA

BY S. JOHN ROSS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

G U R P S

R U S S I A

Empire. Enigma. Epic.

By S. John Ross

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Reader's Haven, the finest bookshop ever to go out of business in Havelock, North Carolina, and to the gamers there, for "putting the quarter into John."

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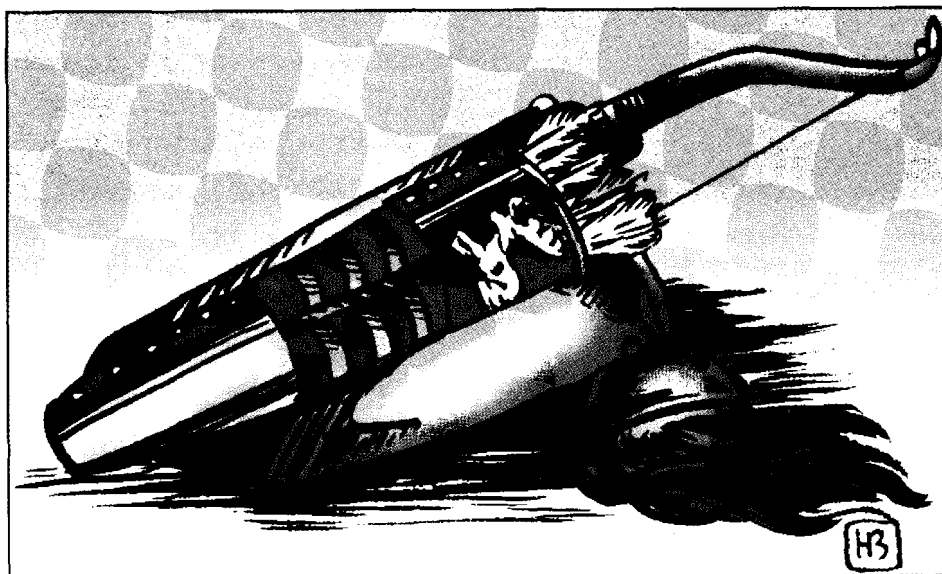
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About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the GURPS system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Pyramid. Our bimonthly magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS*, as well as information on *In Nomine*, *Illuminati: New World Order*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures* and more. It also covers top releases from other companies – *Castle Falkenstein*, *Traveller*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun* and more.

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our Web site (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request. Or download them from the Web – see below.

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Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for an online catalog, errata and hundreds of pages of information. *Illuminati Online* supports SJ Games with discussion areas for many games, including *GURPS*. Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! Dial 512-485-7440 at up to 33.6K baud – or telnet to io.com. We also have conferences on Compuserve and America Online. *GURPS* has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. Much online discussion of *GURPS* happens on this e-mail list. To join, send mail to majordomo@io.com with "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your World Wide Web browser to www.io.com/~ftp/GURPSnet/www/.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *Basic Set* – e.g., p. B23 means p. 23 of the *Basic Set*. An M refers to *GURPS Magic, Second Edition* and CI refers to *GURPS Compendium I: Character Creation*.

GURPS Russia presents the Russian world from its beginnings in the 10th century to its *new* beginnings in the early 18th. It unfolds the history, folklore and daily life, not of the Imperial Age or of the Soviet Union, but of *medieval* Russia – a culture all but forgotten in the 20th century. To most Westerners, the word "Russia" is synonymous with Communism, nuclear war, competing space programs and World War I-era farm machinery tending the fields of The People.

To those readers, I bid a welcome to a world that just might surprise you with its depth of character. Russia isn't a *nice* place, not now and not then, but Russians themselves can be very kind. The lowliest peasant will offer you bread and salt when you come through his door. If you're polite, he'll give you a seat on top of the stove and maybe get you drunk! He probably won't *trust* you, but if you had been raised on stories of constant invasions and hatred by Mongols from the east, Poles from the west and Turks from the south, you'd be leery of foreigners, too.

GURPS Russia provides sufficient information to play anything from a pagan sorcerer in the days of early Christianity to a Cossack pirate in the days of Peter the Great. If you favor politics and espionage, you'll enjoy the machinations of the Shuiskys and Romanovs in the dreaded Time of Troubles. If you're fond of the dark side of humanity, you'll discover the black riders of the *oprichnina* – the Russian Inquisition of Ivan the Terrible. And if you like magic, you have a whole Otherworld to explore, beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands, where thunder heralds the *zmei's* flaming wings and the grim laughter of Baba Yaga demands your respect.

— S. John Ross

АБОУТ ТНЕ АУТНОР

Born in 1971 to a military family, S. John has lived in both the United States and Japan. He has yet to set foot on Russian soil, but is determined to stand in Kitai Gorod in this lifetime. He's held a bizarre collection of unskilled-labor jobs, including a stint as Associate Editor in charge of war games at *Interactive Entertainment*, the world's first monthly magazine on CD-ROM.

He cooks, sings, plays the harmonica and does an uncanny David Pulver impression. The parts of his leisure time that aren't dedicated to books and films are spent attending science-fiction conventions. He's been an adventure gamer since Spring 1986, when he discovered *Car Wars*, *AD&D* and *Nuclear War* in the same weekend. His fascination with folklore and history grew out of the same period.

His professional credits include articles and adventures in *Roleplayer* and *White Wolf*, an adventure module for *Tales From The Floating Vagabond*, cartoon art in *Dragon Magazine* and co-authorship of *GURPS Grimoire* and *GURPS Black Ops*. He wears his T-shirts backwards.

ТНЕ СТРАЙТ ЛИНЕ

GURPS Russia is an experiment. The subject appeals mostly to hardcore roleplayers and history fans – not a large market. But we really *like* this book . . . so we're printing 2,000 copies, and they will only be available directly from SJ Games. You can reach our Web catalog at www.sjgames.com. If this goes well, maybe we'll publish other "straight-to-you" titles . . . books that won't work in standard distribution but are too good to ignore. We'll see.



МОТHER RUSSIA

*"Loe thus I make an ende: none
other news to thee.
But that the country is too cold, the
people beastly bee."*

**Ambassador George Turbeville,
in a report on Russia made to
Elizabeth I**

Medieval Russia was a wilderness – a cold forest all but unfit for human habitation. Russia, born with hopes of becoming Earth's final empire, was instead fated to be a cultural outcast, left out of the European Renaissance.

Despite this adversity and admitted backwardness, Russia gave birth to some of the most fantastic heroes and villains in human history. Seen by western Europe as a frozen, barbarous woodland, Old Russia was the home of people unique in their dark humor and loyalty to one another.

The term "Mother Russia" has been woven into prayers, battle cries and laments for centuries, and stirs emotion even in today's Russians. The grim motherland was protector and provider to Russians of every era, from the time of the primitive Eastern Slavs to the height of the Empire, and Russians revered it.

THE RUSSIAN VILLAGE

The basic unit of life in Old Russia was the village. Often isolated for months through the winter, Russian villages formed complete communities independent of the cultural trends of Moscow or other "centers of civilization." To a Russian, who could spend his entire life among a collection of tiny *izbas* (huts) surrounded by forest and swamp, the lives and troubles of the tsar, and even the local princes, were so distant as to be meaningless.

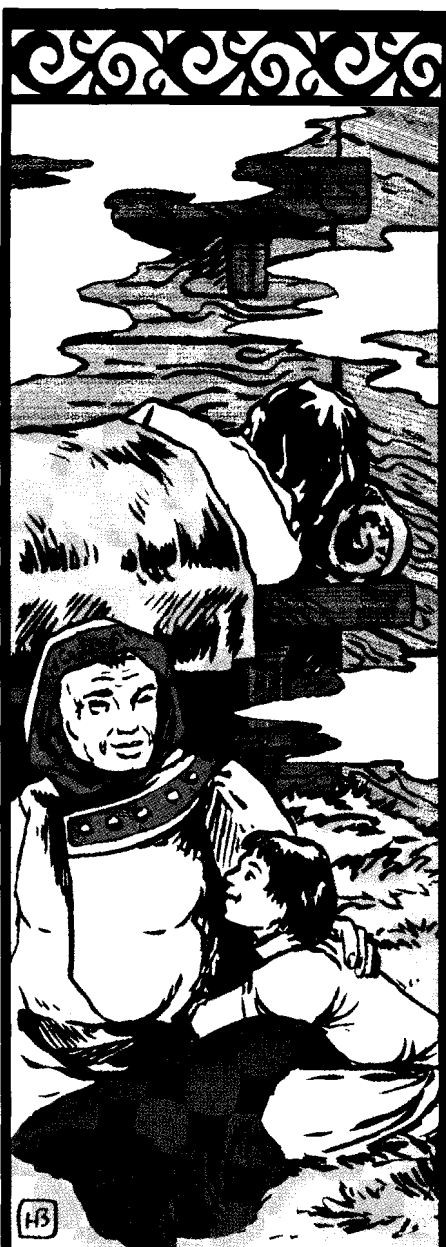
Location and Layout

Russian villages (*derevni*), more so than those of the rest of Europe, were islands of human life in the wilderness. Lacking the organized feudal structure of England or France, Russians were scattered into almost random clumps and pockets in the forest. Near cities and monasteries, villages might be less than two *verssts* (1.3 miles) apart. On the frontier, villages could be four or five days from each other, and from the tsar's authority, which was how the colonists wanted it!

Common villages were simply rough collections of filthy hovels clustered along roads near ponds or streams. The number of dwellings varied from four or five to several dozen, but in about half of the settlements no real streets were to be found; houses were simply built where their owners felt comfortable. Such villages were the stock and source of Russian life into the 19th century.

A larger and better-organized village consisted of a central market square and several streets radiating from it, along which sat peasant dwellings. In the planned villages of western Russia, each home had a small yard for gardening, walled off from neighboring plots, and streets were often "paved" with wooden planks. The village church would either be on the central square or at the town's edge. Fields on which the peasants worked would be nearby.

Villages varied by function more than layout. Some existed solely to provide homes for fur-hunters, for instance, while others were centered on Church lands – the Russian Orthodox Church owned fully 33% of Russia by the time of Ivan the Terrible. Any Russian entering a new village would be able to immediately guess its function just by looking.



Old Russia

The term "Old Russia" is used to distinguish the Russia of *GURPS Russia* from Imperial Russia and the USSR. Old Russia refers to the country from its origins to the time of Peter the Great, defined by its near-total separation from European politics and lifestyles. It includes the early Kievan genesis, the Mongol invasion period, and the Tsarist era, which was the last of the "Middle Ages" in Russia. Nothing beyond the realm of Peter I is covered here.

Any generalization made in the text, such as "Russia extended to the Ural Mountains," should be taken to refer to Old Russia exclusively, unless otherwise specified.

The Izba

The common village dwelling was a simple one-room building, made either of logs hewn flat on the inside walls, or of heavy planks. The floor was a blanket of forest moss and pine boughs, what was casually called a "*muzhik* (peasant) carpet." The walls were lined with large shelves used for both storage and sleeping, and the air was full of eye-stinging smoke from the huge stove. Most early huts lacked smoke-holes, and none had chimneys, but the smoke helped the room retain heat.

One ancient word for the peasant hut, *izba*, meant simply "warm room," stressing the value Russians placed on well-heated shelter. Foreigners marveled at how hot the *izba* got in the winter, and how Russians emerged from their huts with skin red "like a roast pig" and then seemed not to notice the deadly cold.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the three-chamber house appeared in rural areas. It consisted of two large rooms (each with a stove, in the homes of wealthier *muzhiks*) and a short "corridor" between them, with an anteroom the size of a closet. This construction minimized heat-loss, and permitted some privacy when needed.

The Russian Stove

The stove was central to the life of the *muzhik*, and occupied a corner of the *izba* opposite the door. In Kievan and Mongol times, the stove was semi-spherical, and built on the ground. By the Muscovite Era, it was built on wooden supports, had grown more cubical, and had a large, flat top with sufficient space for the entire family to huddle on it for warmth in the winter!

In Russian folklore a person could earn the nickname “lie-on-the-stove” if he was lazy.

Icons

The next most prominent features in a Russian household were its icons: painted wooden images of saints and scenes from the Bible. Russians believed that the saints and spirits represented truly lived within the icons, and in times of trouble worried Russians gathered solemnly in front of their icons and prayed. See Chapter 4 for more detail on icons.

The Family

To Russians, family and community ties were more important than ties of faith or nationality. Families in Russia did not separate when children came of age; they lived together for their entire lives, with succeeding generations often taking over the same house. Children clustered around *babushkas* (“grandmothers”) for stories and discipline, elder brothers went with their fathers to tend to the horses and hunt, and women took care of the harvest and home. The entire family ate, slept and worshiped together in the same small house.

Little was sacred to dour Russian humor, and Russian folklore reveals a different family image. One fairy tale tells of a clever farmer who posed a riddle that even the tsar could not answer. He told the tsar that, of the money he made from his crops, one-fourth went to taxes, one-fourth went to pay debts, one-fourth was spent, and one-fourth was thrown away frivolously, and yet all his family were well-fed. The tsar understood the taxes but was confused by the rest, and asked the farmer to explain. “It is easy,” replied the farmer, “feeding my father is repaying a debt, feeding my son is making a loan, and feeding my daughter is frivolous!” As in the rest of medieval Europe, a son was a worker and heir, while a daughter was an expense to be married away. Among many circles of Russian nobility, young women were kept locked away in private rooms until adulthood, and were not permitted to circulate publicly!

Hospitality

Russia was cold and *large*; each village could find itself alone for months during the winter. As a result, Russians developed a strong tradition of hospitality. The *izba*, providing an island of shelter amid the dangers of the wilderness, has been likened to the oasis in Arabian culture. All visitors, without exception, were welcomed with food; *muzhiks* offered bread and salt to visitors, and proffering a place on the stove was the highest expression of a peasant’s good will. The same tradition on a grander and occasionally more pompous level, applied to the wealthy nobility, who were expected to lay out feasts and open their bathhouses to their

A Note on Accuracy

Several problems plague the research of Russian history, and while every effort has been made to avoid them, this book cannot have sidestepped every trap.

Transliterations. There is no accepted standard for translating from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet. Historians skip from system to system, adopting the best one for any given word, or using eccentric methods of their own devising. As a result, there are half a dozen spellings for any major Russian term, few of which give an accurate portrayal of the sounds intended. Sadly, many of the worst ones are the accepted norms.

Simplicity and consistency have been the aim of the author. To change words such as Cossack and vodka to *Kazak* and *voika* would be accurate but inappropriate, harming what “Russian flavor” clings to these words in the Western mind. The same applies to the names of many historical figures. The final judgment on transliteration was made on a word-by-word basis. Also, the majority of plural forms of Russian nouns have been deliberately Anglicized for ease of use: *bogatyr* becomes *bogatyr*s instead of *bogatyri*, for instance.

Historical Accuracy. What little detail there is in medieval Russian history is available only in Russian. English-language Russian history varies widely in quality and depth, and when dealing with pre-17th-century Russia, it is in very short supply relative to the histories of western European countries.

Even the best books of Russian history are plagued with contradictions, due partly to the fact that Russian history has been deliberately rewritten many times, by the Soviet Union in recent years, and by the Russian Orthodox Church in the past. Another reason is simple exaggeration by historians; general works are notorious for taking a single line from a medieval text and expanding it into a detailed episode complete with dialogue.

While *GURPS Russia* is more than sufficient for the historical and historical-fantasy gamer, some may need to supplement this book with studies of their own. The bibliography on p. 124 lists some of the best works available in English.

Capitalist Russia

As strange as it may seem to the modern reader, Old Russia was extremely profit-oriented until the Tsarist period was well under way. The society was built on mercantile skill, and a crafty and ambitious trader was a respected man. Even peasants were free to choose the lord who gave them the best deal, encouraging competitive arrangements and staving off serfdom (for a while). Even a casual glance at the laws of early Russia shows that they were fundamentally materialistic; assaulting another person was punishable by a relatively small fine, while setting fire to a barn would result in seizure of all property and banishment! Almost every law in Yaroslav's time was designed to give money to the state and the offended, rather than to imprison or kill the criminal. Instead of focusing on eliminating crime, Russian rulers simply "put wheels under it," providing state revenue. In this sense, Russian law was far kinder than the laws of western Europe at the time, but the fines were very steep.

Usury (loaning money for interest) was a major point of contention in medieval Russia; everybody practiced it, but the Church opposed it, declaring usury a sin and evidence of *srebroyuby*, the "love of silver." Typical interest in medieval Russia was 20%, and failure to pay could result in beatings or worse.

The earliest document mentioning Kiev was an account written by two Jewish Khazars, one of whom had borrowed money from a Russian. The debtor had been killed by brigands on the road to the city, and so the Russians demanded repayment from his brother, Jacob. When Jacob could not pay, he was chained at the legs and neck and imprisoned for a year, until a group of his fellow Khazars payed part of the debt and pledged the rest, which had to be raised by pleading to Jewish communities in Egypt! Clearly, Russians took money very seriously, and by the 14th century, even the upper-echelon clergy were loaning at interest as a matter of daily business.

Everyday Life

Russian villagers lived and worked as extended families. The men gathered each day at dawn to hunt, prepare furs for shipment, build and rebuild houses, gather honey, harvest crops and perform other such duties as a group, working together for the landowner. While not strictly feudal for most of its history (see pp 13 and 65), most Russian peasants owed a debt of service to *somebody*, often by contract.

When not working, Russians gathered and drank *kvass*, mead or vodka at the village tavern (or outdoors, in smaller villages), and sang and danced. The drink available depended on how poor the peasants were: *kvass*, a weak beer, was the cheapest drink, that peasants often made themselves; mead (fermented honey) was the "common" beverage; and vodka, once it became available, was adored but still more expensive than mead. Visitors were made drunk as a form of greeting, and drinking was also used to honor saints on their holy days. Several festivals and feasts were held annually in Russia: celebration at the arrival of winter, celebration at the arrival of spring, weddings and more. The Russian zeal for drunken revelry often resulted in tragedy; any festival day could see dozens of towns burned to the ground by accident (see *Fires*, p. 11).

The warm months were a time of back-breaking toil. After work, peasants had barely enough time for food, religious observances, and sleep. After the harvest, when the rivers were icebound and travel was treacherous, work came to an abrupt halt, and Russians spent much of their time finding amusements until the spring thaw. This summer-winter cycle was common in pre-industrial society, but in Russia it was extreme. The time for planting was short, and winter brought death to the unprepared.



DIET

The Russian peasant diet was monotonous by our standards. Most people got little meat, unless they had the time to hunt for it, although (due to good pastureland) what domestic meat was available was of good quality.

The *muzhik* lived on a soup called *shchi*, made from cabbage, and dense rye bread. He grew turnips, onions, garlic, rhubarb and cucumbers (which he pickled). The forest gave him mushrooms and berries, which he gathered and dried; rivers supplied fish. If the peasant had any livestock, he would have milk; beekeepers had honey.

In cities, the fare was more varied, owing to the large markets. A wide variety of meats, vegetables, spices and even coffee were available. Large preserved fish, reported by travelers to stink badly due to frugal use of salt, were eaten eagerly. Pastries made of fish and vegetables were also available. In winter, huge pyramidal mounds of frozen beasts were sold from merchants' sleds, along with eggs and butter. At festivals, *kalachi* vendors sold small loaves of fine bread for snacking.

CITY LIFE IN OLD RUSSIA

In the 16th century, Paris was the greatest city of western Europe, boasting a population in excess of 100,000 people. In the same century, Moscow was four times that size. Even in the 11th century Kiev boasted an estimated population as high as 80,000. Cut off from the intensive routes of Western trade and politics, the great cities and towns of Russia remained almost unknown to West Europeans. Upon visiting the tsar's country, were often shocked by their size.

Urban Layout

The oldest part of any Russian city was the *kremlin*, the heavily fortified core. While modern usage limits the word to the Moscow Kremlin, the term was a general one, and nearly every Russian city had one. The typical *kremlin* contained the palace of the house of the city's rulers and local nobles, and often a church or cathedral. In the earliest days of the town, the *kremlin* was the only part of the city to have fortifications. Houses were clustered close to it, and townsmen entered it in times of crisis or invasion.

As the population of a Russian city grew, so did the city itself, expanding outward in rings, much like trees. Even when the local landscape didn't permit the traditional concentric layout (such as in Yaroslavl and Pskov, both of which were wedged between rivers), important royal and official buildings were arranged in a semicircle. As cities grew, their walls would be surrounded by buildings, and so a new wall would be built to surround *those*, and so on. In contrast, most cities of medieval Europe pressed limiting the size of the city wall, and extended *faubourgs* (walled extensions and gates) only when absolutely necessary.

The main streets radiated from the *kremlin* to the outside walls, with lesser streets crossing them spiderweb-fashion. Neighborhoods formed between and along streets, divided by function. Most businesses clustered by type, and there was usually a "quarter" set aside for non-Orthodox foreigners. The largest and best-known of these "German Quarters" was in Moscow (see p. 20).

Northern Russian cities differed in one very important respect from their West European counterparts. Whereas the streets of London and Paris were characterized by two-story buildings huddled tightly together and facing narrow streets, buildings in Russian cities had small yards, separated from each other and the streets by wood-fences. And while most city homes were similar (see *Fires*, p. 11), they didn't always face the street; a house might occupy any position within its fence. Walking through the streets of Old Novgorod or Moscow was a considerably less claustrophobic experience than a stroll along the *Ruelle des Chats* in Troyes.

Of course, to the West European visitor of the time, the most noticeable difference might have been the people. Russian city-dwellers, by the standards of the West, were always a few centuries too primitive. Russian customs and manners were seen as crude and uncivilized; the Russian burgher spat where he pleased, wore a huge beard and the very "non-European" caftan, and seemed to possess an unbelievable capacity for poor temper and extreme humor. Dozens of diaries and travelogues exist from visitors to Old Russia, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries, and they exude a stunned sense of fear beneath attempts at clear report.

Events and Scenes

The Russian city was a place of vigorous existence; even in the depth of winter the icy streets were filled with crowds and huge carts and sleds carrying goods from the open markets. Burghers owned small, personal sleds (with capacities similar to modern shopping carts) that they dragged behind them by ropes. At any moment, a group of unclothed bathers might emerge from a steaming



Terms of Endearment

Familial terms were used in all parts of Russian life. Any elderly woman could be referred to as *babushka*; the terms "grandmother" and "old woman" were synonymous. From the Russian viewpoint, Russia was a large family. The soil was the *matushka* (mother), while the sovereign (whether Slavic chief, Varangian prince or Muscovite tsar) was the *batiushka* (father). Traditionally, the *matushka* was given the higher place in the hearts of Russians, while the *batiushka* was the source of order and punishment for misdeeds.

The "-shka" ("dear") ending could be added to any noun in the Russian language to make it friendlier, or (more often) to add irony. A good example of this comes from more recent Russian history. The elite Soviet airborne troops of the 1980s were known for their habit of adding "-shka" to the name of just about every piece of their military equipment. Their blue-and-white-striped undershirt became known as the *telnyashka*, and they even called the BRMD armored fighting vehicle *BRMDeshka* – the equivalent of a U.S. Marine referring to a "Bradleykins."

Early Slavic Settlements

In a campaign focusing on the early Slavs and the Rus, a peasant dwelling was a rectangular structure, sunken into the earth, sometimes with only the roof aboveground. The roof was covered with layers of sticks and grass and then earth, which grew grass naturally, creating the appearance of a triangular mound. Inside, this structure held warmth and kept out rain better than any aboveground hut. In summer, temporary wooden structures were used.

The villages of the early Slavs were small clusters of houses, each a self-governing society. In the southernmost parts of Russia, *gorodishcha* were common. A *gorodishcha* was a town built on a defensible area (often a high bluff or bend in a river), surrounded by low earth ramparts in a circle or triangle. Within the *gorodishcha* were several huts, densely packed, with enough room to hold a large community and its livestock. In particularly dangerous areas the *gorodishcha* was the only sort of village. In less hazardous regions, it was the place of whatever central authority the local villages recognized, and a place to run to in times of trouble. Most villages were at least 5 to 8 miles apart. Archaeological evidence shows that many of the foundations and ramparts used in the *gorodishcha* were of pre-Slavic origin, dating back into Biblical times.



bathhouse to leap into the snow, or a trained dancing bear might go wild and run through the quickly emptying streets. When presenting Russia's cities in play, the GM should keep the players informed of such events; the streets shouldn't be empty or quiet until nightfall. Russian cities, like those of any nation, were the showcase for what the country had to offer, both good and bad.

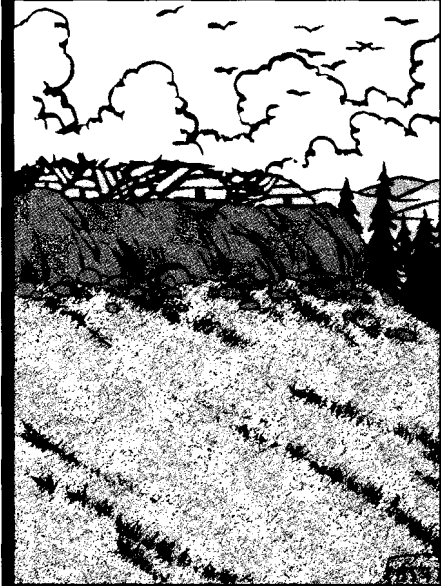
Religious Observances

It's difficult to overstress the importance of religion in Russian life, and any visit to a city could include an encounter with one of the many religious rituals, festivals or observances common in medieval Russia. Russians, as a rule, took their religion more seriously than the people of western Europe. To the Russian Orthodox, Hell was the certain destination of any who didn't live pure, almost ascetic lives. Visitors to Moscow were stunned by the grim nature of the Russian Lent, in which the only foods available were boiled peas and other dull fare, without even fish permitted. For details, see Chapter 4.

Magicians and Diviners

Even in a purely historical campaign, the sight of a diviner or other magician speaking to a crowd in the streets would not be uncommon, particularly in Kievan or Mongol-era Russia, when the Russian *dvoeverie* ("dual faith" – see p. 82) still took the form of an open struggle between Christian priests and pagan wizards. Diviners used both animals and spiritual "possession" acts to sway the peasants' opinions and take money from them, and in a fantasy campaign these powers could be real!

Naturally, any large public display by a wizard would be the source of conflict. Pagan practices were illegal, and those laws were enforced within the city walls. At the very least, priests would arrive to denounce the pagan, and a duel for the burghers' attentions would result, with invective flying. The winner of these conflicts was almost invariably the priest, who would soon have the backing of city soldiers. The pagan would most likely be tortured or put to death, depending on the political climate.



Open Markets

Year round, Russian cities featured huge open markets, with merchants hawking wares from all corners of Russia, and points west and south. A lucky buyer might find German crossbows or wine from Crete among the baskets of vegetables, jugs of mead, casks of honey and other local goods.

The markets were traditionally laid out in long rows of stalls and tables, sometimes up to 10 deep in a single section of the city. All dealers of a similar product stood next to each other; surviving plans from the 15th and 16th centuries show sections for everything from breads, to old clothes, to weaponry. This had the effect of producing competitive shouts between merchants, and Russians could detect a fair deal by listening long enough.

In winter, the markets were dominated by food and alcohol, and the influx from foreign lands dwindled to nothing; December was a poor time to buy a steel helmet, but a fine time to stock up on clay pots of vodka!

Tortures and Executions

Russians were infamous for their stoic attitudes toward torture, and there was never a week in a Russian city when at least one or two men weren't publicly smouted (flogged) or burned for crimes against the local prince or the tsar. Commonly, large groups of men were tortured or killed together.

Methods varied (see *Harsh Punishment*, p. 71), depending on the tastes of local authorities and the crime in question, but painless deaths were seen as merciful to the point of unfairness. The public delighted in the screams of the tormented, and many Russian nobles were fond of displaying criminals for several days after their deaths, to provide examples to commoners and their children.

Fires

Regular fires were a fact of life in Russian cities; it would have been unthinkable for a Russian burgher to live out his life without experiencing two or more major fires, and without losing his home at least once. All Russian houses, both in cities and in smaller towns, were built on simple plans to permit reconstruction within a day. In a sense, they were "disposable," at least compared to those of the rest of Europe at the time.

Cities experienced *major* conflagrations (that reduced nearly all of the town to smoking ruins), every 10 to 20 years. Smaller fires occurred five or six times a week, burning down neighborhoods or individual houses.

Naturally, there were men to capitalize on this. Outside of the gates of Moscow (and probably other cities), was a small quarter of wood merchants and carpenters who made comfortable livings selling the pre-cut logs needed to quickly rebuild lost houses.

Entertainers

Minstrels, jugglers, puppeteers and other entertainers were very common; it was almost impossible for a city to be without at least one troupe on a given day, and even small towns and villages got their share of visitations.

A Russian puppeteer was a self-contained stage. He wore a long, layered caftan, baggy and larger than a woman's dress. When the show was to begin, he raised the "stage" over his head, leaving only his feet visible – the show was presented over the puppeteer's head. Russian clowns and minstrels were known as *skomorokhs*, and



Dragoon Villages

In the latter days of the Muscovite state, Russia lost much to attackers from the south, most notably the Turks. This led to the creation of "dragoon villages." The tsar took peasants from farms and churches of the southern border and made them soldiers. At first, this seemed like a good thing to the peasants: they were freed from taxation and gained the status of Russian soldiers (essentially freemen). The government was not being magnanimous; it was being cheap, avoiding the necessity of expending real military might in the south. These villages-turned-military-camps were required to provision and equip themselves in order to stave off the enemies of Russia, a financial obligation just as oppressive as the one from which the peasants had been saved.

Peasant Movement

Russian history is a story of motion, of an unending move toward the frontier to escape oppression, claim new land for the tsar, protect borders, create warm-water ports or simply to explore. For individuals, however, the Russian landscape was static. Russians of most eras stayed in one place for their entire lives. Both peasant and landowner grew to know their local roads and forests more intimately than most modern people could understand or tolerate.

In the latter days of Old Russia, the static landscape became a matter of *law*, as the grip of serfdom ground out the materialistic spirit of early Russia and replaced it with a grim obedience to the tsar. By the end of the reign of Peter the Great in the 18th century, even merchants needed a form of passport to move from city to city. In these times, the runaway *muzhik* had one of the few mobile lifestyles of Russia.

The GM must balance the historicity of his campaign with the needs of his players. Free movement is an important feature in any RPG setting, and players may become bored if their PCs are never allowed to leave their home village. Roleplaying fugitives or bandits can be an exciting compromise.



evolved slowly from pagan mystics to entertainers; during the early growth of Christianity in rural Kievan Russia, the *skomorokhs* were *both* (see Chapter 4). By the 1400s, *skomorokhs* had developed the popular trained bear act.

Most entertainers worked on their own, but some banded together as troupes. A typical troupe might consist of a drummer, a man to play the *gusli* (a lap-harp), and either a juggler, a puppeteer or a bear-tamer. Rare troupes included all of the above, with multiple musicians. Genetic dwarves were commonly found in such troupes, usually as musicians or jugglers.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Medieval Russian society was an uneven mixture of democracy and despotism, almost never similar to western Europe at any given time. During the Dark Ages, when the West was harshly feudal, the Russian *muzhik* was a free man. Later, when the rest of Europe moved into the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance, whittling away the power of the nobility, Russians found themselves under the thumb of absolute monarchy, with genuine serfdom for the first time in Russian history! In both cases, this made Russians seem barbaric to the West, first for existing in “anarchy,” and then for tightening the governmental grip just when such behavior went out of fashion.

Despite these changes, some distinct social classes and systems remained in recognizable form. At the bottom were slaves, peasants and indebted workers. Next were merchants, much of the clergy, soldiers and colonists. At the top were landowners, princes and then, finally, the sovereign (either a grand prince or a tsar).

The Kholop

The four greatest commodities of Kievan traders were honey, beeswax, furs and *kholops* (slaves). Dnieper Slavs sent massive boatloads of slaves (mostly women) to Constantinople and to Itil, where they formed a Russian slave market famed throughout the Mediterranean.

A slave in Russia was not necessarily miserable – his lifestyle depended entirely on his master. A slave was considered an object, not a person, and this actually made slavery *desirable* during the 14th through 16th centuries when taxes and conscription were heavy burdens for free citizens! The Russian economy suffered as common workers and gentry alike sold themselves into slavery. Of course, if these slaves ever changed their minds, they were stuck (or were forced to “go Cossack” – see p. 16).

Monasteries were the largest attractors of such people, and took on skilled craftsmen, laborers or anyone capable of assisting their causes. The Church thus gained wealth while the nobility lost a source of taxes and soldiers. The laws of Novgorod had to forbid accused criminals selling themselves to avoid prosecution, and general Russian law placed a minimum on the amount a man could sell himself for to prevent abuses!

The majority of Russian slaves were house stewards and workers, but slave concubines were common, and female slaves during all periods were regarded as more valuable by both merchants and the law. If a man had children by a female slave, they received no inheritance but were legally free upon the death of their father.

The Muzhik

In Kievan Russia, the life of a *muzhik*, or peasant, was a product of his own hard work and ambition; with a little luck, a peasant's family could live as well as a landowner's. And as social class was mutable in early Russia, a *muzhik* could save money and become a landowner himself.

The *muzhik* wasn't a serf bound to a specific lord and plot of land. If the landowner for whom he toiled was unfair or required too high a percentage of his crops, he simply packed up his family and moved elsewhere. Out of necessity, successful landowners were on good working terms with their *muzhiks*. The peasant needed to grow crops to feed his family; the landowner had land and rented it for a share of the peasant's crop. Greedy landowners could find themselves without peasants!

This system did not last. In the 15th century, when western Europe was abandoning the concept of land-bound peasantry, Russia was adopting it. By the time of Peter the Great, the serfs of Russia were virtual slaves, while the men of western Europe were developing Free Enterprise and Industrialism.

The Merchant

Medieval Russia was built on trade; the early Slavs did not have enough agriculture to support their society, and traded extensively along Russian waterways for what they needed. In the latter days of Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russian merchants were a social force to be reckoned with.

During all periods of Russian history, merchants were protected and encouraged by the sovereign. Severe limits were imposed on how much toll could be levied from merchants, and they were immune to customs and duty taxes. Under the laws of the Mongol Period, merchants had to be taken before the grand prince himself in order to be prosecuted! Some merchants probably abused such privileges for their own profit, but offended parties would take justice into their own hands rather than bother with the inconvenience of the law . . .

In later times, the merchant lifestyle only improved. In Moscow, merchants had houses in the "white city," along with *boyars* and petty nobles. They and their attendants, dressed in distinctive ankle-length caftans, brought huge sleds of furs, wood, frozen animals and other goods to the bustling winter markets of the city.

The Boyar

Boyars were the most important Russian landowners, ranked socially beneath the lesser princes but above all else. Only the wealthiest landowners could become *boyars*, as they collectively formed the *duma*, a council of advisors to the Russian sovereign.

In the earliest times, the *duma* was made up of the grand prince's warrior-attendants – the Russian equivalent of his most trusted knights. By the height of the Kievan Era the title was granted to merchants, common landowners and noblemen, for service to the sovereign. In the days after the Kievan Era, the title was hereditary, and therefore often meant a little less. The Time of Troubles following the death of Ivan the Terrible was the death of the *boyar* class in many ways; afterward, a new "service gentry" (commoners granted noble status as a reward for service to the state) occupied the niche that the *boyars* had once filled.

Second-Hand Views

"Russia is a very large province. . . . They are Christians, and follow the Greek rite. They have many kings, and a language of their own. They are very simple people, but are quite handsome, both the men and the women, for they are all white and fair. . . . They pay tribute to no one, except a section of them, who give something to a king of the Ponent, who is a Tatar, and whose name is Toktai. To him they do pay tribute but it is very small."

"You must know that in Russia the cold is greater than anywhere else, so that it can hardly be borne. Such great cold as reigns there is not to be found in any other part of the world, and were it not for the many 'stoves' that they have, the inhabitants could not but perish from the extreme cold. These stoves, however, are very numerous, and the noble and powerful have them built as a deed of charity, as in our countries they build hospitals."

"They make an excellent wine with honey and panic, which is called *cervista*; they have great drinking bouts of this, as you shall hear. They frequently assemble in companies of men and women, especially noblemen and magnates, 30, 40 or even 50 people together, husbands taking their wives and children with them. Each company elects a leader, and fixes rules, as for example, that if someone utters an improper word, or somehow breaks the rules, he is to be punished by the leader the company has elected. Now, there are certain men, like our taverners, who keep that ale for sale. The companies go to these taverns, and pass the whole day drinking."

— Marco Polo, writing circa 1293

Polo did not visit Russia, but gathered his information from merchants who had.

Grigory Karpovich Kotoshikhin

Born around 1630, Grigory Karpovich was (by the late 1650s) an undersecretary in the Foreign Office of Moscow, involved in Russia's negotiations with Poland and Sweden. He was guilty of espionage, selling information to the Swedes. Fearing the consequences of his actions, he fled the country, arriving in Stockholm in 1666. He became a Protestant and entered government service for Sweden.

Grigory served there for only a year before he got in a fight with his landlord, and wounded him mortally. He was tried for murder, found guilty, and executed that winter. Fortunately for students of Russian history, his few months of service were dedicated to a large written work describing Russian social structure and details of the Russian economy (*O Rossi i tsarstvovanie Alekseia Mikhailovicha*; excerpts of which are included in many of the books in the bibliography). These writings reveal much about 17th-century Russian life:

On Social Climbing

"... *dvorianstvo* [noble rank] is not granted to any *posadniks* [socially elevated peasants], or to sons of clergymen or peasants, or to bondsmen. But if any *posadnik* or peasant or any man should release his son to serve as a soldier, or as a cavalryman, or as a clerk, or other official to the tsar... and if these sons should rise through their service from low station to high, and obtain *pomestia* [the title "service gentry"] and patrimonial estate for their service, then he and his descendants shall be of noble rank."

Continued on next page...

The Clergy

The Eastern Orthodox Church was a powerful force in medieval Russia, on both spiritual and financial fronts. During the Kievan Era, churches were granted huge plots of land, and formed entire neighborhoods of churchmen within communities. By the time of Ivan Grozny (Ivan the Terrible), at least one-third of all Russian land was Church property.

Clergymen, from a social standpoint, were either "white" or "black." The "white clergy" were urban churchmen: bishops, priests, deacons and sextons. Their duties included keeping the standards for weights and measures, overseeing oaths, collecting tithes and housing members of the lay community in times of crisis (the stone church would often be the only structure remaining after a city-wide fire).

White clergy were respected and very often wealthy; Russian nobles tithed vast amounts of money to the Church, particularly to "yes-men" priests who pandered to them. The bishops and priests (and their wives!) were sometimes on a social level equal to that of the petty nobles and wealthy landowners.

Although the clergy (with the exception of sextons) were immune to conscription, white priests were often soldiers as well, particularly in the Kievan Era, and many such fighting priests became heroes. Fighting clergy still existed in later eras, but a priest who killed in battle was no longer eligible for church service, and would become a layman.

The "black clergy" were monks – men who took strict vows giving their property and lives over to the Church. Black clergymen were hardly removed from Russian society, though. Many were former nobles, and played active social roles in town. Their wealth went toward decorating the monasteries and increasing Church landholdings. The abbey was also a path to power; many a petty princeling gained the mantle of bishop for the price of a few years' service to God.

Most monks, of course, were not high-placed cogs in the social machine, and came from humble backgrounds. Monks kept the strongest, and at times the only, literary tradition in Russia, serving as both scribes and chroniclers. They were also craftsmen, and their wares brought revenue to the monasteries from the open markets of the cities.

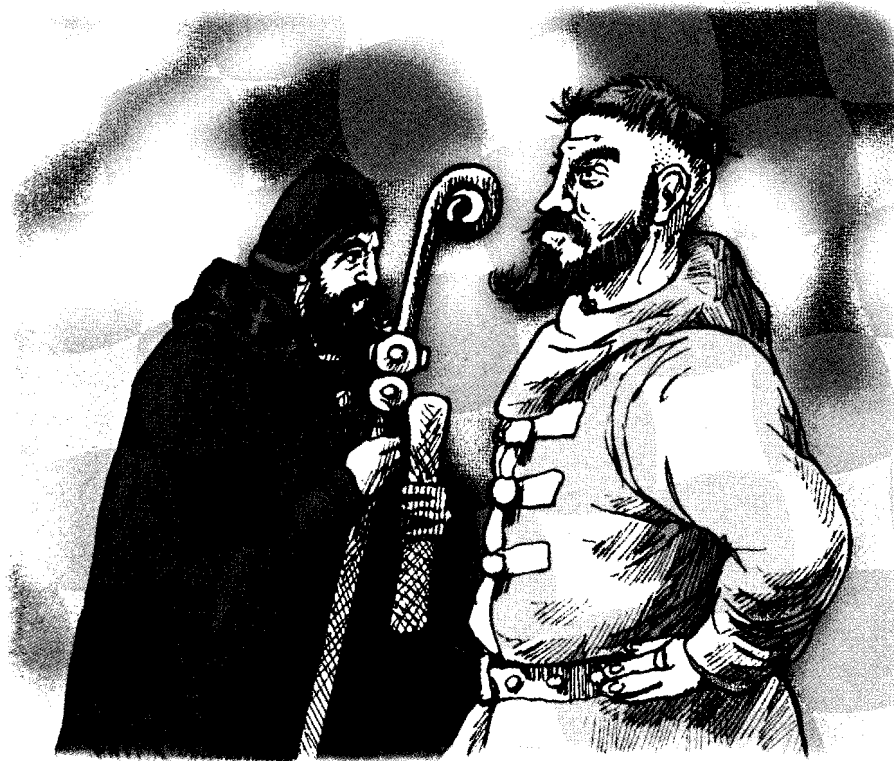
Monasteries were built mostly *within* town walls until the tsarist era, not in the countryside as in western Europe, for many reasons including the staunch resistance of the rural dwellers to Christianity. By the 14th century monasteries became rural and their landholdings grew. Monasteries were popular targets for brigands and raiding plains nomads such as the Polovtsy.

The Nobility

The structure of the noble class varied depending on the era. Before the tsars, Russia was divided into principalities, each ruled with relative autonomy by its prince. The monarch *above* those princes changed with the times, and as his importance waxed that of the princes waned.

Kievan Rus

The princes of the Kievan Era were Varangians – transplanted Viking warlords. The princes paid homage to a grand prince, who earned the throne of Russia through outright civil war or (occasionally) peaceful succession. There were many years during this period with no generally recognized chief prince, but many (or all) claiming the title.



The early princes cared little about the lifestyles of their subjects; they only wanted tribute and order. The nobility and the rest of Russia didn't even share a common religion, much less a common culture, until Grand Prince Vladimir united Russians under Orthodox Christianity!

Mongol Russia

The *structure* of the nobility changed very little under the Mongols; the *character* differed somewhat. The class system was no longer driven by mercantile interests, and the grand prince (or grand duke) gained his title by gaining the favor of the Mongol khans, bootlicking and fighting to earn the *yarlik* (the document issued by the khan to signify sovereignty over Russia). The princes were responsible for taxing their subjects, and paying tribute to the khan.

At this time, Russians began to fuse into a single culture, shaped by their new homeland and by the power of the Church. In addition, the *appanage* problem (see *The Yarlik*, p. 53), divided much of Russia into tiny "village kingdoms" where the sons of a noble would divide his land between them as their inheritance.

Muscovite and Tsarist Russia

From the Mongols, the Russian nobles learned the value of heavy taxes and tribute, and the usefulness of oppression. When the Mongols were cast off, the grand duke of Moscow (later the tsar) became absolute sovereign, granted the right of rule by the will of God; it would be many years before the authority of the church would be in question again.

At the beginning of this period, the princes were still a force to be reckoned with, though all answered to the grand duke. As the tsars appeared, both the princes and the nobles had their powers greatly reduced, until *all* power in Russia rested in the hands of a single man: the tsar.

Grigory Karpovich Kotoshikhin [Continued]

On Women

"In the state of Muscovy those of the female sex are unlettered, such being the custom, and are by nature simple in mind and foolish and shy in speech. From childhood until marriage they live in their father's house in private rooms, and none but the closest relatives can see them or be seen by them. It is plain from this how little chance there is for them to be smart or bold, and even when they are wed, men see little of them."

On The Don Cossacks

"... there are about 20,000 of these Don Cossacks, who are charged with the protection of the regions of the Lower Volga... They originate at Moscow and other towns, newly baptized Tartars, and Zaporozhian Cossacks, and Poles. Many are traders and peasants of Russian masters who were sentenced to punishment for brigandage and theft and other crimes, and who, after robbing and stealing from their masters, traveled to the Don. After being on the Don for even a week, or a month, if they should for any reason come to Moscow, no one may then take any action against them for any crime, no matter the offense, since the Don frees them from harm. They have been granted leave to live on the Don as they please, and they choose their own leaders, atamans and others, from among their number, and they mete out justice in matters according to their will, and not according to the tsar's laws..."

"... in Moscow, they are given the same honorable treatment as foreign emissaries, and without their freedom they would refuse to serve on the Don and remain obedient..."

Russian Flora and Fauna

Old Russia was largely wilderness, and the variety of living things there helped define the Russian character.

Mixed Woodland

Many varieties of tree were found in the mixed zone. In the west, hornbeam, elm, oak, spruce, pine, larch, ash, maple, aspen, beech and linden were all found. To the north and east, the broadleaf varieties thinned out, and maple and oak became predominant before fading completely before the Urals, leaving only spruce and occasional birch and aspen. Other plants included clover and some fruit-bearing trees.

Wild animals were plentiful in the mixed region, including vipers, hamsters, squirrels, weasels, ermines, forest martens, stone martens, turtles, snowshoe rabbits, badgers, fitches (polecats), swine, foxes, wolves, lynx, deer, moose, brown bears and European wild bison.

Continued on next page . . .



Other Classes

Medieval Russia was encumbered with tricky hairline social distinctions, and GMs pursuing further research are likely to drown in the tangle. There were the *bobyli* (peasants without plowland), *smerd* ("free" peasants with limited rights), *zakup* (indentured servants), *chernye liude* (lower-class city-dwellers), tens of types of petty nobles, princes and gentry, and literally dozens more. Even the wafer-bakers at churches were treated differently than lay craftsmen, and the Church had its own feudal system built on repayment for miracles and healing!

For purposes of game play, however, the basic groups given above are sufficient.

THE COSSACKS

Outside of Russian society, but closely involved with it, were the Cossacks, a "social class" that demands special treatment. While Cossacks were not true Russians, the lives of these steppeland adventurers had dramatic effects on Russian history. Beginning as freedom-loving bandits and nomads, they eventually became the eager servants of a cruel Russian state.

Appearing during the early 15th century, the Cossacks were a blend of Turkish bandits, Russian steppe-colonists and runaways, and Tatar (Mongol) rogues. They raided Tatar and Russian settlements alike, living on their own and forming a buffer between the Tatars and Russians, much as Russia served as a buffer for Europe. As Russia became a more despotic state under the tsars, the Cossack population swelled, most coming from all levels of Russian society. Entire *villages* are known to have "gone Cossack," fleeing their landlords in order to live beyond the reach of laws and princes in the "Wild Country."

Cossack Society

There were several kinds of Cossack. The most important to the Russian government were the "town Cossacks," adventurous souls of the steppe, mostly Russian-born, who knew enough of Tatar combat techniques and steppe life to make valuable mercenaries for Russia. They manned guardposts on the southern frontier of Muscovite Russia and were essentially freemen.

Other sorts of Cossacks were more numerous, but less seen within the confines of Russia. Free Cossacks roamed the upper steppe beyond the guardposts of Muscovy, living as hunters and fishermen, gathered under strong leaders and avoiding authority. They came, in time, to form significant towns, but the Cossacks were never a nation.

Cossacks didn't *like* the concept of society; it was what they had run to the steppe to escape. The steppe, however, was a dangerous place, and while the streams were "thick with fish," the hunting was good and the freedom was real, the Wild Country was deadly. Vipers waited in the tall grass, ruthless robber bands (other Cossacks, in other words) wouldn't hesitate to expend some black powder on you, and the Tatars and Turks were a constant threat to the south. Even if you were an honest free Cossack, serving only as a mercenary and a hunter, you might still be caught and hanged as a thief or a pirate by Muscovite authorities. As a result, Cossacks formed close-knit bands ranging in size from four or five to coordinated independent armies. Any given Cossack might travel under dozens of leaders in his lifetime, and those with the backbone to lead could become the masters of huge fighting forces.

Cossacks didn't relish the idea of spending the winter on the open steppe: they valued freedom but rarely to the point of idiocy. The early Cossacks solved this problem by making the steppe a "summer job" of sorts. In the warm months, the free Cossack took his tent, bow, horse and saber into the grasses, and lived by fishing, hunting and keeping furs, possibly engaging in brigandage or mercenary work as well. In autumn, he returned to the forests and border-towns to sell his furs and weapons and armor taken in battle. He then holed up until the rivers ran freely again, whereupon he returned to the steppe.

As robber Cossacks became more of a problem to merchants of Russia and Poland and to Russian river-shipping, free Cossacks returning home often found themselves arrested as outlaws. A choice soon had to be made between becoming faithful "town Cossacks" or living on the steppe full time. Many chose the latter.



The Cossack Settlement

The life of the Cossacks has been compared to the American Old West; Cossack towns were assembled quickly from available materials on the prairie, and the Cossacks went armed on their horses and sat with their backs to the metal-plated doors. The Tatars played the role of the Indians, and the *ataman* the chief.

Cossack town government was democratic. Each year (more often in times of war) the townsmen came together in a huge assembly to elect their new *ataman*, the Cossack community leader and commander in battle. He had the responsibility of keeping peace and order within the settlement, and of representing it in negotiations for mercenary contracts and treaties. At each new year, the old leader stood before the gathered Cossacks and awaited their judgment. If he was voted out, he simply fell back into the ranks, but if he failed in his duties, he had to die for it, sometimes with death.

Cossack settlements were placed with Tatar marauders in mind. River banks, high ridges and other easily defensible locations were favored. Ditches and wooden palisades were used; wood was scarce on the steppe, and its primary use was in defense. Cossack huts often had roofs of horsehide or other materials. Cossacks ate fish almost exclusively, and traded surpluses to Russians. They traded with Persians for important supplies such as guns, gunpowder and grain. The Cossack community traded with was dependent on how tough Russian law was that season.

Russian Flora and Fauna [Continued]

Taiga

The prevalent tree here was the Scotch pine, which thrived on sandy ground. In the northern reaches of Old Russia the *taiga* included many open, swampy spruce forests, and scattered birch and aspen. Moving eastward brought the Siberian spruce, pine and the dense Siberian larch into dominance. The forest floor was covered in lichen, which provided food for reindeer (it was often referred to as "reindeer moss"). The occasional sphagnum peat bogs included many varieties of berries, and sparse pine and birch.

Along the river valleys, the good soil and drainage produced luxuriant meadows, useful for cattle-grazing or agriculture. The ground here was a multicolored sea of flowers and grasses, blanketed in bluegrass, lilies, redtop, crysanthemums and the orange Siberian globe-flower, among others.

The gloomy *taiga* was virtually devoid of animals. Most *taiga* wildlife appeared near the small open patches and meadows, where more food could be found. Animals found in these areas included European brown bears (Siberian bears east of the Urals), timber wolves, foxes, lynx, wolverines, vipers, eagles, owls, badgers, hares, moose, wapiti, several types of deer and several species of squirrel, including the abundant "fur squirrel" and flying squirrels. Winter was the season for large-scale squirrel-hunts. Other small creatures of the region included pine martens, black fitches, marsh otters, ermines, weasels, *kolinsky* (Siberian yellow minks), sables and alpine weasels. Many of these creatures were sought for fur.

The *taiga* was home to many species of flying pest: one of the great barriers to Siberian settlers. Mosquitoes, black flies, gnats and horseflies were so common as to be genuine threats to those living here, particularly in the eastern *taiga*.

Continued on next page . . .



Russian Flora and Fauna [Continued]

Steppe

Forested regions on the steppe were found only at river sides. Willow, alder, cottonwood, elm, maple, pear, hawthorn, wild apple, oak, pine and blackthorn were all common, with their frequency dependent on the region. Most of the fruit-bearing trees were west of the Dnieper.

The plains were carpeted in flowers, the colors changing with the months: various red flowers in March, purple hyacinths in April, dark red peonies and light blue sageflowers in May, a silver sea of feathergrass in June, etc.

The steppe of Old Russia was home to many wild herd animals, including cattle, saiga antelopes, horses and stags. Wild boars were common, as were some European species of deer. Other common animals of the steppe were much smaller, including dormice, hamsters, ducks, pelicans, molerats, ground squirrels, herons, various small lizards, vipers, grasshoppers and jumping mice. Waterfowl were most common in the shallow eastern lakes.

Russian Images of Cossacks

Criminals or not, the Cossacks represented freedom to Russians. Times of oppression created the Cossack, and the greater the oppression, the more heroic the steppe adventurer seemed. Cossacks rarely refused aid to runaways wishing to become Cossacks, and so their numbers swelled as tsarist pressure forced more and more to the borders. To the tsar, the Cossacks were a dangerous wind of anarchy that fed the flames of rebellion, and many uprisings did have Cossack leadership (see *Stenka Razin*, pp. 67-69).

МОСКВА

When most people think of Russian cities, the image that comes to mind is that of Moscow, particularly of Red Square and the glorious spires and onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral, built in the time of Ivan the Terrible to commemorate his military victories. Founded as a tiny village on the Moscow River by the descendants of Alexander Nevsky, and evolving into the capital of Russia's tsarist government, Moscow was the heart of all Russia.

Location and Layout

The Moscow River was a small tributary of the Oka, which was itself a tributary of the Volga. Moscow was a vaguely circular city, divided at several points by waterways. It was the clearest example of the concentric nature of Russian cities (see p. 9), having four major stages of its growth clearly preserved by city walls.

The heart of it all, the Kremlin, was the heavily fortified center of Muscovite government. (For a more complete description of the Moscow Kremlin, see *GURPS Places of Mystery*, p. 101.) Beyond the Kremlin through the Spassky Gate lay Red Square and Kitai Gorod, the central marketplace of the city and the home of the town's wealthiest merchants, nobles and *boyars*. Nearly surrounding both of these areas was the White City; the home of the wealthier burghers, intermixed with poor and common Russians. Encircling the entire affair was the Wooden City, a huge collection of homes, shops and churches of the masses, surrounded by a giant wooden wall with many gates.

The Inner City

At the center of Moscow was a collection of large governmental buildings (including the palace of the tsar) and a number of large and beautiful cathedrals and churches. Red Square, which sprawled along the length of the eastern wall of the Kremlin, was the year-round central marketplace of Russia – anything that could be bought in central Russia could be found (for the right price) here. In its center stood a circular stone stage upon which all major public executions, speeches by the tsar or patriarch, and other notable official displays were presented. The sleds, carts and ramshackle stands of hundreds of dealers lined the walls and wood-paved streets.

Incidentally, the name "Red Square" predates Communism. The Russian word for red, *krasny*, is synonymous with "beautiful." Red Square was named for its beauty, and Communism became "red" because of Red Square.

Enclosed by the same walls as Red Square was Kitai Gorod, literally "basketville." In the early days of the city, as Red Square's importance increased, the

area was fortified by building large walls of earth-filled baskets (similar in principle to sandbagging), giving this part of the city its name. By the height of the Muscovite Era the walls were of stone. Kitai Gorod was Moscow's "Merchant's Quarter," the site of many stately homes and luxurious inns and restaurants. Of course, Kitai Gorod was no fairyland; its streets were lined with beggars, and a combination poorhouse and morgue was there, its large bell ringing out to call for the collection of unidentified bodies.

In the winter, the markets of Moscow extended beyond Red Square onto the frozen rivers and canals that criss-crossed the city. Merchants would sled in their wares through the river gates, saving the trouble of bringing them down off the city streets. Temporary structures were erected, and the ice quickly became so dirty and rough from dragging lumber and sleds across it that walking on it was more difficult than walking on a modern sidewalk in the rain.



The Outer City

Outer Moscow consisted of the White and Wooden Cities. The White City, like Kitai Gorod, wasn't associated with any particular class in the city's early years. As the city grew beyond it, creating the Wooden City, the White City became identified with wealthier city-dwellers and higher-ranking craftsmen of

Russian Proverbs

Sayings of Russians reveal a none-too-optimistic society. It was the firm belief of the common Russian that, at any moment, something bad would happen. This belief was reinforced by both the Russian faith and a seemingly endless stream of invasions, plagues, fires, famines and other calamities, all of which were recorded in folklore and embedded in the national character.

- ◆ "The *muzhik* walked to Moscow, just to hear a proverb."
- ◆ "The church is near but the road is icy; the tavern is far but I'll be careful."
- ◆ "The grave calls if you drink; the grave calls if you don't."
- ◆ "The early bird that sings may wake a hungry cat."
- ◆ "It's a sin to leave a wedding sober."
- ◆ "Priests sing music over the dead; mosquitoes sing over the living."
- ◆ "The falling leaf is a message to living men."
- ◆ "Fear life, not death."
- ◆ "Nobody's seen the devil, but everybody blames him."
- ◆ "Beat your wife to learn a lesson."
- ◆ "Rapidly a tale is spun; with much less speed a deed is done."
- ◆ "A fool has no fear of going crazy."
- ◆ "An aged horse is 10 times more useful than an aged bridegroom."
- ◆ "Fear not the clever enemy, but the foolish friend."
- ◆ "God is too high; the tsar is too distant."
- ◆ "Even the fool may ride; even the sage may walk."
- ◆ "Save your meal for tomorrow; do your work today."
- ◆ "Even a *skomorokh* weeps sometimes."
- ◆ "Luck is better than wealth."
- ◆ "Her hair is long, but her wit is short."
- ◆ "The small one is too small, the large one too large, and the other just right . . . but I can't reach it."
- ◆ "If only one evil woman lived in Russia, every man would want her for his wife."
- ◆ "My only hope was in a fool, and he became wise."
- ◆ "When the cudgel fails, try *rubles*."
- ◆ "Time is money, but money is not time."
- ◆ "All girls are darlings; where do bad wives come from?"
- ◆ "If you want to find the Devil, look behind a cross."
- ◆ "If God dies, we'll still have St. Nicholas."
- ◆ "The icon and the axe come from the same tree."
- ◆ "Love your neighbor, but put up a fence."
- ◆ "Hens should not pretend to be roosters."
- ◆ "We are brothers, since we've dried our rags under the same sun."
- ◆ "Even a sick wolf can kill a lamb."
- ◆ "If the hostess is pretty, the *vodka* is good."
- ◆ "A man leaves his sins behind him, but his wife brings them into the house."
- ◆ "He who is destined for the gallows will not be drowned."
- ◆ "He who does not weep in this world will weep in the next."



all sorts, and held more beautiful smaller churches than the Wooden City ever would. The buildings of the White City were closer together than other parts of Moscow; in later years it closely resembled west-European cities, albeit with wider streets. And, of course, the White City had walls of white stone (erected in the 1500s).

The Wooden City, which grew around the White, had wooden defenses and gates. It had few stone buildings, and even many of its churches were made of wood, as in the poor communities of the Russian wilderness. The Wooden City was the home of Moscow's common people, workers and craftsmen. It also contained large tracts of urban Church land, and was therefore filled with orchards and gardens tended by monks or Church-owned slaves. Markets in the Wooden City were mostly for "crude goods" such as building materials and flax, and extended well beyond the walls of the cities.

The Wooden City was filthy and often muddy in the summer. The streets were irregularly paved with logs and boards, and the upkeep on this part of the town was largely the responsibility of those who lived in it. The portion of the city south of the Moscow River was the housing-place of the *streltsy* and other soldiers, and included their training grounds as well as barracks.

Outside of the City

Of course, Moscow didn't stop at its gates. The surrounding villages and forests provided a network of production that extended Moscow for four to eight miles in nearly every direction before the forest took over. In these villages, Moscow's soldiers trained and drilled, and *muzhiks* worked and farmed for the princes and *boyars*. Under Peter the Great, the drilling infantry formed separate groups and staged mock wars with real ammunition and weapons (including cannons) and genuine casualties!

Another important part of the city was some four miles southeast of the walls proper: the "German" or "Foreign Quarter," as Russians used the word "German" to refer to any European who wasn't distinctly "Latin." The German Quarter was a cultural pocket of the West formed by runaway dissidents, soldiers of fortune and others who weren't truly representative of the West, but who were instrumental in forming the Russian view of it.

OTHER CITIES

Moscow was not the only city in Russia. The greatest city, from a cultural and economic standpoint, was Novgorod throughout much of the period covered by this book. Kiev, the birthplace of Russia, and St. Petersburg, the latter-day capital, must also be considered, as each of these are likely locations for adventure.

A Russian proverb goes: "Moscow was the heart of Russia; St. Petersburg, its head, but Kiev, its mother." This sentiment dates back to medieval sources and is still held to in Russia.

Kiev

According to Russian legend, Kiev was founded by three brothers, who settled on three hills and surrounded their settlements with a single wall. The eldest brother, and the one who lived on the highest hillock, was Kia, for whom the city was named.

Politically and culturally, Kiev became relatively insignificant by the 13th century. In its prime, Kiev was the capital of a large, tenuously bound collection



Self-Consciousness and Xenophobia

The Russian view of the rest of the world has never been positive. The Russian perspective, which tended toward the melancholy and skeptical (with a surprising capacity for good humor), was stronger than most Westerners might realize.

This dim view of the world was easily justified. The Russian landscape was a world of dreary, grey skies and endless, dangerous forests. Its history featured despotic oppression, foreign invasion and famine. Even the West, to which it made constant attempts at friendship in its latter days, treated Old Russia with disdain. Its religion was seen as a "bastard faith" by Church leaders in western Europe, and Russian merchants often found themselves tricked by their Dutch and English counterparts, who supplied them with false information regarding units of measure and the value of currencies. This spawned a strong distrust of all that was not Russian; even the worst of tsars seemed kind by comparison.

Curiously, Russians were still very concerned with the way the rest of the world saw them. They were seen as dirty, barbaric people, overly promiscuous, lazy and ill-mannered. These views were largely the result of European misinterpretations of Russian culture, but Russian nobles took much of it personally, and made many attempts to become more likeable to the West even before the reign of Peter the Great. The *Domostroi*, a manual describing (among other things) proper behavior in the company of foreigners, was written during the time of Ivan IV.

The GM should keep these things in mind when running scenarios involving contact with foreign visitors. Russian practices that were commonplace, such as spitting on the floor, belching and so on, were seen as revolting by Europeans, who did their best to remain coldly observant. PC nobles from the 14th century onward should feel the pressure of the tsar and others to become more like their Western cousins, and should roleplay their reactions accordingly . . .

principalities, and a significant center for the growth of the new Russian Orthodox faith. Even though it was often only a capital by default, Kiev was still a large and powerful trading center, probably the largest city in eastern Europe.

Location And Layout

Kiev was located on the west bank of the Dnieper River, the "road from the Magyars to the Greeks." It was one of many fortified trading settlements peopled by Slavic peasantry and Viking nobility, although its origins as a town certainly predated the Viking rulership by a century or two. As the southernmost of the Slavic trade centers on the Dnieper, it was the major connection between the East and the Byzantine Empire.

At the time of Vladimir, Kiev was a small walled city, but its outward growth continued even during its years of political insignificance. By the 16th century, the original walls of the Viking princes' town enclosed only a small portion of the city.

Medieval Kiev's streets were more "organic" and sprawling than many other medieval towns, twisting over each other in no planned formation. The streets, however, were very wide, and the buildings were given plenty of room. Many gardens and orchards took up sections of Kievan Church lands, and Kiev was the site of dozens of major, and even more minor, churches.

Kiev, from the time of Vladimir, was built fundamentally as an "imitation of Constantinople," with Byzantine stylings in its gates, cathedrals and trappings. The monk Hilarion described it as "a city glistening with the light of holy incense, fragrant with incense, ringing with praise and holy, heavenly songs." Even the names of specific structures were cribbed directly from the Byzantine buildings that inspired them.

Vodka!

The stereotypical Russian was known for his love of drinking, and, unlike many stereotypes, this was rooted in truth. Prince Vladimir's remark that "drinking is the joy of the Rus" has echoed through the centuries. In the warm months, the *muzhik* worked from dawn to dusk, with time between only for sleep. In winter, there was little to do but sit and await spring. Drinking passed the time.

Vodka (pronounced "votka" by Russians) was not always the "national drink." In Kievan times, crude mead, beer and *kvass* (a weak beer) were favored. The Russian word for honey is *myed*, which may be the source of mead's name.

Vodka appeared in Russia in the late 14th century, most likely brought by Crimean Genoese refugees fleeing the Mongols. It had been distilled in western Europe for nearly a century for medicinal purposes, and in the West was known as *aqua vitae*, "the water of life." The Russian term *vodka* is less dramatic: it simply means "little water."

The arrival of vodka caused no small revolution in the drinking lives of Russians. They adopted the drink eagerly, and the vodka tax became one of the largest sources of revenue for the Russian state, which suddenly had a major interest in keeping its citizens tipsy. Even the laws of the time showed understanding toward the drunk. The 1397 charter of the city of Pskov stated that deals and sales made between drunkards could be reversed without oath or fine once they had slept off their inebriation. Ironically, the phrase "give me a drink of vodka" appears in one of the earliest surviving manuscript Russian dictionaries. Vodka was also believed to have supernatural medicinal powers.

The Russian reputation for alcoholism was carried into Europe by countless travelers and even Marco Polo described them as incurable drunkards. A scholarly German visitor to Moscow in the mid-17th century reported that a Muscovite emissary to King Charles of Sweden, "forgetting his quality and the affairs his master had entrusted him with," drank so much "strong water" on the night before his meeting with the king that he was found dead in the morning, and was carried to his grave instead of being conducted to an audience. The same writer said of the common citizens of Muscovy that "the lowest sort of people, peasant and slaves, refuse not cups which are given them by some persons of quality, but will drink of it until they lie down, and many times die in the place." Many writers recorded incidents of men selling their clothes and tools in order to spend an entire evening at drinking houses.



Novgorod

"Novgorod the Great," sometimes referred to as the father of Russian cities, was a major city from the earliest days of Russia, and it was from Novgorod that Prince Rurik ruled his northern empire that would become Kievan Russia under Oleg. Unlike all other major Russian cities, Novgorod wasn't sacked by the Mongols, instead making peaceful arrangements with them via Alexander Nevsky. Novgorod was an independent city-state for centuries, and the center of a vast colonial empire, until it finally came under the rule of the Grand Duchy of Moscow in 1471. Even then, the Muscovite nobility played a secondary role to the city's *veche*, a semi-democratic town council.



Location and Layout

Novgorod sat by the Volkhov River, three miles north of Lake Ilmen and just over 300 miles northwest of Moscow. The river flowed northward, into Lake Lagoda, 120 miles distant, and then outward to the Baltic, making the city a valuable gateway for Baltic trade. It was at the southern edge of the *taiga* and the landscape a few miles south gave way to extensive wooded marshes.

The city was in two parts, divided by the river. The western, or "St. Sophia side," housed the city's *kremlin*, which was walled in stone just after the annexation of the city by Ivan III. The *kremlin* contained the citadel, as well as the cathedral of St. Sophia and the palace of the archbishop. Six gates allowed burghers to travel through the *kremlin* and into the large oval of wooden buildings surrounding it, which contained many craft districts, including the Potter's, Carpenter's, Shoemaker's and Leatherworker's quarters. The eastern, or Market, side was completely enclosed by wooden walls, and very likely contained the original citadel, from the days when the city had to be more defense-conscious. Market Side also contained Yaroslav's Court, the site of the city's *veche* meetings.

Novgorod was like a traditional fantasy medieval city in that the surrounding countryside was almost completely uninhabited. In Novgorod, you lived *inside* the walls or you lived *elsewhere*. The city had no large stretches of farmland to support it; Novgorod lived on commerce and brought in its needed supplies from a network of river settlements it sponsored. This network extended deep into the *taiga* and across to the Urals, and

more than sufficient to support the city. Inside the walls of Novgorod over-
ing was a problem.

St. Petersburg

The city of St. Petersburg, which began construction in 1703 and was named the capital of Russia only nine years later, was symbolic of Peter the Great's obsession with making Russia a part of Europe. While it can usually be treated like any other Russian cities, the GM should keep in mind that the whole *point* of the city was a *revolution* from the Russian norm. Peter wanted a new capital for a new age, and he got precisely what he got.

The Moscow Open Market

"In front of the Kremlin is the largest and best market square in the town. All day it is full of merchants, both men and women, and slaves and idlers. Some women stand by the dais selling linen, while others hold in their mouths and sell rings, usually set with turquoise. I have heard that along with these they offer something else for sale as well. In the market and in the nearby streets, the wares and craft items are displayed in special locations, arranging each variety of thing in the same place. Sellers of silk and cloth, goldsmiths, saddlemakers, shoemakers, tailors, furriers, beltmakers, hatmakers, and others each have their own streets where they offer their wares. This system is convenient; everyone knows where to go to buy what he needs. Also by the Kremlin is the icon market, where only painted icons depicting the old saints are sold. They do not call it a trade in icons, but an exchange for money, which does not allow for much haggling."

— Olearius

The Russian Public Baths

Friedrich Christian Weber, a German visitor to Russia in the time of Tsar Peter I, gave some interesting descriptions of Russian bathing habits, which both impressed and offended him. Russians bathed at least once a week as far back as the early Muscovite era, which made them a good deal cleaner than most Europeans. On the other hand, they often bathed openly, which Weber found horrifying.

Some, Weber said, rowed naked in a boat until they worked up a sweat, and then dove into the river, drying themselves later with their capstans. Others swam and then dried themselves by a fire, covering themselves with oil or grease, which Russians believed was good for nimbleness.

Continued on next page . . .

The Russian Public Baths [Continued]

Of "the most common" method, he wrote:

"Along a stream are built thirty or more bathhouses, half for men, half for women. Those who wish to bathe disrobe under the open sky, and run into the bathhouse. After having sweated enough and had cold water poured on them, they will go to rest and dry themselves, and run through the bushes sporting with each other. Not only the men, but also women, married or not, in numbers of forty or fifty and more with each other, naked without any shame . . .

"The Russians, both men and women, bathe this way in both winter and summer, twice a week or more. They pay one copeck a head; the bathhouses are the property of the tsar. Those that have bathhouses at their homes pay annually for them, and, since bathing is universal in Russia, this brings considerable revenue to the coffers of the tsar."

The bathhouses were much like Finnish saunas, and according to other visitors the urban bathhouses used herb-scented steam! Bathers cleaned themselves, and then ran into the streets and rolled naked in the snow. While visiting Westerners were often quite surprised at this, Russian passers-by hardly noticed. Olearius wrote that "it's nearly miraculous to see how their bodies, used to and toughened by the cold, can endure so intense a heat. When they can stand it no longer, they come out of the oven, naked as the back of a man's hand, both men and women, and go into cold water, or have it poured over them."



Politically, the role of St. Petersburg did not lie in the world of Old Russia. In fact, it symbolized the death of it, and the beginning of the Imperial Era. Most adventures in St. Petersburg take place during the period of its construction (which featured horror and death sufficient to terrify the most morbid of players), and, if the game is of the political/espionage strain, the forced move of the Russian government to the city. The latter is rife with potential for exploring the deadly conflict between the power groups in Russia, and would easily fall into an Illuminated campaign.

Location and Layout

The site Peter chose was symbolic in many ways: sitting at the recently captured mouth of the Neva, it firmly established his victory against Sweden, and planted a population to defend it. More important, it was the first stage in gaining the "window to the Baltic" that Peter craved. If it was close to western Europe, Peter reasoned, it would have to be *better* than that which was purely Russian.

The site, aside from its symbolism, was a poor one. The land was swampy and all but unfarmable, and the tides rose high onto the land. The fresh water was harmful to large wooden boats, and the river was narrow and shallow. To make matters worse, the river was ice-bound for several months of the year, so its role as a Baltic window was hindered. Peter did not care.

Throughout Peter's lifetime, St. Petersburg was a miserable place. He ordered thousands of men from all corners of Russia (some from distant Astrakhan and Siberia!) to build his city. Peasant and noble alike were forced to build and live there. Legally, even visitors could not enter the city without a building block as a sort of "toll." They died by the hundreds, and the survivors lived in miserable hovels. Peter, himself dwelling in a leaky hut, shrugged quietly at their plight. They were simply servants of the state, he reasoned, and the city was being built for the good of Russia.

The layout and architecture of St. Petersburg differed greatly from the Russian norm. Unlike "natural" cities such as Moscow and Novgorod, St. Petersburg was planned from the start, with regular street layout and western-European-looking buildings. Peter prided himself on the city's shipyards, which became the largest in Russia. Despite the problems the city had as a port, the docks added to the city's European flavor.

ГЕОГРАФИЯ

Russia is not Russia without wilderness. Whether wolf-haunted icy wasteland, vermin-thick forest or nomad-hiding steppe, every piece of Russia's natural mosaic played a pivotal role in the development (and retardation) of its culture, lifestyles and outlook. The land was truly the "mother" of all that was Russian, from the rich tradition of art to the regrettable tradition of xenophobia and distrust. Understanding that land, and what it did to the people who lived in it, captures the "flavor" required to make Old Russia come alive in your *GURPS* campaign.

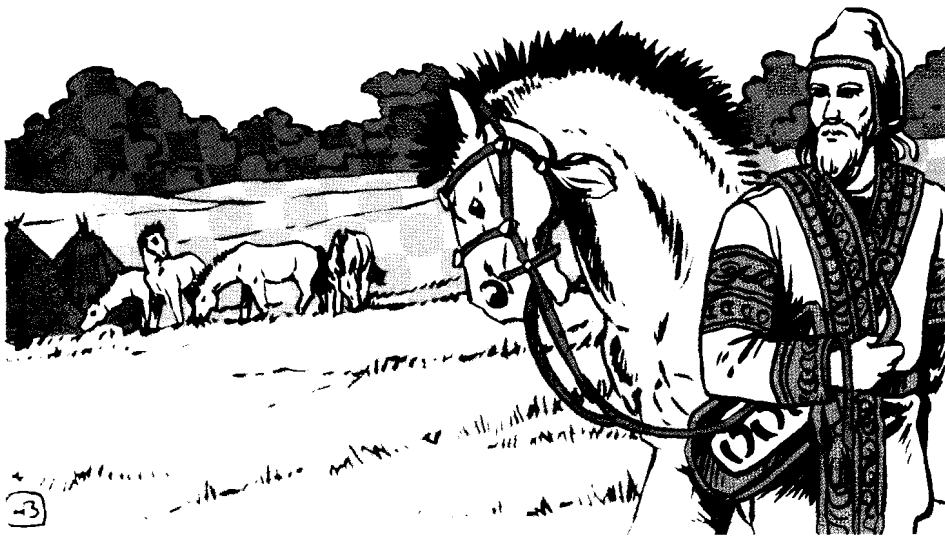
Overview

Unlike western Europe, which was gifted with a blend of hills and lowlands, Old Russia was a vast, flat territory, with bands of trees, grassland and desert ranging unhindered across thousands of miles. This made Russia a highway of sorts. The Varangians used its interlocking river systems as a trade road, taking their

stretches as far east as the Caspian and as far south as Constantinople. Countless groups of equestrian nomads, from the Scythians, Sarmatians and Huns to the Mongols, used the steppe as a road from Asia to Europe. In the middle were always the Russians.

The "continentality" of Russia also had a tremendous effect on its weather. Without shielding mountains or tempering contact with the sea, Russia knew storms, winds and a bone-chilling winter most Americans or West Europeans could scarcely imagine.

The following sections examine each area in detail.



The Forest

More than half of Old Russia was forest. Extending as far southwest as the base of the Carpathians, and painted in a broad stroke across the continent above the steppe into the Urals, the forest defined the Russian lifestyle in the Middle Ages.

The forest shaped not only the Russian view of the wilderness, but also the Russian village and city: *everything* was wooden. European visitors to Russia in the 12th and 13th centuries remarked how "even their castles are made from wood."

In the 17th century, when the Moscow Kremlin was being rebuilt in stone, Peter the Great insisted on living in his old wooden palace, finding a house of stone unnatural and believing it unhealthy. The streets of large towns were "paved" with slats of wood, and the fundamental symbol of Russian piety was the painted wooden icon. But the Russian character includes a paradoxical fear of the forest that shaped it. In the minds of medieval Russians, the forest was inhabited by strange and frightening entities: god-like spirits of cold and fire, vicious beasts and annoying vermin.

The Russian forest came in two varieties. The first was mixed woodlands occupying the central western and southwestern parts of Old Russia. The second (and largest) type of Russian forest was the *taiga*, a vast belt of conifers with rivers and streams throughout, extending across all of northern medieval Russia and eastward to the depths of Siberia.

The Veche

Novgorodians were a savvy people, respected by west-European travelers far more than Muscovites or other Russians. Novgorod was arguably the home of the best grain and fur markets, entertainers and craftsmen in Russia. The Novgorod sense of civic pride, city-wide independence, and lack of patience with Russian attempts to make it "just another city" were defining factors of the citizens. Novgorodians were a special breed and they knew it, and their will had its clearest expression in the ringing of the *veche* bell in Yaroslav Court.

The *veche* was a public assembly in which every citizen gathered and discussed current issues to vote on them. Each street in Novgorod was seen as a self-governing unit, led by an elected elder, and several streets formed a *sotnia*. Several *sotnia* formed a "quarter." There were five "quarters" in the city, each of which had its own minor assembly and handled its own business by town meetings. When the entire town needed to assemble for a major matter (the election of a mayor, for instance, or the dismissal of a prince), the major *veche* was called to order, and the city gathered to resolve the issue.

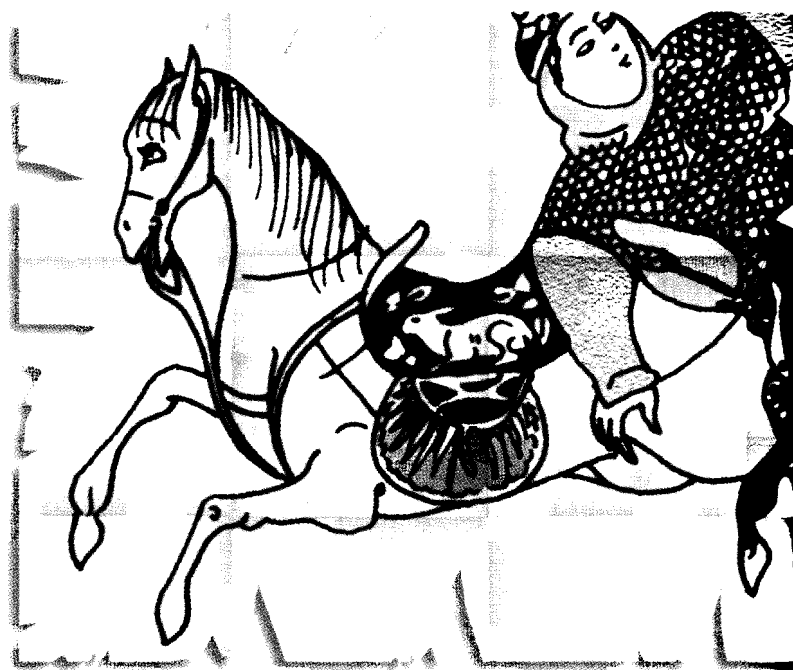
As might be expected, it didn't really work. Within a few years of its inception, the assembly concept became a mock-democracy that gave the common man the proud sense of airing his opinion without the slightest risk of it being considered by the real men of power. By the time the Novgorod records give us a detailed look at the *veche*, it consisted of the city's rich clergy, merchants and *boxars*. The common Novgorodians were welcome to attend, but they gathered outside the courtyard to listen to the discussions within. If they could make out the details over the crowd noise, they were permitted to yell their own opinions into the courtyard. The *veche* became a form of oligarchy where wealth dictated the size of the vote, and the inevitable inefficiencies of such a system rendered it useless for day-to-day affairs, which were handled by a "court of notables."

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The Veche [Continued]

Occasionally, the meetings resulted in violence. If the city's wealthy factions were completely at odds with one another, no amount of screaming in the courtyard would make either side give up its position. Both sides took up arms at one of the city's bridges, "taking it outside and settling it like men," so to speak. When the swords and clubs were drawn, the common men of the city were more than welcome to join in as equals with their richer neighbors . . .

With all of its flaws, however, the *veche* was the last real chance that the common men of Russia had to scream their views from any place other than the chopping block. When Novgorod finally came under the power of Moscow and the *veche* bell was carted out of the city, the evolved state of Russian serfdom had arrived.



Civilized Forest

The mixed woodland was simply "the forest" to most. Within it lay all the major towns and monasteries central to Russia. Novgorod sat on the northwestern border, with mixed woods to the south and deep *taiga* to the north. Kiev was on the southern border, where the conifers were the least numerous, and the wood gave way to the steppe. Moscow sat surrounded by mixed forest in the center of the region.

The climate was cold, and the forests were often filled with fog from the rivers and swamps (except when they were filled with snow, roughly five months out of the year). The mixed woodland was made of a blend of conifers and the broadleaf, deciduous trees common to all Europe, with the monotony broken by gigantic cold marshes and occasional plateau meadows.

This region served Russia well defensively during the pre-Mongol years, when the greatest military threats were the various steppe nomads. The nomads preferred open grasslands both for life and combat, and the forest was a place of darkness, ambushes and slow movement.

Unfortunately, the soil of the mixed woodlands was poor, and the climate made growing most crops difficult. Deep plowing was necessary for even rudimentary farming, and at no point in history was this region known for its agriculture. Still, bees (producers of wax and honey) and many fur-bearing animals thrived in these forests, forming the basis for Russian trade.

Evergreen Wilderness

North of the common forest of Russia sat the forbidding *taiga*. In the tongue of the southern Siberian natives, the word meant "forested mountain ridge"; the Mongols used the word simply to mean "forest." By the latter days of Old Russia, the modern meaning, an untamed, evergreen wilderness, had come into being.

The *taiga* was an almost unbroken conifer forest, filling the Russian subarctic region almost to the ice-bound northern shores of Asia. The land was flat with occasional gentle undulations, and not too rocky. Its rivers were meandering and sluggish, but flowed evenly year round; precipitation was high, and evaporation was low. In the winter, snow was everywhere.



The soil here was the all-but-useless podzol (“ash-like”) variety, and under the dark canopy of the heavy pines very little plant life was to be found on the forest floor. Between rivers were swampy divides: dark, icy and unsuited to human habitation. Novgorod’s empire, such as it was, extended several colonies into the *taiga* (along rivers, for the most part), successfully exploiting some of the vast wealth that was to be found along the waterways. Otherwise, most of these areas remained untouched by human beings into the 20th century.

The Steppe

Extending southward from the broad forests lay the broad Asian prairie: the steppe. It was a region of wild herds, seas of colorful feather-grass, and tree-dotted riverbanks. To most medieval Russians it was firmly in the realms *beyond* Russia proper. Russians lived along rivers and in forests; invaders and outlaws roamed the steppe.

The steppe was vast and mostly flat. Its rivers had few tributaries and often ran deep into the land, creating depressed banks filled with trees. A large crescent of low mountains and crystalline rock deposits formed the southern boundary where this “Asian Highway” met India, Turkey and China.

Waterways

In Old Russia, waterways were the source of all life. They were the roads upon which Russia was built and upon which it operated. Russia was founded by Slavs and Vikings on the Dnieper and Don, and then made an empire from the Dnieper-Volga – “Mother Volga” to Russians.

Russian rivers were very slow, very still and very wide; the waters of the Dnieper at Kiev were wider than the effective range of steppelander short bows. Most of the major ones flowed southward, the Volga traveling some 2,300 miles from its source in the Valdai Hills into the land-locked Caspian Sea. A few important ones (such as the Dvina and Neva) flowed northward into the Baltic or toward the Arctic, and many small rivers never made it to *any* major body of water, being split and lost in swamps or simply fading into the sands of the Caspian



semi-desert. Russian rivers came from the lakes and swamps at the country's heart, fed mostly by melting snow and ice. Like the streets of a Russian city, they radiated out from the heart. In fact, several small lakes and swamps were the source of two rivers, one flowing north and one flowing south. In winter, of course, the rivers froze solid until spring when floods were common. In summer, the water level was noticeably lower. North-flowing rivers were less prone to such extremes, since they were shorter and flowed through cold forests.

The Mountains

Mountains were not something that Russians thought about; Russia was big and flat, and most Russians never saw a decent *hill*, much less a mountain. While Russia would eventually expand toward many European and Asian ranges, the only important mountains in Old Russia were the Urals, the divide between Russia and the vast plains of Siberia.

Despite their comparatively insignificant size (the tallest point in the range was Mt. Narodnaia at 6,200 feet, while the majority of the range was significantly below 3,000 feet high), the Urals served as a barrier between Russia and Siberia, hindering colonization eastward and defining the border for centuries. Still, the Urals were loaded with mineral wealth, and kept the tsars' mining interests strong. They even managed to block air movements from the Atlantic; if Russia was cold and dry, Siberia was frigid and near-arid.

КЛИМАТ

Russian winters were extreme. The lack of northern mountains permitted cold air masses to flow unhindered from the Arctic, while the mountainous crescent south of the steppe blocked the warm air of the Indian Ocean. As a result, average temperatures in Russia were closer to the winter values than to summer ones.

The mean annual temperature of Moscow (typical of the region) was 24°. The coldest month was January, which averaged 12°, but could reach lows near -40°. High temperatures for the heart of winter were approximately 45°. The temperature from November to April averaged below the freezing point, and the snows (which began falling in mid-October) accumulated to a depth of 20 inches or more before the thaw; frosts could occur as late as June. The Moscow River froze solid in mid-November, and stayed that way until early April.

The summer in Moscow was mild. The hottest month, July, averaged 66°, and a "hot day" was 75° with very rare heat waves bringing Moscow into the mid-90s. June, July and August saw the heaviest precipitation, with an average nearing 5 inches per month. Overall precipitation was 21 inches per year. Rainfall and snowfall were both frequent, with large storms being uncommon and light, and constant precipitation the norm. On average, assume a 50% chance of precipitation on any given day.

Climate Beyond Moscow

Russia's climate varied beyond the central mixed woodlands. Western Russia had milder winters (merely bone-chilling) and more precipitation. The inhospitable *taiga* and Siberian regions were *nasty* – summer temperatures were slightly cooler than Moscow, and the January average was 2°, with lows around -70° and record lows near -95°!

Wind

Fortunately, Russian winters were relatively still; the heavy cold air masses weren't prone to winds beyond the occasional breeze, and the haunting stillness of the *taiga* was legendary. When a wind *did* occur it could increase the deadliness of cold dramatically due to wind chill. At -40° , a 10-mph wind made the temperature effectively 30° colder! Such detail is optional, but certainly appropriate in Russia. For a table of wind-chill factors see *GURPS Compendium II*, p. 133.

Winter Rules

The following sections deal with problems of travel, combat and survival in winter conditions, expanding on *Basic Set* and *Compendia* material. While they shouldn't be brought out in every session of a *GURPS Russia* campaign, occasional trouble with the elements is part of what defines Russia, and fights on frozen lakes can be *fun*, especially if it's just about time for the thaw . . .

Dashing Through the Snow

Moving through snow is slow and *extremely* tiring. To realistically represent this, use the following rule: 1" of snow is equal to 5 pounds of encumbrance. In other words, walking through a foot of snow, unencumbered, is comparable to walking on normal ground while wearing a 60-lb. backpack. This temporary encumbrance is added to the weight of carried equipment.

Snowshoes. Snowshoes keep the walker on top of the snow, but travel is still slow. The value of snowshoes is that they eliminate the "extra encumbrance" effect of the snow. Movement in snowshoes is at -2 to Move. Snowshoes will not reduce the Move of encumbered characters below 1.

If using the Advanced Combat rules, a snowshoe-wearing character must make a DX or Sports (Snowshoeing) roll (p. 40) in order to use a retreat with an





active defense. Failure by 1-3 means the character stays in the same hex – the retreat fails. Failure by 4 or more means the retreat *succeeds*, but the character falls on his back after the defense roll is resolved! Moving backward or sprinting requires a DX or Sports (Snowshoeing) roll to avoid tripping.

Skis. “Cross-country” style skiing was common practice in Russia when overland travel was required in winter. Characters wearing skis in combat suffer the same movement and combat penalties as those wearing snowshoes, and the DX or Skiing check to retreat or move backward (but not to sprint) is at -2! When on skis, a character may not take any facing after a *Step and (anything)* maneuver; he is limited to a one hexside change. Any further changes require a Move maneuver. Note that while short-term “tactical” skiing is slow and inconvenient, over the long haul it’s a *vast* improvement over walking.

Magic. In fantasy campaigns where “practical magic” is available, the Snow Shoes spell (p. M37) is extremely valuable, and skilled wizards can keep two or three up indefinitely.

Overland Travel

In general, use the rules in the *GURPS Basic Set*, pp. 187-88. For snowy terrain, however, treat snow as encumbrance instead of a terrain modifier; this allows for greater realism. Parties on skis travel *faster* on snow; divide the traveler’s Skiing (Overland) skill (p. 40) by 5 and apply it as a multiplier to distance traveled! Snowshoes also eliminate the snow for travel purposes, but reduce the time one can travel to 60% of normal. In most cases, the terrain *around* the snow applies normally – skiing through forest is slower than skiing across a meadow.

Note that fatigue loss for missed meals (see p. B128) is doubled in very cold conditions; the body needs *lots* of steady food to keep warm. This, added to the fact that hunting and scrounging for food is more difficult in the winter, makes long overland journeys serious undertakings.

General Survival

Winter's conditions can make simple survival a task in itself. For general rules on surviving arcticlike environments, see *Compendium II*, p. 131 and pp. 133-135. Some elaborations on those rules follow.

Visibility: Snowfall is a major obstruction to visibility. Firing an arrow straight in a snowstorm, even without wind, is more a matter of luck than skill. A penalty of -1 per 25 yards of range is appropriate for a light flurry, with a penalty of -1 per 5 yards for a raging blizzard.

These penalties also are applied to rainfall, smoke and foliage, which are also fairly common in a *GURPS Russia* campaign. Rainfall ranges from -1 per 50 yards for a light mist to -1 per 5 yards for a drenching downpour. Forested areas might range from -1 per 50 yards for open woods to -1 per 5 yards for dense growth. A healthy amount of smoke (or thick fog) would be -1 per 5 yards, while dense smoke would be -1 per yard!

The above sighting penalties apply in addition to those for darkness. Note, however, that the combination of visibility penalties from *all* sources cannot exceed the -10 of total darkness. In total darkness (or the snowy equivalent), actions that can be done blind (such as firing a bow) are permitted, but actions requiring *some* level of vision (such as spotting a bandit) are impossible.

Snow Blindness. This is a problem when traveling the steppe or open country of Siberia, per p. CIII34. It is not a hazard in the Russian forests.

Ice

Whereas moving on snow is tiring, moving on ice is *treacherous*. Ice slickness varies. In general, new ice tends to be very slippery. As ice gets older, new layers of snow drift, frost and airborne dust "tame" the surface slightly. In days of spring thaw, "old" ice becomes treacherous again as the top layer begins to melt. On slippery ice is almost impossible to move on – a character must make a DX-2 roll to enter each hex or fall! A further DX-2 roll is necessary to stand up; Skating skill can substitute for DX.

In any case, most ice isn't that bad. On typical ice, a slow walk (Speed 1) is possible with a DX roll every two minutes to avoid falling. Any greater speed requires a roll every turn (but not every hex).

Combat on ice is difficult. Fighters end up trying to keep their foe busy and shouting sound at the same time. All close combat and melee attacks, all defenses, and attempts to retain footing after knockback are at -3 on ice. All physical skills, including ranged attacks, are at -2. This applies even on snow, but skaters with skill 13+ reduce these penalties by 1. Any combatant can negate these penalties, but doing so requires a DX-4 roll to avoid falling down. Skating skill can substitute Skating skill for DX.

Specialized footwear negates ice penalties, but such footwear did not exist in medieval Russia; its existence in *fantasy* Russia is up to the GM. Skis can be used on snow, but were snow for simple forward and overland travel, but fighting on skis utilizes the rules for both ice combat *and* ski combat! See the sidebar for more on skates.

For rules on how much weight ice can support, see p. B188. Anyone suddenly immersed in freezing water must make a HT roll; failure means the character suffers a -3 penalty to DX due to "cold shock" in addition to the standard survival penalties detailed on p. CIII35. This lasts until the character is made warm and

Skaters in Advanced Combat

With all the frozen rivers and streams in Russia, heroes may eventually have to *fight* on them. In Basic Combat, a series of passes and attacks can be assumed, using the ice combat rules on p. 31. For Advanced Combat on skates, however, the following movement rules are required:

Skaters can move quickly: Speed is equal to (Skill/2), rounded down. The sprint bonus may be gained for forward movement, just as if the skater was on foot.

Turns. Tight turns are very difficult; it's recommended that the turning radius rules in Chapter 17 of the *Basic Set* be used. Medieval skates were flat-bottomed, and about 1/2 G was the limit for turns without making a Skating roll. Modern skates can make tighter turns; assume (Skill/10) G is safe without rolling. They also add 1 to Speed.

Stopping. If you reach your foe at Speed 7, you can't simply take a Step and Attack maneuver on the following turn! Skaters can change their speed by up to (Skill-9) hexes per turn (minimum 1). This applies to both acceleration and deceleration, although the latter may be ignored in most instances.

If a character's minimum Speed on any given turn is greater than 1, that character can take only a Move or All-Out-Attack maneuver. If the latter is chosen, his Speed may not be decreased on that turn.

Example: Berbedykov the Mad (Skating 13) is charging his brother in anger with an improvised club. At the end of his turn, he is two hexes from his brother and moving at Speed 6. His brother, on his own turn, takes an All-Out-Defense, preparing for the coming blow.

On his next turn, Berbedykov is faced with a choice. In his rage, he is approaching his brother *far* too fast! He can make a Move maneuver, lowering his Speed by 4 (13-9). In one turn, this would take him past his brother. He could come to a full stop on the next turn, and could attack him *en passant* with a Wild Swing. Optionally, he could *stay* at Speed 6 and make an All-Out Attack. He chooses the former, since the second option would mean barreling uncontrolled into his brother.



RUSSIANS

*“They are bearded children . . .
They will express the most ardent affection
in the most ardent language;
they will express the most furious rage
in the most vindictive terms.”*

**William Richardson, 18th-century
English scholar**

Point Cost

Characters in most historical *GURPS Russia* campaigns should be built on 100 or fewer points (the typical Russian peasant would be a 25-point character *at best*), with a maximum of 40 points in disadvantages and five quirks.

However, sometimes more powerful starting characters are justified. Campaigns set in dangerous time periods, such as the Mongol invasion or the Time of Troubles, could feature 150-200 point heroes. A *bogatyr*-level fantasy campaign might be made up of 500-point characters! The ratio of realism to heroism depends much on the exact setting and the tastes of the participants.



АРРЯЯЛИСЕ

The stereotypical medieval Russian was short and strong-looking, with a barrel chest and a large, dark beard. His features were dark and homely, with twinkling eyes and bright teeth that gleamed when he laughed – and he laughed *loudly*. On his head he wore a fur hat, and he wore a caftan and boots. His stocky legs were good for dancing, arms folded and legs kicking, even when he was stinking drunk from *vodka*. His wife was plain and stout and his dresses were simple and dark except when she wore her colorful best for festivals.

Most clichés melt away when you look at them closely; not even the typical Russian. Probably half of medieval Russians fit the stereotype. The only exception might be the bright teeth: as in most cultures before TL5 or so, healthy teeth were often a matter of luck.

Unlike western Europe, where dietary differences produced noticeable differences in height and frame between urban and rural dwellers, the Russian diet was similar for *boyars* and *muzhiks*. See table on p. B15, with the standard -3" modifier for medieval peasants, gives realistic results for most parts of Russia. For nomads, second-generation Cossacks and Russians on the southern borders (who were often of Mongol stock), subtract an additional inch from average height.

Hair and Eyes

Russians mixed Slavic, Asiatic, Turkic, Scandinavian and other bloodlines, ranging from the black-haired and golden-skinned to the golden-haired and ivory-skinned. Russians' eyes, likewise, could be just about anything. In general, darker eyes, dark browns and reds for hair, and browns, blacks and greys for eyes predominated.

The closer a Russian was born to Mongolia, the more likely he was to have Oriental features. Many famous Russians (including Godunov and possibly even Ivan the Terrible) had some Mongol ancestry. The Russian ruling monarchs until the Time of Troubles were direct male descendants of the Rurikan Vikings.

НАИИЕС

Russians typically referred to each other by their first names, followed by a "patronymic" created from the first names of their fathers. Ivan, the son of Boris, was Ivan Borisovich – literally "Ivan, son of Boris." Ivan's sister, for example, was Olga Borisovna, or "Olga, daughter of Boris." Suffixes *-ovich* and *-evich* were masculine, and *-evna* and *-ovna* were feminine. However, the precise rules for Russian patronymics were vague, and a son of Ilya would be Ilyavich, Ilyaevich or simply "Il'ich." Close family and friends dropped the patronymic in conversation.

Patronymic names were also used in Old Russia, particularly among wealthy landowners, *boyars* and other persons of status. Many peasants and slaves apparently lacked them. The son of Sergei of the family Azimov (a name meaning "seller of winter wheat"), would be Alexandr Sergeevich Azimov. Daughters should add an "a" to their names: if Alexandr had been born Alexandra, she'd be Alexandra Sergeievna Azimova.

Typical Russian Names

Male

Aleshin	Danita	Ivashka	Sergei
Alexandr	Dmitri	Kirbitei	Simen
Alexei	Dobrynya	Kyryl	Solovei
Aliosha	Erema	Lev	Stepan
Andrei	Fedor	Login	Staver
Andron	Foma	Lutonia	Timofey
Arsei	Fyodor	Mikhail	Tolbek
Artemon	Georgi	Naium	Vasily
Boris	Gregor	Nikita	Vladimir
Budimir	Ignati	Okinf	Volkh
Busla	Ilya	Peter	Vyslav
Dalmat	Ivan	Sadko	Yakov

Female

Afrosina	Era	Marusia	Solmonida
Alion	Irina	Natalya	Tamara
Anastasia	Katerina	Nana	Tatiana
Darya	Marfa	Sofia	Zabava
Elina	Marya		

Epithets/Nicknames

Agile: <i>Provorniy</i>	Handsome/Beautiful: <i>Krasiviy</i>
Amorous: <i>Vlyublenny</i>	Hasty: <i>Skoryat</i>
Arrogant: <i>Nadmyenny</i>	Hirsute: <i>Volosaty</i>
Awkward: <i>Nelovky</i>	Immaculate: <i>Chisty</i>
Bald: <i>Pleshivy</i>	Invulnerable: <i>Neyasvy</i>
Bashful: <i>Zastenchivy</i>	Lucky: <i>Schastlivets</i>
Beardless: <i>Bezborodny</i>	Miserly: <i>Skupoy</i>
Belligerent: <i>Vedushchy</i>	Nefarious: <i>Myerzky</i>
Blind: <i>Zaslon</i>	Obstinate: <i>Uporniy</i>
Bloodthirsty: <i>Zhestoky</i>	Odious: <i>Nyenuvisty</i>
Braggart: <i>H'vastun</i>	Old: <i>Pozhiloy</i>
Brave: <i>Hrabry</i>	Overconfident: <i>Naydmymnost</i>
Buxom: <i>Zdorovy</i>	Peculiar: <i>Stranny</i>
Callous: <i>Beschuvstvenny</i>	Pious: <i>Nabozhny</i>
Candid: <i>Konkurient</i>	Quarrelsome: <i>Svarlivy</i>
Celibate: <i>Holosty</i>	Sad: <i>Pyechalny</i>
Chaotic: <i>Haotichesky</i>	Short: <i>Korotkiy</i>
Charismatic: <i>Ocharovatelyny</i>	Simpleton: <i>Prostak</i>
Diabolical: <i>Dyavolsky</i>	Strong: <i>Silny</i>
Fat: <i>Dorodny</i>	Unlucky: <i>Neschastlivy</i>
Foolish: <i>Duratsky</i>	Vile: <i>Nizkiy</i>
Gullible: <i>Legkovyerny</i>	Zealous: <i>Revnostny</i>





CHARACTER TYPES

Boyar/Gentryman/Minor Prince

The lower nobility of Russia is very playable in campaigns focusing on political skulduggery and family quarreling. The struggles of the Shuiskys and Romanovs to gain the throne during the Time of Troubles amounted to all-out war behind the curtains of Russian palaces, with murders and betrayals startlingly common events. In earlier days, a PC *boyar* might simply be a former warrior or merchant who finds favor with the grand prince, and travels either for personal interests or on behalf of the nobility when not tending his lands. He might even be a former member of the grand prince's *druzhina*.

Details can vary widely, as each principality, manor or province in Russia was like a kingdom unto itself until the time of Ivan the Terrible. Each ruler had his own form of rule, and each place had its own "flavor," some prosperous and pleasant, and some dark and oppressive. Some, owing to the madness or perversion of the lord, might simply be *strange*. In fantasy Russia, the extremes can be carried even further.

Advantages: Status (usually 4 or higher) and Legal Enforcement Powers (10 or 15 points) are a must. Literacy, Allies, Reputation and Wealth are all common. If the noble in question is close to a powerful prince or the tsar, then he could have a useful Patron.

Disadvantages: Reputation is very common, as are Duty and Enemies. Other probables include Dependents, Fanaticism (either to Russia as a whole or to his own personal slice of it) and any of the disadvantages typically associated with decadent nobility: Fat, Greed, Odious Personal Habits and so on. More likable *boyars* have Honesty.

Skills: Administration and Savoir-Faire are necessary and Law, Theology (Russian Orthodox), Diplomacy, Leadership and various military skills are useful.

Clergyman

Whether or not magic works in the campaign, and whether or not priests have access to it, Russian clergy hold plenty of role-playing potential.

Monks make good characters in *Horror/Fantasy* games, or in historical campaigns focusing on the troubles of a single monastery (such as one on the Tatar border). Mundane mysteries work, too; players and GMs fond of *The Name of the Rose* may want to try a Russian version.

High-ranking white clergymen had very good reasons for travel. They were diplomats, merchants and occasionally spies, all rolled into one. See Chapter Four for more detail on clergymen and their possible roles in a campaign.

In a fantasy campaign, devout priests might have the powers of God to call upon, or have magical spell-like powers, depending on the GM's decision regarding holy magic.

Advantages: Clerical Investment and Status appropriate to their position within the Church.

Disadvantages: Vows, Fanaticism, Duty and Code of Honor (Kenoticism) (see p. 76) are all common.

Skills: Accounting, Administration, Bard, Calligraphy, Illumination, Theology (Russian Orthodox), Literature (Russian Orthodox), History, Diplomacy and Teaching.

Cossack

The Cossacks were outlaw adventurers in the wild country between Russia and Turkey. Living in small bands, they hunted, traded and fought for what they needed. Some were honest mercenaries and hunters, others were robbers roaming in packs or even pirates. Some were revolutionaries, determined to eliminate the tsars' oppression and replace it with Cossack anarchy. All were tough, skilled and fond of freedom to the point of mania. Most were probably realistically close to 100 points in game terms.

The details of Cossack characters depend on what *kind* of Cossack they are. Are they Ukrainian freedom fighters, dealing with Polish kings and raiding towns on the Black Sea for women and booty, or are they proud Don Cossacks, serving as mercenaries protecting Russia by attacking the Turks? Cossacks can be a part of an all-Cossack or a fully Russian campaign.

Advantages: Ally or Ally Group are especially common; lone wolves tend to die quickly on the steppe. Alertness, Danger Sense and Luck are stock advantages in a Cinematic campaign, and every Cossack wants a good Reputation.

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty (to the band), Code of Honor (never refuse asylum to a runaway wishing to become a Cossack) and Poverty are likely. Some Cossacks were Bowlegged (quirk-level only).

Skills: Riding (Horse), Broadsword, Bow, Boating (for pirates), Brawling, Survival (Steppe), Fishing, Tracking and some sort of Craft skill are musts. Animal Handling, Carousing, First Aid/TL2 and Naturalist are helpful. By the late 16th century, Cossacks should have skill in Black Powder Weapons.





Foreigner

A character in a *GURPS Russia* campaign needn't be Russian. All sorts of "outsiders" had places in Russian history: Polish mercenaries, Greek missionaries, English fur-buyers, Turkish slave-traders and so on. Foreigners came to Russia seeking money from trade, information about Russia (usually for their own country) or asylum from the laws of their own country. All three are good player-character ideas.

A German mercenary/robber living in the Muscovite German Quarter is the closest thing to a typical swords-and-sorcery "fighter" found in Russia. If the other heroes are higher on the social ladder, a foreign emissary might travel with them to learn about their daily lives and customs, probably at the order of the PC's patrons. Merchants have obvious roles, either working with the group to attain goods or trading with them. And *any* group of disparate individuals can be brought together by necessity in times of crisis.

Advantages, Disadvantages and Skills: Social Stigma (Outsider) and a few points of Language (Russian) would be helpful. Intolerance (Barbaric Russian Heathens) might be entertaining.

Fur-Hunter

The fur-hunter is a constant of Russian culture. Decked out in furs, with either a bow or a musket in hand, trappers and hunters supplied Russia with one of its most valuable commodities, furs for domestic and foreign trade. Most lived on the ever-advancing frontier, along the rivers of the *taiga* as Novgorod colonists, on the upper Don or in the northeast near the Urals. A fur-hunter and his sons spent each day in the forest tracking animals and checking snares. His furs, which he sold in huge bundles, would later sell for many times more in the markets of Moscow than in London.

A campaign with a fur-hunter will likely center on a colony in a remote village. Alternately, a Muscovite villager/hunter could easily take part in a Runaway *Muzhik* campaign.

Advantages: Acute Vision and Intuition would help a hunter track elusive beasts. Night Vision and Toughness are a part of the romantic image of Russian fur-hunters.

Disadvantages: Low Status is likely, particularly in Muscovy where prodigian colonists were -1 at worst; most were practically penniless. Alcoholism and Dependents are very likely.

Skills: Tracking, Naturalist, Survival (Forest), Area Knowledge (Local Woods and Streams), Stealth and Skiing are all likely. Hunting with either Bow or Black Powder Weapons.

Merchant

Merchants were free and respected men in medieval Russia, and their wealth was built on the efforts of savvy traders. Dealing in slaves, furs, wax, foreign luxuries, weapons or stranger things, each merchant ran his own operation, licensed and regulated by the tsar. The success of any merchant character requires the development not so much of his personality, but of his *trade route*. Does he ply his trade by boat, buying salted fish along the Volga or furs along the coast or by sled, carrying animals and honey from deep forests to the coast? Each requires merchants with different skills and outlooks.

A merchant in a party will often be the primary (Status-wise) member of the group, since merchants rarely had cause to travel without guards, but would certainly travel with guards and workers in the past. An all-merchant campaign (into dangerous or newly discovered territory) is also a possibility.

One of the aspirations of any Muscovite merchant was, oddly enough, to become the city's "knoutmaster," the man in charge of the torture-by-knouting of the tsar's enemies and major city criminals. Most knoutmasters were merchants who had retired to the role of torturer in exchange for good service to the state.

Advantages: Status 1 (Status 2 for torturer-merchants) and Wealth are both essential. Literacy would be helpful, but not strictly necessary unless the merchant dealt with foreign trade.

Disadvantages: Greed and Miserliness are stereotypical.

Skills: Merchant is the obvious must; Law, Area Knowledge (Trade Route Towns), Streetwise and possibly Language skills would be useful. Social-climbing merchants will want Whip skill.

Mongol/Tatar/Turk

The obvious way to play Mongols in a *GURPS Russia* campaign is as invaders (an invasion campaign from the side of the Mongols), but players can also create Tatars-turned-Russians, who were common in the latter days of the occupation. As the khanates disintegrated and were captured by the new tsars, the steppelanders settled in, moving into villages, teaching and joining the local soldiery and, in some cases, being granted lands as gentry!

Mongol or Turk invader PCs could be outriders scouting new areas for attack: such groups were small, armed and permitted to act with reasonable initiative. Tatar PCs within Russia would be of another character type, with the added feature of Oriental blood and features. Depending on the period, this could cause considerable tension and Social Stigma would be appropriate.

Advantages, Disadvantages and Skills: As per profession, with the addition of Language (Russian) since the character's native language is that of his Mongol/Turk background.

Muzhik

There are several campaign types in which a common *muzhik* would make an appropriate player character. Russian *Horror* gaming, especially, may begin with the PCs as "ordinary people," albeit 100-point ordinary people, drawn into adventure by some supernatural terror. In a Time of Troubles campaign, the peasant becomes a *very* viable character, since entire villages were destroyed by the *non-supernatural* terror of the *oprichnina*, and many others were simply runaways. Large peasant robber gangs could be either antagonists or protagonists.

In nicer times, wandering peasant storytellers were a common feature, traditionally welcomed in any village, telling tales in exchange for food, drink and repairs to their clothing. Typically, the storyteller extended his stay for several days by claiming thirst at tense points in a long adventure tale. Any tale-teller player would probably enjoy learning a few actual tales to tell; see the bibliography for sources.

Advantages: Voice for tale-tellers.

Disadvantages: Low status is common during most periods. Poverty and Alcoholism are typical.

Skills: Agronomy/TL2, Boating, Animal Handling, Cooking, Beekeeping/TL2 and various hunting and craft skills are appropriate, depending on the village.

Robber/Brigand

With the ever increasing pressure on the peasants to produce revenue for the tsars, many turned to brigandage to survive. Others simply did so from cruelty or laziness. Muscovites were accused by travelers of being acclimated to crime. A robbery or murder, said one Englishman, could be ignored by the townsfolk nearby.



who simply shut their windows and ears to the screams of the victim. The city's *streltsy* would presumably stop a crime that they witnessed, but the "Tsar's Musketeers" had other duties, and were only so numerous.

In the countryside, brigands waylaid merchants and even noble parties. Robber bands close to the steppe often went south to become Cossacks and pirates; others preferred the forest.

Advantages: Combat-related advantages.

Disadvantages: Low Status, negative Reputation and some of the nastier mental disadvantages work well. Enemies and lasting injuries (One Eye, One Hand) are possible.

Skills: In addition to weapon skills and Survival (Forest or Steppe), robbers have the skills that they grew up with (see *Muzhik*, p. 35).

Sailor

The Volga, Don, Dnieper and other major rivers, along with the waters of the Caspian and (later) Baltic Seas, were thick with Russian boats carrying goods and soldiers. Some were owned by the tsar, others by lesser nobility and a great many by the Russian Orthodox Church, which had its own financial empire to keep healthy. Sailors might be of any social standing from slave (often the case if they worked for the Church or lesser nobility) to free men employed by the tsar or powerful merchants.

Like other "working class" Russians, sailors were known to attempt escape from the bondage of normal Russian life into lives of piracy or Cossackhood; the story of Stenka Razin's encounter with Volga sailors (see *Stenka Razin*, pp. 67-69) is a good example.

Advantages: Any.

Disadvantages: Any, especially of Low Status and Duty.

Skills: Boating or Seamanship/TL2 is necessary; most other work was either manual labor (no skills required) or repairs to the boat (Carpentry and Shipbuilding/TL2).

Strelets

The *streltsy* ("shooters") were the Moscow city soldiers, formed under Ivan the Terrible as a Russian equivalent to the French King's Musketeers. In peacetime, they were quartered on the south side of the city, living out lives as businessmen, craftsmen or even adventurers. Other major towns also had *streltsy* regiments, each about a thousand strong. A *strelets* paid no taxes, and was allowed to conduct his private life as he saw fit, except in time of war.

Streltsy PCs can be the servants of the tsar, engaging in daring acts of heroism (or horrible acts of torture and murder, in the days of the *oprichniks*) on behalf of the sovereign. During the time of Peter the Great, the *streltsy* revolted, massacring the *boyars* and attempting to overthrow Peter. While they didn't travel on the tsar's behalf in heroic bands like The Three Musketeers, such historical details can be ignored by GMs running Cinematic or fantasy campaigns.

Advantages: Military Rank, Ally Group and Patron.

Disadvantages: Duty, Honesty and Enemies.

Skills: Riding (Horse) is taught to some, but only a small part of the *streltsy* are cavalry. Black Powder Weapons at a decent level is required. Broadsword, Spear, Polcarm and Axe/Mace are taught as well. Minimum skill levels aren't a factor; the typical *strelets* is patriotic but not impressively skilled. Savoir-Faire (Military) would be useful.

Volkhv/Skomorokh

The *volkhvs* were pagan wizards and priests, the wise men and women of the early Slavic faiths, and Manichaean philosophers. The populace trusted their powers to deal with evil spirits and to predict the future. The Orthodox Church wanted them destroyed, and was frustrated by the respect that they maintained for centuries after the arrival of Christianity.

The *skomorokhs* were minstrels, jugglers and bear-tamers - Russian clowns. At least, that's how Christians and nobles viewed them. The plays, songs and bear-dances were pagan rituals, and the *skomorokh* was every bit the pagan spiritual leader, traveling from village to village serving the spiritual needs of non-Christians, similar in function to Celtic bards. Over the years, the *skomorokh* tradition became more an artform and less a religion, but the masks, horns and *gusli* remained symbols of paganism, and many a *skomorokh* retained the old symbolism, consciously.

Volkhvs were urban figures, serving pagan nobles and merchants, acting as soothsayers and advisers into the 11th century. *Skomorokhs* were rural, serving the peasants. There was some crossover, but also considerable conflict, since both groups included opportunistic con-men preying on beliefs in gods and the supernatural.

In a fantasy campaign, both have powers that are, to some extent, *real*. In a realistic campaign, their *social* powers are real enough that magic is hardly necessary.

Advantages: Reputation, Voice and Charisma, plus Magical Aptitude in a fantasy campaign.

Disadvantages: Status (Outlaw), particularly from the 13th century on, as well as Enemy (either the Orthodox Church or another *volkhv* or *skomorokh*).

Skills: *Volkhvs* have Theology (Slavic Pagan), Administration, Politics, Fast-Talk, Bard and possibly less pleasant skills such as Poisons. *Skomorokhs* have Acrobatics, Animal Handling, Bard, History, Musical Instrument (Drum, Gusli), Performance, Sleight of Hand and Juggling, among others.

Warrior-Trader

In early Russian history, Viking traders were a regular sight along the Dnieper and Don, and later the Volga after the Pechenegs receded and opened the route to Itil and beyond to Baghdad.

The Slavs had their share of adventurous river-merchants, carrying boatloads of wax, honey, furs and slaves to the markets of Tsargrad (Constantinople) and the Caucasus. Player characters of this sort need a wide variety of abilities and resources, since they'll be in conflict with raiders, pirates, untrustworthy foreign merchants, the elements and the river itself. *GURPS Vikings* details river travel and Viking PCs, and is recommended for GMs running Warrior-Trader campaigns.

Advantages: Toughness, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Charisma, Ally, Ally Group, Alertness and Rapid Healing are useful.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Viking) and Sense of Duty.

Skills: Animal Handling, Area Knowledge (Trade Route, for best portage points, ambush locations, etc.), Armoury/TL2 Axe/Mace, Boating, Bow, Brawling, Broadsword, Carpentry, Cooking, Fishing, Packing, Skiing, Survival (various), Swimming Tactics and Merchant.



ADVANTAGES

Ally Group **see p. B232 or p. C119**

Some Russians had loyal groups of followers or "brothers" that they called on in times of need. Cossack *atamans* often had dozens of freedom-loving adventurers at their command, a band of merchant-adventurers had its boat crew and princely nobles of the Kievan Era had their *druzhina*.

In a realistic *Russia* campaign, typical soldiers are built on a budget of fewer than 75 points. Ally Group characters built on 25 or fewer points reduce the base cost of this advantage by 5 points, but are not taken as a group, such "ordinary" people still count as an advantage, not as Dependents.

Destiny **see p. B235 or p. C135**

The concept of a preordained fate ran strong in early Russia. Pre-Kievan Slavs worshiped spirits of destiny. As a culture, Russians believed themselves the fated inheritor of Byzantine Empire and the Third (and final) Rome that would see the world's end in 1492.

Russian folk-tales tell of heroes living out their destinies regardless of clever attempts to avoid them. While a Destiny can be positive or negative, in the spirit of peasant beliefs, negative destiny is *far* more common than positive!

Favor **see p. B236 or p. C125**

You did someone a good turn. Now he owes you one. In Russian folklore, the Favor is often owed by a mythical entity if the character has done Baba Yaga a good deed, or saved a phoenix rebird from an evil hunter, for example. In return, the character has been given the right to call upon the aid of that entity in times of need.

Literacy **see p. B17**

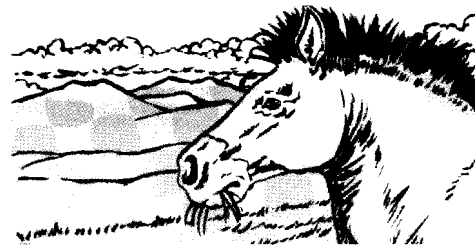
Reading and writing were uncommon practices in Old Russia, and literacy is an advantage. Most nobles strove for literacy, which often attracted foreigners. Monasteries were the schools to teach laymen to read, but they were few, far between and devoted exclusively on religious matters, beginning each student with the alphabet and working from there. Many peasants feared and hated secular literacy, and the phrase "gone to the literates" indicated that a person had been arrested on charges.

Magical Aptitude **see p. B21**

Russian religious zeal was powerful, and any associations with magic brought stinging memories of the early pagan uprising led by the *volkhvs*. Possession of this advantage, if known, makes the possessor an outlaw, hunted as a heretic and a Satan.

Temperature Tolerance **1 point/level**

Natives of Russia should be allowed to buy this advantage in 1-point increments, per the note on p. C130. This increases the normal human "comfort zone" of 35 to 90° by HT degrees per point (see p. B130 for climate's effects). If reports by English ambassadors to Russia are to be believed, every *muzhik* had this advantage.



NEW ADVANTAGES

Shapeshifter **200 Points**

This is a magical ability, limited to powerful sorcerers and mythical heroes; it is different from lycanthropy (see p. 94), which is *also* common in Russian fantasy. No character may be both a magical Shapeshifter and a lycanthrope. If the GM is uncomfortable with this advantage, he should forbid it entirely, require Magery as a prerequisite or charge a stiff Unusual Background cost for it (the latter is *certainly* logical). It is only appropriate for high-powered fantasy campaigns in which magic is both real and potent.

A shapeshifter may take the form of any animal that is real in the campaign and known to him. If it is questionable whether the character would know of a very unusual animal, the GM may require a skill roll against Naturalist or Zoology/TL2. The shapeshifter gains the beast's ST, DX and HT scores, but keeps his own IQ. If the animal's ST is more than four times that of the shapeshifter in human form, then the shapeshifter cannot assume that form. The shapeshifter may not talk while in animal form.

A shapeshifter in animal form can use any abilities appropriate to the animal; he can fight with claws, fly with wings and so on. The shapeshifter can retain his form for as long as he wishes with no ill effects, and the change cannot be forced by outside events. Any injuries sustained while in animal form carry over to human form proportionately (round in favor of the shapeshifter) and vice-versa.

The change from human to beast (or from beast to another beast) requires a Concentrate maneuver, and takes a single second and an IQ roll. If

the roll fails, the shapeshifter takes 1 point of fatigue; repeated attempts are allowed at no penalty.

Some shapeshifters can assume the shape of inanimate objects (needles, pitchers, slaughtered beasts and so on). Others can assume the form of *landscape*; a patch of weeds, a sapling or a puddle, for instance. Either of these is a +25 percent enhancement to the cost of the advantage.





DISADVANTAGES

Addiction

see p. B30

Aside from alcohol (see below), the only widespread physical vice in Old Russia was tobacco, which was cheap and legal (and a 5-point disadvantage) from the 18th century on.

Under Michael Romanov (1613-1645) tobacco was outlawed, and the use of snuff could result in public whipping and slitting of the nostrils! Tsar Alexis considered the death penalty as a punishment for smoking. During this period, smoked tobacco addiction is worth -10 points, and snuff is -5 points. Unlike smoking, snuff is not considered Highly Addictive for game purposes; during all other periods, snuff-addiction is a quirk.

Alcoholism

see p. B30

This disadvantage was much more common in medieval Russia than in other societies of the time (see *Vodka!* on p. 22). The Russian passion for drink, while exaggerated in the writings of outsiders, was very real. During most periods of Russian history the sale of alcohol was legal (and encouraged, since the state's revenue was heavily boosted by liquor taxes). A few exceptions existed, however: Michael Romanov was, in the words of one chronicler, "a sober person, and hated drunkenness," and passed many laws forbidding the sale of alcohol except by his permission, and then only in whole jars, not by the cup at drinking houses. Campaigns taking place in Moscow during this period could justify the additional -5 points for an illegal addiction, at the GM's discretion.

Bad Temper

see p. B31

Russians were known as people of passion, prone to unbelievable (to Western observers) mood swings and fits of temper. They were not known to resort to violence without reason, and often regretted their poorly chosen words once they calmed down. Most visitors to Russia made special note of Russians' willingness to apologize.

Bowlegged

see p. C180 and below

This was an extremely rare condition for Russians of any era, but was common among Mongols, Cossacks and other steppe dwellers, many of whom spent the majority of their lives on horseback. The most common form of this disadvantage is at quirk level. Bowlegged characters walk with a distinctive gait and take a -1 penalty to Jumping skill. A Russian horseman, if he were bowlegged at all, would have this level.

An *extreme* case of bowlegs is rare today, but possibly common among Tatars, particularly in the early days of the invasions. Only a character who *lived* on his horse for practically every waking minute could develop this level of Bowlegged. In addition to the above effects, the character may find running painful; he takes the -5-point Reduced Move (p. C1103), for a -1 to his Move (Dodge is unaffected). In addition, if such a character takes advantage of the sprint bonus for continued forward running, it automatically causes 2 fatigue, over and above any fatigue caused by continued running (this is a special effect worth no points). This affliction also makes learning the Running skill impossible (a -1-point Incompetence as on p. C191).

Dwarfism and Gigantism

see p. B28

In the 15th to 18th centuries, people with either of these disadvantages were doomed to live as freaks; they were prized as "court decorations" throughout Europe, including Russia. King Frederick William of Prussia made a point of *collecting* giants, and reportedly had nearly all to be found in Europe, as well as parts of Africa and Asia, with the men forming his bodyguard, the Potsdam Life Guards. Russia's Peter the Great had a giant from Calais named Nicholas Bourgeois in his service. In 1720, he married Nicholas to a giantess from Finland, hoping that they would produce giant children.

Peter also found dwarves extremely comical, and employed many (as did many Russian nobles), often staging diminutive ceremonies that mocked his own. After his niece wedded the Duke of Courland in 1710, a second wedding was held peopled with 72 dwarves summoned from the far corners of Russia; Peter, smiling broadly, held the garland over the bride's head (a Russian wedding custom), and the couple was then escorted to the tsar's own bedchamber.

While the lives of such court giants and dwarves were no doubt comfortable, they were humiliating to most.

Incompetence (Running)

see p. C191

Steppe dwelling horsemen may suffer this; see *Bowlegged*.

Intolerance (Xenophobia)

-5 Points

You are paranoid about any person or thing not of your own culture. Foreigners are dangerous, cunning and deceitful. They want to destroy your way of life and harm your loved ones. None are to be trusted.

This is a special case, better portrayed as a version of Intolerance than the similar-but-not-quite-right Phobia (Xenophobia). Most Russians have it as a subtle cultural quirk, worth 2 character points or a -1-point quirk at most. This disadvantage represents the rarer, extreme version.

In addition to being a side-effect of the long and dark history of relations with foreigners, Russian xenophobia is also certainly a result of their closed culture (see the *Value of Cyrillic* p. 75). In campaigns with little chance of contact with non-Russians, the GM may rule that this disadvantage is worth no points.

Lecherousness

see p. B34

Russians were seen by most western European visitors as promiscuous, and many reports on Russia contained long, and tastelessly detailed, descriptions to back up their claims. If even a small fraction of their reports were accurate, then this disadvantage was very common in Old Russia. It is likely, however, that the visitors, often spurred into self-righteousness by their views of the Russian Church, were simply being hypocritical. Adam Olearius, a clearer-minded German scholar, wrote that, "Fornication is very common among them, and yet they permit no public stewes [brothels], which diverse other Christian princes not only permit, but authorize."

Russian religion was strict regarding casual encounters, and even married couples covered their icons with cloths before making physical relations and avoided church that day.

Reduced Move

see p. C1103

Steppe dwelling horsemen may suffer this; see *Bowlegged*.



SKILLS

Most skills available in a *GURPS Russia* campaign are exactly as described in the *Basic Set* for Tech Level 2. As noted above, campaigns set in the latter tsarist periods can have TL4 gunsmiths and engineers of various sorts, as well as Guns and Gunner skills for muskets, cannon and mortars. The Mongols used Chinese equivalents of the trebuchet, as well.

Languages

see p. B55

Russian trade made contact with western Europe, Greece, Turkey, India, China and other countries, so the possible languages in a *GURPS Russia* campaign are just about all those spoken at the time. Russians encountered literally hundreds of languages and dialects. Knowledge of foreign tongues brought respect to some early Kievan leaders from those with whom they dealt.

Note, however, that foreign languages weren't commonly spoken by Russians; if Russians had had *any* desire to learn Greek or Latin, for instance, history would doubtless be extremely different. Russian merchants would know a smattering of the language of their trading partners but nothing else. A GM may wish to require an Unusual Background for any foreign-language skills in a *Russia* campaign.

Given the scope of languages to be dealt with, GMs may wish to simplify foreign-language skills into broad groups. "Turkish" would refer to any number of dialects, including those spoken by the Pechenegs and other steppelanders. The Tatar tongue, a Turkish and Mongolian mix, defaults to Turkish at -4.

Russia itself had three common languages, reduced to two after the Kievan Era. *Slavic*, the earliest language, is another generalization. Each tribe had its own dialect, which defaulted to neighboring dialects at -2 and to distant dialects at -3. By the time of the Mongol rule, the Slavic tongue had faded from significance in Russia. *Church Slavonic*, the liturgical language of Russia, was derived from a Slavic dialect. It defaults to Slavic at -5 and to Russian at -2. *Russian* is the native language of most player characters. All three languages are Mental/Average.

Like all languages, Russian existed in a constant state of slow evolution. If the heroes must read an old document, assume a -1 penalty for every 200 years of age (round normally). Thus, a character in the time of Peter the Great reading a monk's log from the time of Vladimir (700 years' difference) would be at a -4 to the appropriate language skill. A 20th-century Russian would be at -5 to read the same document; the text would be comprehensible, but many sentences would seem strange and some ideas might not come across.

Skating (Physical/Hard)

Defaults to DX-6

Russian skates of the Kievan Era were made of cattle bone, lashed to the feet with leather thongs. They were broad and smooth on the underside, unlike the metal blades of today's skates. Skating, like skiing, was a form of winter transportation, and races down frozen rivers were common sport.

A roll is required every 30 minutes (or for every hazardous situation) when on the ice. On a failure, you fall. On a critical failure, take 1d-2 damage to a randomly chosen limb and suffer as if Crippled (see p. B127) until you actually heal. If a limb takes 4 points of damage, it was broken. For rules concerning combat while skating, see pp. 27 and 31.





Skiing (Overland) (Physical/Hard)

Defaults to Skiing (Downhill)-4 or DX-6

This is *ski-hiking*, known today as "cross-country" skiing. It does not include the skills necessary to handle high speeds and steep slopes; those are covered by the Skiing (Downhill) specialization (which the p. B49 skill description assumes). Both sorts default to each other at -4. Skiing on skis made from either wood or bone was a common form of overland transport between villages in Russian winters.

Just about anyone can lash on skis and move about after only a few hours of practice. Those who have actually *practiced* overland skiing for some time, however, learn more efficient pacing, develop specific leg-muscle endurance and learn to maneuver with greater ease. A skill roll is required in difficult or hazardous situations. On a failure, you fall. On a critical failure, either (50% chance) a ski breaks or you take 1d-2 damage to a randomly chosen limb and suffer as if Crippled (see p. B127) until you actually heal. If a limb take 4 points of damage, it was broken.

See p. 29 for details on this skill in overland movement.

Sports (Snowshoeing) (Physical/Average)

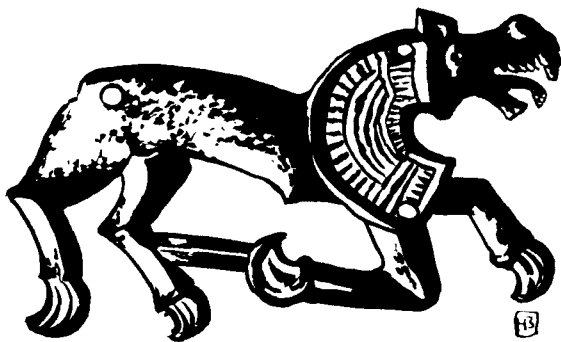
No default

This Sports skill (see p. B49) was common among Russians. Any DX-based activity that requires a great deal of bodily movement while on snowshoes is performed at the lower of the skill itself or the Sports (Snowshoeing) skill; also see pp. 29-30.

Survival

see p. B57

The following specialties exist in a *Russia* campaign: Forest (covering the Mixed Woodlands and European-style woods), *Taiga* (the cold pine wilderness), Swamp, Mountains, Arctic and Plains (for the Steppe). The division of Forest and *Taiga* is a special-case exception, not a rule change. The Caspian semi-desert region requires Survival (Plains), not Survival (Desert).



NEW SKILLS

Beekeeping/TL (Mental/Average)

Defaults to IQ-5

This is the ability to maintain hives of honeybees, and to collect honey and beeswax from them in a saleable form. It includes the ability to construct hives and keep them healthy through harsh weather, as well as knowledge of bee behavior sufficient to avoid getting stung (although any beekeeper, particularly without the benefit of modern apiary garb, will get

stung a number of times in his life). At low TLs, this skill also includes *bee-hunting* – locating and transporting wild honeybee colonies to the apiary. This skill was common in Old Russia: honey and wax were second in importance only to furs as export products from the time of Kiev to that of Imperial Russia.

WEALTH & STATUS

Average starting wealth in any *GURPS Russia* campaign is \$1,000 (500 *copecks*). Just how much of this may go into "adventuring gear" depends on the circumstances of the campaign. In an early-Russia "warrior-trader" campaign, the characters would be mobile, trekking long routes from the Russian northwest down into Itil on the Caspian Sea. They might have 50% of their wealth tied up in the communal rivercraft and trading stock, and the remaining 50% put into the weapons and armor needed to fend off bandits and defend the venture. "Hired muscle" in an identical setup could use 100% of their starting wealth for gear. Less mobile characters would spend 80% of their wealth on homes and other "mundane" property, as per the *Basic Set*.

Note that the \$1,000 starting wealth figure is for freemen (Status 0), such as the *streltsy* or craftsmen. The typical home and property of a *muzhik* family was worth less than 200 *copecks* for a total starting wealth of about \$500. Peasant PCs should be either Poor or Struggling, in addition to their reduced Status.

Status Table

Status	Examples	Monthly Cost of Living
7	Grand prince, tsar	\$15,000
6	Powerful prince	\$8,000
5	Average prince, archbishop	\$4,000
4	Boyar, bishop	\$1,000
3	Prince's counselor (<i>sluga</i>), mayor, <i>posadnik</i>	\$600
2	Petty noble, Cossack <i>ataman</i>	\$200
1	Merchant, constable	\$100
0	Cossack, craftsman, infantryman, burgher	\$80
-1	Lower-class burgher, semi-free peasant (<i>smerd</i>)	\$50
-2	<i>Skomorokh</i> , robber Cossack	\$20
-3	Serf	\$15
-4	Slave	\$0

The status of the *muzhik* varied widely. In the 15th century and earlier, they were freemen (Status 0). From the end of the 15th century they dropped to Status -2, and then to -3 in the 17th century.

The class given for *skomorokhs* assumes a Muscovite campaign. In Kievan times, they were merely Status -1 (looked down upon in the cities). In later times, they were persecuted outlaws.

Cossack titles are given in terms of *Russian* status. In a purely Cossack campaign, an *Ataman* has Status 4! A Cossack pirate or robber would have Status 0 and either a positive or negative reputation, depending on the nature of his "crimes" and the current Russia-Cossack political climate.



JOB TABLE

Job (Requirements), Monthly Income

Easy Jobs

- Apprentice (no qualifications), \$30
- Peasant (no qualifications), \$0 (living expenses only)
- Trader (Merchant 9+), \$3 × Skill
- Thief (any two Thief skills at 12+), \$3 × IQ

Struggling Jobs

- Apprentice (Craft skill 9+), \$0 (living expenses only)
- Bandit (Survival 10+, one weapon skill 10+), \$40
- Barber (ST and HT 9+), \$4 × best PR
- Boyarokh* (Performance at 13+), \$20
- Boyar Vedomye Zheny* (IQ 10+, Fast-Talk or Physician 10+), \$20

Average Jobs

- Beast-Tamer* (Performance 10+, Animal Handling 10+, a trained bear), \$80
- Beekeeper (Beekeeping 9+, bees), \$7 × Skill
- Boysack* (Survival 10+, Bow 10+), \$8 × IQ
- Craftsman (Craft skill 13+), \$8 × Skill
- Farmer (Agronomy 11+), \$8 × Skill
- Fisherman (Fishing 11+), \$8 × Skill
- Fur-Hunter (Tracking 10+, missile weapon 10+), \$8 × worst PR
- Lowly Bureaucrat (Literacy, Fast-Talk 9+, IQ 11+), \$6 × IQ
- Peasant/Soldier (Combat skills totaling 40+), \$116**

Comfortable Jobs

- Boyar (Theology 12+, Bard or Politics 10+), \$300
- High-Level Bureaucrat (Literacy, Fast-Talk 12+, Administration 12+), \$25 × worst PR
- Merchant* (Merchant 13+), \$18 × Skill
- Secretary Officer (Combat skills totaling 60+, Status 1+, Strategy or Savoir-Faire 14+), \$230
- Professional (e.g., Lawyer or Administrator) (appropriate skill at 12+), \$25 × skill
- Peasant or Government Courier (all stats 10+, Stealth 10+, Area Knowledge 14+), \$230

Wealthy Jobs

- High Church Official (Theology 16+, Politics 12+, Administration 12+), \$1,500
- High Noble/Gentryman (Status 4+, Administration 8+), \$125 × Skill***

Key to Table

PR: Prerequisite; LJ: Lose Job; "d": dice of damage suffered (the GM may game this out as an adventure); "i": months' income lost.
 * Freelance job. ** In addition to an annual allowance of rye and oats for the *streltsy*. *** *Boyars* received an annual allowance from the tsar amounting to over \$6,600 per month (more if the Giles Fletcher journal is to be believed), in addition to their estates' revenues. The vast majority of this went to the upkeep of their lands. The salary (based on Administration skill) determines how much the boyar himself gets, before considering his personal living expenses.

Success Roll

Critical Failure

IQ-2	2d
11	2d/4d
PR	-1i/-1i, 2d
DX-2	3d/3d, caught
PR	2d/4d or LJ
best PR-2	3d
ST	-1i/2d
PR+2	-1i/2d, -1i
best PR	-1i/-2i
worst PR	-1i/3d, -2i
PR	1d, -2i/2d or lose bees
best PR	1d/5d
PR	-1i/-2i
PR	1d/2d, -1i
PR	1d/3d, -2i
worst PR	2d/3d, -1i
worst PR	LJ/3d, LJ
IQ	2d/5d
best PR	-1i/-3i
worst PR	-1i/6d, LJ
PR + Status	-1i/2d, -1i
best PR	-1i, 2d/-2i, 5d, LJ
PR	-1i/-1i, LJ
worst PR	3d/-1i, 5d, LJ
best PR	-1i/-2i, LJ
IQ	-3i/LJ





TECHNOLOGY, EQUIPMENT & WEAPONS

GURPS Russia focuses on the medieval period of Russian history, which lasted well into the 17th century. Until after Peter the Great's time, all skills learned in Russia were at Tech Level 2, with the exception of skills involving gunpowder (including engineering skills for guns and appropriate Armoury skills), which were at TL4. Russians were fond of guns and *loved* artillery.

Equipment was generally TL2, with imported TL3 (and later TL4) goods available in urban markets. Such items (steel weapons, plate armor, crossbows, etc.) cost 30-300% more than their listed prices in the **GURPS Basic Set**, when they are available at all. Many such items were issued to Russian soldiers but were completely unknown to Russian peasants.

Tsars and nobles of the 16th century were exposed to many TL3 and TL4 advances through their contacts with the West. From the time of Peter the Great, Russia took a hard and rapid leap into the Renaissance, almost skipping TL3 altogether. By the end of the 18th century (the time of Catherine), TL4 was the Russian standard in most areas; writings of the time began casually referring to things such as pocket-watches and chimneys (which Russians and their houses previously lacked).

Armor

The most advanced armor produced in Old Russia was chain-mail, which was highly favored by those who could afford it. *Boyars* generally wore cloth armor into battle and Cossacks avoided armor altogether. Scale and leather were used only to a limited degree, but were certainly available. Plate armor, while it existed in western Europe for much of the period covered here, was not widely available in Russia: imported plate (and steel helmets) cost four times the prices listed in the **Basic Set** in Russian markets.

Weaponry

Russians had access to the whole bewildering variety of medieval arms, but axes were by far the most common weapons, followed by expensive swords, which were available in styles from double-edged English and German broadswords to Turkish and Mongol single-edge sabers.

All are considered Broadswords for game purposes. The *streltsy* were trained in the use of the pike, and Mongols used such odd items as sharpened and weighted whips. Russian-made blades were *cheap* quality at **Basic Set** prices. Foreign TL3 swords ($\times 4$ cost) were of *good* quality, and *fine* weapons (always imported) cost 16 times base cost, if available at all.

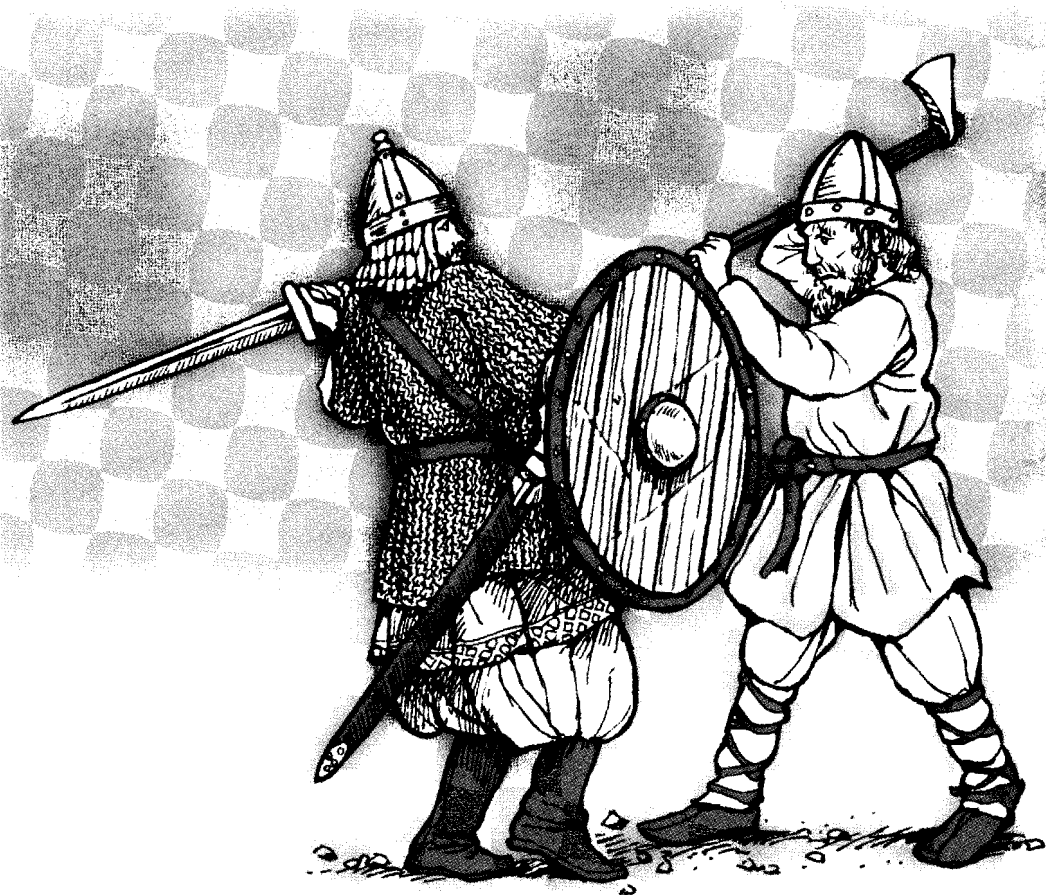
Russians made use of all sorts of bows, and the composite bow was the favorite weapon of most steppe-dwellers. Cossacks trading with the Turks and with Persia got composite bows at **Basic Set** prices. A Russian occasionally found one in the early autumn Moscow markets at four times that price. Crossbows became available in the 15th century, and were popular among those who could get them: prices were, again, quadruple normal.

There were a few weapons common in Old Russia which are not covered in the **Basic Set**:

Cannon

Cannon and mortars were emphasized in Russian armies from the time of Ivan the Terrible, who enacted major military reforms around 1550. In later years, the Russian love of cannon became a major cultural quirk.

A typical large mobile cannon of the period was a 24-pounder (*Malf* 14, *Type Cr.*, *Damage* 6d \times 10, *SS* NA, *Acc* 3, *1/2D* 450, *Max* 2,500, *Wt.* 3 tons, *RoF* 1/45, *Shots* 1, *Cost* \$40/shot).





required a crew of eight men to operate. The crew leader needed reasonable levels of Gunner (Cannon)/TL4 and Leadership. The gun-layer aimed the weapon using Gunner (Cannon)/TL4.

Most campaigns won't need precise statistics for artillery; simply assume that any human hit by a cannonball is killed instantly and messily. GMs running campaigns with a military focus are encouraged to refer to **GURPS High-Tech**, which covers the forms of TL4 artillery in detail.

Black Powder Weapons

Russians were fond of guns when they could get them. The early (Time of Troubles) *streltsy* used the matchlock arquebus. *Malf* 14, *Type Cr.*, *Damage* 3d-2, *SS* 16, *Acc* 3, *1/2D* 100, *Cost* 700, *Wt.* 9, *RoF* 1/60, *Shots* 1, *ST* 10, *Rcl* -2, *Cost* \$100. In later periods, the matchlock musket (see p. B209) was in general use. Ammunition for either gun (both powder and shot) was \$2 for 20 lbs. per 100 shots.

Matchlocks malfunction on any roll of 14 or higher. The user can then attempt *Immediate Action*, taking 3d+12 seconds, and making a Black Powder Weapons/TL4 roll. Success clears and reloads the weapon. An ordinary failure requires that the charge be removed before the weapon can be fired again, taking four seconds! A critical failure means the gun is broken, and must be repaired by an armorer.

A *cheap* matchlock arquebus costs 40% of the listed price, has an *Acc* of 2 and a *Malf* of 13. A *fine* one costs four times the price, and has an *Acc* of 5 and a *Malf* of 15.

Pelt-Arrows

These were blunt-tipped arrows used in early Russia to hunt fur-bearing animals (see p. 114). They caused severe internal injuries without (in theory) damaging pelts. Pelt-arrows do stinging instead of impaling damage and reduce *Acc* by 1.

The Knout

The Mongols used many forms of whip, from long, lead-tipped affairs that were used by the Cossacks in later centuries to short, cruel *knout*, the traditional weapon of state punishment and torture in medieval Russia. The knout was a short (1-2 ft) whip, with several short, *sharpened* lashes. It requires Whip skill, and does sw-6 crushing damage with a successful hit, and cutting damage against bare flesh. Maximum damage is 1d-4. It is a "balanced" weapon; it doesn't become unbalanced after an attack or parry. The knout cannot entangle foes, but can be used to attack weapons, as per the skill on p. B52. A knout costs \$25 and weighs 2 pounds.

The knout was not of much use in combat: its primary function was the punishment of bare-backed foes who didn't get to the Knoutmasters typically made each stroke as an All-Out attack for +2 damage, and a typical number of lashes was 5-15 (foes who took more than that often died). Note that the All-Out attack doesn't increase damage beyond the stated maximum.

Transportation

Land transport in northern Russia was by animal and sled. In more southernly cities, carts were also used, but the areas used sleds exclusively, moving the vast majority of goods during the winter after the harvest; archaeological digs at

medieval Novgorod have revealed dozens of sleds and sledges, but not a single cart wheel. Sleds ranged from royal coach sleds, which looked like west-European coaches with runners where the wheels should be, to small hand-drawn box sleds, used instead of shopping carts at winter markets. Horses and mules were common; Russian breeds were hardy and could take cold well.

River transport was by a variety of boats and rafts, ranging from medium-sized river ships to small rowing craft. Cossacks explored the Siberian frontier in open-topped boats only 30 feet long, 12 in beam and draft, with sails of crude hide, traveling the Arctic and even choppy Pacific waters, reaching the eastern edge of Asia and apparently as far south as Japan! Zaporozhian river pirates used similar craft to great advantage; each held 60 Cossacks, and could travel quickly by oar into shallows. The pirates called them *chaikiy*, or "seagulls," and a group of Cossacks could assemble one in under four days.

ЕQUIPMENT

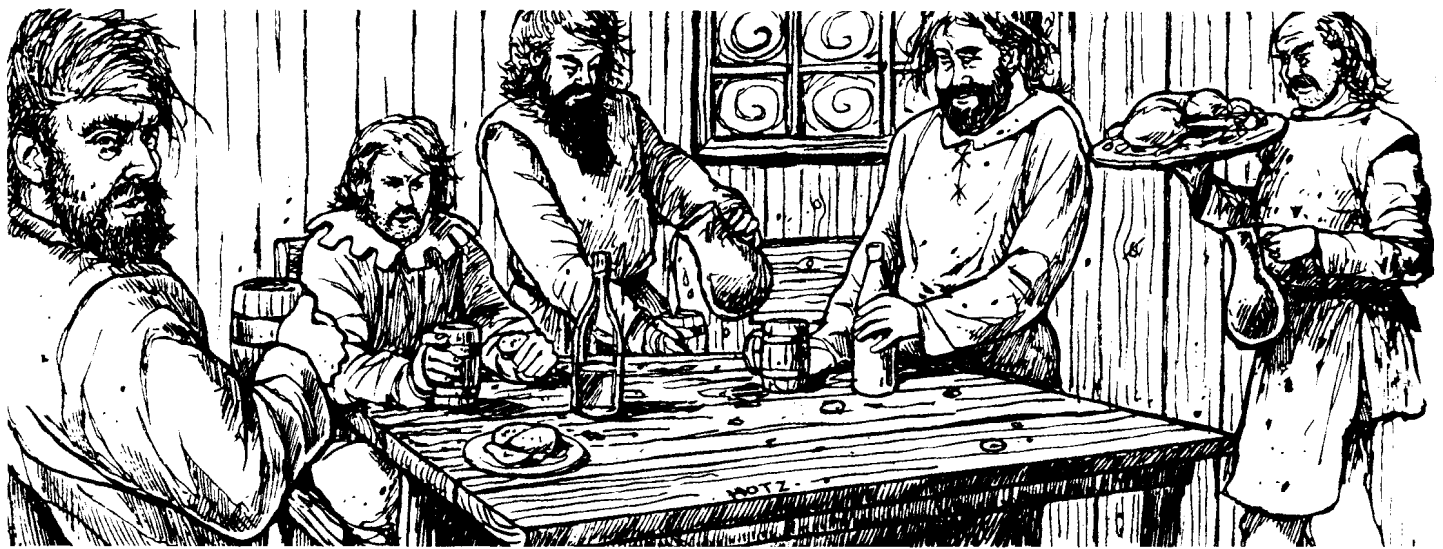
Prices here are for items especially common in a **GURPS Russia** campaign, and for items which had different prices in Old Russia than the standard costs listed in the **Basic Set**. Items not listed here or discussed in the weapons section have standard prices. These prices varied widely: the 12th-century city records of Novgorod show years of financial ruin in which the food prices ranged from double to *five times* that listed! The populace nearly starved and "the dogs could not eat up all the dead."

Clothing (generic; includes footwear)

Ordinary Clothing	3 lbs.	\$14
Winter Clothing	10 lbs.	\$75
Heavy Winter Clothing (as above, grants +5 to HT rolls to resist extreme cold)	17 lbs.	\$170

Clothing

Boots	3 lbs.	\$40
Breeches	1 lb.	\$5
Caftan, Ordinary (with sash)	1 lb.	\$5
Caftan, Rich	1 lb.	\$40
Caftan, Long Merchant's	2 lbs.	\$20
Cloak, Fur	4 lbs.	\$60+
Coat, Wool	4 lbs.	\$100
Coat, Heavy Fur	10 lbs.	\$100+
Dress, Common	2 lbs.	\$10
Gloves, Heavy Wool	Neg.	\$4
Hat, Fur	1 lb.	\$10
Hat, Wool	1 lb.	\$3
Hat, Wool, Broad	1 lb.	\$6
Mittens, Fur	1 lb.	\$8
Padding, Heavy Winter (scraps of cloth around legs, as a scarf, etc.)	3 lbs.	\$1
Shirt, Wool	Neg.	\$2
Shoes (Bast)	1 lb.	\$4
Shoes (Leather)	2 lbs.	\$15



Food and Drink

Mead (one quart. clay jar)	3 lbs.	\$2
Kvass (as above)	3 lbs.	\$1
Vodka (as above)	3 lbs.	\$3
Bread, loaf	1 lb.	\$1
Honey	36 lbs.	\$4
Rye (Grain)	126 lbs.	\$40

Riding and Transportation

Small Hand-Sled (holds 6 cubic feet)	8 lbs.	\$10
One-Horse Sled (holds 1 ton)	250 lbs.	\$300
Four-Horse Sled (holds 4 tons)	700 lbs.	\$850
Bone Skates, Pair	1 lb.	\$4
Skis (Bone or Wooden), Pair	4 lbs.	\$16

Miscellaneous

Basket (holds 50 lbs.)	2 lbs.	\$1
Icon, Small	Neg.	\$4+
Icon, Household	8 oz.	\$10+
Icon from Famous Monastery or Great Painter	8 oz.	\$50-\$600
Gusli (stringed instrument)	4 lbs.	\$90
Drum, Large, worn around neck	6 lbs.	\$30
Pipe (musical)	4 oz.	\$7
Horn	1.5 lbs.	\$40

Money

Old Russia had many systems of commerce, from barter to dozens of types of coins, with dramatically altering value over time. Trade with Constantinople and cultures further east brought foreign gold and silver into the coffers of early Russians, and what rules might have existed for exchange of these coins still elude historians.

This lack of hard facts is a convenience for most *GURPS Russia* GMs; money can follow whatever standards the players find easiest to manage. And while data is available for the later periods, the GM might still want to consider simply calling the \$ a *ruble* or *copeck*. This is easy to remember, and still "feels right." Players who require more realism should read on.

Money in Muscovite/Tsarist Russia

By the end of the 15th century, the monetary system of Russia had become formalized, but still varied slightly from city to city. Coins (mostly silver) came in and out of circulation, or were used only for local trade, and so on. The standard large unit of currency was the silver *grivna*, an ingot weighing approximately 0.4 ounces. Almost all large purchases (and fines) mentioned in medieval texts were quoted in terms of *grivnas*. The largest common unit, the *ruble*, was a quarter-pound silver bar. Other common coins, and their relative values, are shown on the table below.

Medieval Russian Currency

Rubles	Poltinas	Grivnas	Copecks	Nogatas	Kuny	Rezana	SSS
1 Ruble	2	10	100	200	250	500	\$200
1 Poltina	1	5	50	100	125	250	\$100
1 Grivna		1	10	20	25	50	\$20
1 Copeck/Bela			1	2	2.5	5	\$2
1 Nogata				1	1.25	2.5	\$1
1 Kuna					1	2	\$0.8
1 Rezana						1	\$0.40

In Moscow and greater Russia, one *denga* (a Mongol coin out of circulation by the late 1600s) was equal to one *nogata*. The *denga* of Novgorod and Pskov was worth twice as much (equivalent to a *copeck*, or \$2). After 1471, the \$1 Muscovite *denga* became the standard throughout Russia. In modern Russia, the word *dengii* means "money."

The *altyn*, a coin worth 15 *rezana*, was circulated in the areas around Moscow. The *poltina*, equal to 1-1/2 *rubles*, also existed, but wasn't common.

The *ruble*, *poltina* and *copeck* are the newest of the coin types mentioned; they outlived the others listed. For most of the period covered by this book, however, all of the listed coins were in circulation to some extent.

These are approximate values for the latter 14th-17th centuries based on prices for slaves, weapons and goods such as honey and rye which were recorded in various documents of the time. Some historians maintain that, until the time of Peter the Great, everything above a *copeck* was not coinage at all, but merely a unit of account.



Money in Kievan/Mongol Russia

Compared to the Kievan monetary system, the 16th-century system was an exercise in precision. The guidelines that follow should be sufficient for gaming purposes, but should *not* be taken as historical facts.

In the 11th to 13th centuries many of the above units existed, but approximately four times the listed buying power (e.g., a *grivna* would be worth \$3.20). In addition, the *veshka*, a small coin of the value of approximately \$0.20, was in circulation.

In all times, Russia had an active fur trade, and the word for marten pelts, *kuny* (singular: *kuna*), was also the word for money for a specific coin. Such pelts were traded in large bundles as a form of currency that seems to have been very stable. These pelts were used as currency, and later lent their names to coins, including the *bela* (ermine) and *veshka* (squirrel), while a *grivna* ("bundle") had at least three meanings and values: as a marten pelt, as a bundle of marten-pelts (a *grivna* of *kuny*) worth the equivalent of a silver *grivna* and as a gold coin worth 15 silver *grivnas*.

In addition to furs and their own early coinage, Russians kept large amounts of foreign coins in circulation. In particular, the silver coins of the Arab world and (by the 11th century) the silver coins or *denarius*, of western Europe. Varangian traders often carried large amounts of Turkish coinage and other foreign money on their return voyages from Itil and beyond.



Units of Measure

The following units are the accepted modern definitions of medieval terms; in *real* medieval Russia they were subject to change over time and by region. The GM can add a touch of realism and color to his games by employing these units occasionally in dialogue.

Liquid Measure

Vedro: The capacity of a typical bucket, equal to 3.25 gallons.

Bochka: One "barrel," equal to 130 gallons, or 40 *vedros*.

Chetvert: One-quarter *bochka*, or 32.5 gallons.

Weight

Zolotnik: The smallest standard weight. A little over 100 *zolotniks* equal 1 pound.

Funt: A common unit of measure, equal to 96 *zolotniks*, or just over nine-tenths of a pound.

Pud: The basic large measure of weight, used for things such as honey and wax. A *pud* is a little over 36 lbs.

Berkovets: A heavy measure, usually used only for mercantile exchanges, equal to 361 lbs., or 10 *puds*.

Korob: A "basket." The equivalent of 7 *puds*, or 253 lbs.

Rad: Equal to 2 *korobs*.

Chetvert: One-quarter *rad*, or about 126 lbs. This is the basic unit of measure for grain.

Linear Measure

Verst: A unit for overland travel. One *verst* is equal to 3,500 feet, or two-thirds of a mile.

Sazhen: A unit for local ground measurement. One *sazhen* is equal to 7 feet.

Arshen: A third of a *sazhen*; 28 inches.

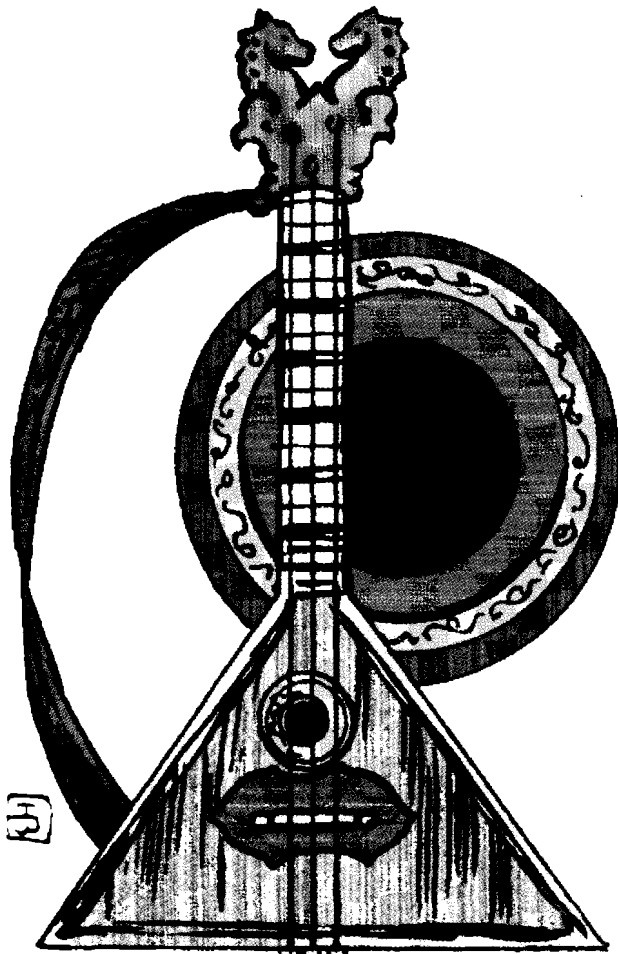
Chetvert: A fourth of an *arshen*; 7 inches.

Vershok: A fourth of a *chetvert*; 1.75 inches.

Land Measure

Desiatina: A measure of land area equal to 2,400 square *sazhens*, or a square area a bit over 100 yards to the side. A *desiatina* is equal to about 2.7 acres.

Chetvert: When used to measure land, a *chetvert* is equal to either one-half of a *desiatina*, or (uncommonly) 1.5 *desiatinas* – 1.3 or 4 acres.





3

RUSSIAN HISTORY

“Every narrative subject in Russian medieval literature was looked on as having taken place historically. Even in those cases where a contrived figure was introduced, he was surrounded with a swarm of historical memories, creating the illusion of real existence in the past. This gave Russian medieval literature the stamp of particular seriousness and particular significance.”

D. Likhachev, 1947

The story of medieval Russia has four parts: the time of Kiev, when Viking princes united scattered Slavic tribes along Russian waterways; the time of the Mongols, when northern Russia gained importance due to foreign occupation of the south; the time of Moscow, when the tsars appeared and built Russia into a nation, and the time of the Romanovs and Peter the Great, when Russia was brought into the political and cultural theater of Europe.

The choice of historical period is of vital importance when beginning a *GURPS Russia* campaign. Each presents its own, distinct flavor. Any two of these settings often differ more than they resemble one another.

PROLOGUE: SLAVS AND VARANGIANS

(circa 600-862 A.D.)

Russia began with nomadic Eastern Slavs moving from the Carpathian mountains into the woods and swamps on the west bank of the Dnieper river. Moving slowly, living by "slash and burn" agriculture, the Eastern Slavs settled the region that would become Byelorussia, Ukraine and Russia.

The Eastern Slavs lived in disparate tribes with little desire to be united as a single people. Their social structure was largely patriarchal, a village consisting of a group of families led by the oldest male. Property was communal, and groups migrated every few years, after their land was too exhausted for continued agriculture. They kept bees for honey and wax and hunted for furs, trading these things for weapons, food and other necessities.

While they would not be truly Russians until the establishment of the Kievan Empire, their culture, language and religion (which focused on nature spirits and the modiments of the elements) had a profound effect on Russian culture well into the 20th century.

Foes of the Eastern Slavs

While the forests and bogs along Russian rivers provided a good life for the Slavs, they were far from alone and far from a peaceful existence. With the exception of the Polians (see *The Slavic Tribes*, p. 48), the Slavs often quarrelled amongst themselves, and they had to deal with the growing presence of Viking raiders along their rivers and unceasing waves of warrior-nomads on the steppe to the east.

Most Slavic tribes were ill-equipped to deal with *any* sort of military threat. Even the warlike tribes were gentle in comparison to the surrounding peoples, unorganized and more concerned with commerce than with warfare.

The first to take advantage of this weakness were the steppe-dwellers. From the Scythians and the powerful Sarmatian Alans to the more civilized Khazars, the steppe nomads attacked Slav communities and then demanded tribute. The Slavs either moved deeper into the forests that the horsemen shunned, or complied, providing the nomads with their sons as warrior stock and their daughters as slaves, as well as other forms of booty.

The Vikings, or "Varangians," were Swedes who arrived in full force by the 9th century A.D. Itil, the Khazar capital, was a great trade center on the Caspian Sea, and Caspian trade convinced many Scandinavian adventurers to seek their fortunes in that direction rather than in raiding the coasts of France and Britain.

Another major Viking trade direction was south, along the Dnieper River to the Black Sea. As the Viking trade-network grew, more Varangians sought their fortunes in the south and east, some traveling as far as Baghdad, trading their boats for camels at Caspian ports! These adventurous Vikings were known by another name - Rus.

Along both routes, the Rus traded with riverbank villages, eventually dominating and fortifying the larger ones. Kiev, one of the largest Slavic settlements, became a city this way. It was the southernmost Viking-reinforced settlement and the most exposed, but became the primary link with the Byzantine Empire and the largest city in eastern Europe.

The Slavic Tribes

The Slavs who made up the population of earliest Russia were divided into loose tribes, most with similar habits and beliefs. Each spoke a dialect of the Slavic tongue, and worshiped a version of the Slavic pantheon. They traded and fought with each other regularly throughout the centuries.

There were eight major tribes: the Ilmen Slavs, Krivichians, Severians, Polians, Dregovichians, Radimichians, Vyatichians and Drevlians. Only the first four survived the Kievan Era intact.

The Ilmen Slavs: The northernmost Slavic tribe, and the one with the most frequent contact with Scandinavia, the Ilmen Slavs were settled around Ilmen Lake, at the southern edge of the *taiga*. They built both Polotsk (on the Dvina River) and Novgorod, the first Russian city ruled by the Viking princes. The Ilmen Slavs were known for excellent woodwork and, like most forest-dwelling Slavs, had a major industry in beeswax and honey. They were the least agriculturally developed Slavic tribe.

The Krivichians: The builders of Smolensk on the upper Dnieper, the Krivichians lived in the mixed-forest zone, and had a lifestyle similar to the Ilmen Slavs.

Continued on next page . . .



The Slavic Tribes [Continued]

The Severians: Centered at Chernigov (on the Desna) and Pereyaslavl (a small trading center south of Kiev on the Dnieper), the Severians dwelt on plains and in the mixed forest. They practiced some agriculture and raised cattle in addition to forest industries.

The Polians: Arguably the most civilized of the Slavic tribes, the Polians built Kiev. They practiced the full range of steppe and forest crafts, providing Kiev with the necessary wealth and soldier-stock to maintain its central role in early Russia. The Polians were the only Slavic tribe to practice arranged marriages; the others held huge festivals for the purpose of kidnapping brides.

Other Tribes: Russians were loyal to their clansmen, but the vital factor in Kievan life was the existence of towns for common defense and trade. While the Ilmen Slavs, Krivichians, Severians and Polians built towns that stand to this day, the remaining tribes did not, and were absorbed slowly into the neighboring urban centers.

The Dregovichians lived in north-west Russia, between the Pripyat marshes and Polotsk, and were absorbed into the Krivichians and Ilmen provinces. The Vyatichians lived in the far eastern regions of the mixed forest near Smolensk, and were absorbed into the Krivichians. The Radimichians lived in the lands between the Desna and the Dnieper north of Kiev – which was between the lands of the Krivichians, Polians and Severians – and were absorbed by all three. The Drevlians lived to the northwest of Kiev, south of the Pripyat river, and were absorbed by the Polians after considerable struggle with the ruling princes.

Varangian Domination

While initially Vikings and Slavs related to each other only as trading-partners or (occasionally) enemies, they soon fused into a single society, with Slavs as the bulk of the population and Vikings as their ruling and protecting princes.

The *Primary Chronicle* says the Varangian “Russes” had subjugated the Slavs, but were thrown off by a Slavic rebellion. It wasn’t long, however, before the Slavs found themselves bickering and invited the Varangians back to rule them. A more likely scenario is that the Slavs began hiring Vikings as mercenary defenders for their camps, settlements and expeditions, but over the course of decades, the Varangian armed presence developed into a nearly feudal arrangement and mercenary pay became tribute. It would have taken only a generation or two for the Slavs to see the Varangians as leaders, and many early texts support this possibility.

THE RUS AND KIEV

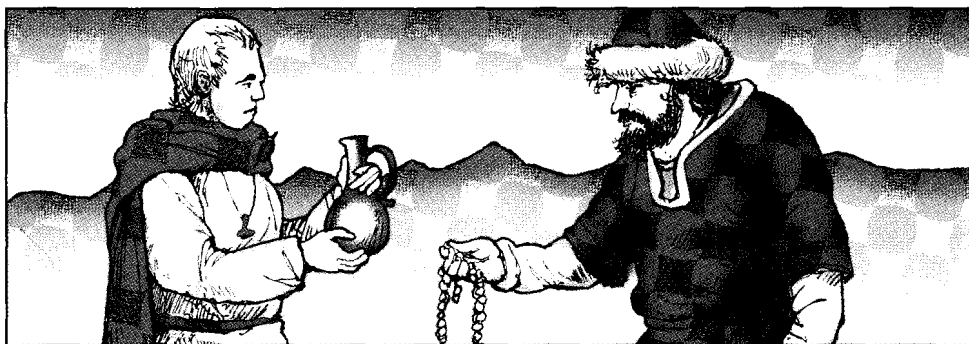
(862-913)

According to (possibly fanciful) medieval chronicles, the first Rus princes were three brothers with holdings in the Baltic region. The eldest, Rurik, took control of the city of Novgorod in 862. The other two died childless soon after, leaving control of all “Rus” to Prince Rurik. Rurik’s descendants would rule Russia for many centuries. The last of his blood, Tsar Feodor, the son of Ivan the Terrible, died in 1698, leaving Russia in the hands of Tsar Boris Godunov (a nobleman of Tatar descent).

To the common Slav, this “Russian” state was a mixed blessing. The Rus demanded total obedience and monetary tribute, but according to all evidence, the Slavs retained their own religions and customs, as well as gaining protection and organization.

Meanwhile, two of Rurik’s warriors, Askold and Dir, traveled south and found Kiev, then a tributary town to the Khazars. They took it, founding a state separate from Rurik’s. In the latter days of the 9th century, Oleg, Rurik’s oldest son and heir, took a band of warrior-retainers south to Kiev to meet with Askold and Dir. Hiding his soldiers behind a hill, he sent word that he was a brother Varangian traveling south to Greece with his small retinue, and that the leaders of Kiev should greet him as kin. Askold and Dir came at once, and were killed by Oleg’s men.

Oleg then took over rulership of Kiev, bringing the two greatest cities in Russia – Novgorod and Kiev – under a single ruler. Through Novgorod he retained strong ties with Scandinavia, and through Kiev he traded with the Byzantine Empire.



YEARS OF EARLY GROWTH

913-978)

Oleg's son, Igor, proved to be a competent ruler, and expanded the Kievan state further, although his grand campaign against Constantinople was a failure. The Russian ships were defeated by the Byzantines' use of "Greek fire," and while Igor left Constantinople with a new trade agreement, the new treaty was less favorable to the Kievan state than the one Oleg had operated under.

Igor was killed in 945 by the Drevlians, while on *poliudie* (tax-collection lands) in their territory. His son, Svyatoslav, was too young to rule, and so his widow, Olga, took the reins of government. Olga was a strong and insightful woman, and ruled with skill until Svyatoslav came of age. Her retaliation for her husband's murder, recorded in the *Primary Chronicle*, was legendary.

Olga's Revenge

After the Drevlians killed Prince Igor, they sent emissaries to request that Olga marry their ruler. Olga, no passive servant, sent a message telling the emissaries to appear before her, not on horses or on foot, but carried by servants in their boat. The Drevlians appeared the next morning, dressed in their finery and sitting regally in their boat. Olga ordered the boat tossed into a pit outside of her window, and the emissaries, screaming for mercy, were buried alive as Olga taunted them.

Before the Drevlian army could suspect treachery, Olga sent a message to its leaders saying, "send me your leading men, so that with great honor I may marry your prince." When they arrived, she greeted them with hospitality, and offered them the use of her bathhouse. When the Drevlian leaders entered the bathhouse, Olga had it sealed and set afire.

Olga next sent a message to the army requesting that vast amounts of mead be prepared in the city where Igor had been killed, so that she and her retinue could hold a proper funeral for him. Olga and her soldiers arrived peacefully, and humbly shared their grief with their hosts. When the Drevlians were well drunk, Olga's men revealed their hidden knives and slaughtered them, killing 5,000 that day as Olga shouted encouragement.

The final prize, the Drevlian capital of Iskorostin, then withstood a year of siege by the Russians. Finally, Olga made a deal with the stubborn city, requesting a simple tax: three pigeons and three sparrows per household. The boys of the city collected the birds and bound them into live bundles for her. Olga ordered sulphurous cloths tied to the birds and set aflame. The burning birds alighted on the roofs of the capital and burned it thoroughly.

After these colorful events, Olga took the Russian regency for herself, ruling until her son, Svyatoslav, was old enough to do so. She was later baptized a Christian, and devoted her life to a faith that would not come in force to Russia until her grandson, Vladimir, came to power.

The Great Adventure

Svyatoslav took the Russian throne in 962, and was an ambitious and vigorous man. The grand prince was unsatisfied with the state of Russia, seeing Kiev as an unfit city from which to rule. As a result, he spent most of his reign at war. He fought the Vyaticians (who had been subjugated by the Khazars) back into Russia, and then descended the Volga into the lands of the Bulgars, expanding his control along the route. After sacking the Bulgar capital, he began a massive war



The Dnieper Settlements

The Eastern Slavs were lucky; when they first began building their settlements on the Dnieper, it was already a trade highway between Scandinavia and the majestic Byzantine Empire.

Slavic village sites consisted of large, flattened areas, or occasionally raised earthen mounds (although it is questionable whether the Slavs *built* the mounds). The Slavs built two types of dwelling: simple wooden huts, sometimes covered with clay, were used as summer dwellings, while in winter, they lived in sunken huts, built deep in the ground with only the earth-covered roof revealed. Each settlement included from three to two-dozen dwellings, as well as buildings for grain storage, smelting of bog-iron and so on.

Despite the gloom and damp of their surroundings, they found ample wealth for trade. Russian forests provided furs and hides, beeswax and honey. Intertribal conflicts provided a surplus of slaves. These things could be traded for luxury items and necessities alike – jewelry, silks, wine, weapons and more. The Slavs conducted large trading expeditions down the rivers to ports far south in the Byzantine Empire and as far east as the Caspian Sea. At home, they built up their network of villages and thrived, living far more comfortably than comparable peoples around the world.

The Varangians

The Varangians were Vikings: Scandinavian merchant-adventurers who sought their fortunes along Eurasian waterways in the 7th to 9th centuries. They traveled in small groups, crossing from river to river in a path that led from the Viking lands deep into Asia. Some Eastern scholars of the 9th century record Varangian groups trading as far east as Baghdad, having traveled the last stages of their journey by camel caravan. These traders were lucrative “middlemen” between the Far East and Europe, bringing Oriental treasures and Arabian coins flowing back to the West.

By the 8th century, the Muslim conquests in Transcaucasia and central Asia opened the Caspian Sea as a vigorous commercial artery. The Khazar capital, the port city of Itil, was the center of this trade and the common stopping point for the Varangians.

against the Khazars that brought him within the walls of Itil (their capital on the Caspian), and down to the fortress of Samandar, both of which he captured and sacked. The Khazars never fully recovered from these attacks.

Svyatoslav next became (temporarily) an ally of Constantinople, beginning a major successful campaign against the Bulgars at the request of the Byzantine emperor in 967. Constantinople wasn't pleased with this success, and the emperor then began a war against Svyatoslav, forcing him to abandon the region and return north where he was killed by a small band of Pechenegs. The steppelanders made a drinking vessel of his skull, upon which was inscribed: “Seeking what belonged to others, he ruined his own.”

What little effect this “Great Adventure” had was negative. The Khazars, weakened by Svyatoslav's conquest, could no longer serve as a buffer against the Pechenegs, who increased in numbers along the Kievan border. In the absence of the grand prince, Russia collapsed into a four-year civil war. From that quarrel, however, emerged a leader who would forever mark the course of Russian history.

ВЛАДИМІЯ

(978-1015)

Vladimir, Svyatoslav's third son, used an army of mercenaries to wrest control of Russia from his eldest brother. He was a passionate man, described by the chroniclers as “overcome by his lust for women,” and as having at least seven wives and hundreds of concubines throughout the cities he ruled. Kiev was a cosmopolitan city at the time, and early in his reign Vladimir was known to violently persecute the Christians, Jews and Muslims of the city.

Despite this, Vladimir was a skilled administrator. He renewed external respect for Russia, which had waned during the civil war. He constructed new towns and fortresses, expanding Russia and pushing invaders farther from the core of Russian life; the distance from Kiev to Pecheneg lands grew from a one-day to a two-day trip due to his military acumen.

More importantly for Russia's future, Vladimir eventually saw the value of spiritual unity and church authority, particularly when it backed the ruler. The surrounding nations, including the other Slavs of eastern Europe, had accepted Christianity and were benefiting from it. In 988, after seeking the perfect religion for his growing state, Vladmimir chose that of Russia's neighbor, the Byzantine Empire: the Eastern Orthodox faith (see *Christianity Comes to Russia*, p. 55).

The onset of Christianity had many effects on Russia. Most noticeably, Russian cities began to look like Constantinople, as Vladimir (and those who followed him) grew obsessed with the splendor and “visual evidence” of God's existence on Earth. Byzantine culture began to dominate Russia, and the emperor gained considerable influence, since nearly all higher, influential clergymen came from Constantinople.

Baptism and Dvoeverie

Upon accepting Orthodox Christianity himself, Vladimir ordered that all Russians be baptized, their personal wishes aside. In some areas this edict had to be carried out by force, with masses of villagers baptized at sword-point. Still, peasants, as one writer put it, “remained apathetic or downright pagan for generations.”

into the 19th century, the cults of Mother Damp Earth and other pagan deities continued (see Chapter 4).

This led to a state of religious affairs termed *dvoeverie*; essentially "dithyrambic" the practice of a dual faith. Russian peasants pretended Christianity, but dismissed their ancient traditions as festivals and dances, while urban priest-wizards, *domorokhs*, became wandering minstrels and entertainers to escape Church persecution.

THE LATTER DAYS OF KIEVAN RUSSIA

(1015-1223)

Once again, the death of a grand prince (this time Vladimir) threw Kievan Russia into chaos. This civil war was messier than the first; not only Vladimir's sons, but even his lieutenants, fought for rulership of the state.

Vladimir's son Yaroslav, called "the Wise," took control in 1020, and brought about the Golden Age of Kiev. Facing constant external threats, internal pagan rebellions and occasional Finnish uprisings, Yaroslav formed strong marital ties with western Europe, taking a Swedish wife, and procuring west-European brides for three of his sons. His daughters married the kings of France, Hungary and Norway.

Internally, under Yaroslav's rule the first native metropolitan, Hilarion, took control of the Russian Church, and Yaroslav was responsible for the establishment of hundreds of churches and the support of a like number of monasteries. He founded a school and library in Kiev, and ordered the first codification of Russian law, the *Russkaya Pravda*. The Kievan state was, for the first time, viewed by the West as a civilized nation: Anna, who wed Henry I of France, was able to sign her own name on the marriage contract, while the French king could only mark an "X."

The Golden Age was not to last; it needed Yaroslav's hand to guide it, and when he died in 1054, his sons fought over the succession. Several rulers followed: Iziaslav, Svyatoslav, Vsevolod and Sviatopolk, each ruling for a short time. In addition, the Polovsty (Cumans) appeared on the border and began a war that kept Russia drained and weary, and at several times threatened its very existence.

The final revival of Kievan Russia occurred during the rule of Vladimir Monomakh (1113-1125), whose role in Russia has been compared to that of King Alfred in England. When offered the throne of Novgorod he initially refused, not wishing to confuse the already tangled succession; he agreed to rule only when it seemed riots would ensue if he did not. Monomakh conducted total war against the Polovsty and other aggressive neighbors. He was a prolific writer, and his notable work, *Testament*, told of 83 campaigns against the enemies of Russia, warned his sons about laziness and gave instructions to treat the poor and helpless mercifully.

The next string of rulers were again the product of quarrel. In 1169, Andrei Bogolyubsky, prince of Vladimir-Suzdal, sacked Kiev and moved the capital to his city. Kiev had already lost much of its importance with the decline of Constantinople and the opening of Mediterranean trade routes, and now, rendered unnecessary, the city faded into a secondary role.

Oleg's Poliudie

Oleg's rule was an exiting and important one. He laid down a detailed (if cumbersome) system of tribute, and worked Russian life into a cycle of taxation and trade voyages.

Each November, he and his *druzhina* (his warrior-retainers, equivalent to a band of respected knights) sledged into the countryside on the *poliudie* ("rounds") to collect tribute from the Slavs and from Oleg's cities, as far east as Rostov and Suzdal and as far north as Novgorod. His army was huge, and his taxation/extortion was very successful.

In April, once the ice had thawed, the Slavic peasants assembled huge flotillas of boats at Vitichev (a small village south of Kiev), and Oleg and his retainers sailed down the Dnieper to the Black Sea, loaded down with slaves and valuable goods for trade at Tsargrad – the Russian term for Constantinople.



THE MONGOLS ARRIVE

The Early Steppelanders

From early biblical times, the Asian steppe was the home of warrior horse-nomads. Russia came into contact with several such peoples in its history.

Scythians

These are the earliest recorded "invaders" of the steppe, arriving *en masse* from 750-650 B.C. Described in detail by the Greek historian Herodotus, they were fierce warriors, fighting from horseback with short bows and shortwords. After victorious battles, they made drinking cups from the skulls of their enemies, an act which apparently bore mystic significance for them.

Sarmatians

The Sarmatians lived in the region for many years before coming to dominate it, displacing and absorbing the Scythians. Around 300 A.D., they found themselves dominated by the advancing Goths. They were an Iranian-speaking group, and their women hunted and fought alongside them. In combat, the Sarmatians employed short lances as well as bows, and many Sarmatian horsemen used stirrups.

Huns

Far from satisfied with the steppe, the Huns swept into Europe in 374 A.D., easily overrunning the now-settled Sarmatians. They lived on their horses, and (according to Roman reports) used lassos in combat. Attila, the Hun king, was called "the scourge of God" by Europeans.

Avars

Arriving on the steppe in the mid-6th century, the Avars were, according to records of the time, cruel and sadistic warriors who yoked women to pull their wagons. They were of Turkic stock, and were the finest of the horse-archers yet to appear on the steppe, using feigned retreats combined with their horses' mobility to deliver deadly volleys of arrows.

Many early Slavs fled before the Avars, introducing their Slavic languages and culture to the previously Greek areas of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Others remained under Avar domination, and it was the Avars who first pushed the Slavs into learning warfare.

Continued on next page . . .

(1223-1252)

According to disdainful 12th-century Chinese scholars, the Mongols were nomadic, "preoccupied exclusively with their flocks," illiterate and without recognizable laws or religious rites. They made all agreements orally, and administered justice by either communal agreement or upon the order of the strongest. They wore skins, and practiced archery and horsemanship from childhood. Their elderly were held in contempt, while the strongest warriors were held in the highest esteem.

The Mongols of that time spent all of their energy fighting amongst themselves, a practice which the wily Chinese government encouraged. In the early 13th century, a single warlord, Temuchin, managed to unite the warring tribes under a single banner. Taking the title Genghis Khan ("supreme emperor"), he rode into China, broke through the Great Wall, and conquered an empire of a 100 million people with a force of only 100,000 soldiers.

Lusting for further expansion of his new empire, Genghis Khan turned his eyes westward.

Early Battles

When the Mongol hordes arrived at the Caucasian passes, they struck at the Polovsty, almost destroying them in a single blow. The Polovsty sent a message requesting aid from their enemies in Russia: "Today the Mongols have taken our land, and tomorrow they will have yours."

The Russian armies, along with the remaining forces of the Polovsty, met the Mongols on the banks of the Kalka River, killing the peace envoys sent by the Mongols. Outraged, the Mongols massacred the combined European army. In the aftermath, the Russian princes and knights were forced to lie on the ground as a huge platform was laid over them. The Mongols gathered on the platform and held a victory feast as the Russian leaders were crushed to death. The Polovsty disappeared as a nation after this defeat.

The Mongols took Kiev in 1224, but retreated in 1227 to settle the succession after Genghis Khan's death. By 1237, the Mongol Empire had been divided between Genghis Khan's sons, with Ogodai named Khaghan ("khan of khans"). Ogodai's western commander was Batu Khan, who led a bloody winter invasion of Russia from the north.

The Russian princes were unprepared for the winter attack, and too concerned about their own landholdings to help each other. Batu's army ripped into Russia's huddled *appanages* like a hot poker through raindrops. By spring, the Mongols were nearly at Novgorod when the countryside suddenly turned swampy and the frozen rivers which the Mongols had traveled on thawed, forcing them to retreat southward.

In following years, the attacks continued. In 1240, the Mongols razed Kiev leaving only a few hundred buildings standing; visitors to the region in the following months wrote of the desolate air of death and silence, and of the ground littered with the heads and bones of the fallen. Russians were terrified of the Mongols. Daniel, a prince of the southwestern Russian territory Galicia, went so far as to convert to Roman Catholicism in hopes of obtaining Western military aid, but none was forthcoming. Completely victorious, the Mongols then terrorized central Europe, defeating Polish, German, Hungarian, Bohemian, Serbian and Bulgarian armies with ease.

Mongol Rule

Batu Khan set up the capital of the Khanate of the Golden Horde (named for its yellow banners) at Sarai, on the lower Volga, and ruled Russia from a distance. At first, Mongol tax collectors ranged the countryside exacting tribute personally, but it wasn't long before Russian princes were relegated to positions as tax collectors, allowing them to tax over the Mongol requirements, producing tidy profits. Within the Mongol army, the situation was similar. After a few years, only the officers were Mongols; the soldiery included Mongol-trained Turkish nomads, countless conscripted Russians and others. There are records of Russian "Mongol" units serving as far away as southern China!

The system of Mongol rule in Russia has been likened to a spider's web. After stunning its prey into submission, the horde left the forest and returned to the comfortable steppe, from where it could lash out if its numb victims dared to stir. Although the Mongol horde was never large enough to defeat a concentrated resistance, the Russian princes rarely mustered substantial forces, and the Mongols stamped out small pockets of rebellion before they grew into danger.

Life Under the Mongols

Russian Orthodoxy painted any disaster as a punishment for the sins of Russia. Russian priests delivered thundering criticisms from the altars, blaming uncooperative princes and sinful Russians for the visitation of the Mongols. "Adultery, foul speech, slander, perjury, calumny and other works of Satan" were cited as causes, and the Church taught that only meekness and charity would absolve Russia of its sins.

Under the Mongol yoke, Russian culture and intellectual achievement took a back seat to survival. With its heart uprooted from the lower Dnieper and placed in the cold central woodlands, Russia began to become *Russian* for the first time in history. Cut off from both declining Constantinople and resurgent western Europe, Russia was alone in the forest. As a result, the patriarchal systems of old came to the fore on the local level and elders were once again the most respected authorities in Russian villages. Huddled on their warm stoves for comfort, Russians sat cocooned in the "silent years" of Russian history, while the princes waged petty wars against each other.

The Yarlik

The grand prince of Mongol Russia, seated at Vladimir, was given his position in the form of a charter known as the *yarlik*. For this document Russian princes intrigued amongst themselves, which suited the Mongols who even sent military aid to the bickering princes to prolong the instabilities.

A separate problem was *appanage*. Unlike most of the rest of Europe, where the eldest son received all of a noble's land upon his death, Russians divided land among their sons equally. The predictable result was that Russia slowly fragmented into smaller and smaller parts, with an ever-increasing number of princes eager to fight for expansion and to defend what little each had.

Northern Russia, centered on the robust trade-center of Novgorod, remained largely unchanged from the Kievan Era. In fact, the first *yarlik* was granted to a ruler of Novgorod, the heroic Alexander Nevsky, who was one of the khan's favorite Russian princes (see *Alexander Nevsky and the Baltic Crusade*, p. 57).

Nevsky's actions, and more importantly those of his sons, would soon eliminate the destructive *appanage* system and bring power to an insignificant northern town – Moscow.

The Early Steppelanders [Continued]

Khazars

From the mid-7th to the early 10th century (which includes a sizeable portion of the Kievan Era), the Khazars were the ruling steppelanders. More civilized than their predecessors, they were active merchants as well as warriors. Slavic traders moving eastward to their capitol of Itil on the Caspian paid a toll-tribute of one-tenth of their goods. Likewise, some Slavic farmers were allowed to work the lands of Khazars in exchange for tribute. About 750, the Khazar rulers adopted Judaism, which they learned of from Jews escaping Byzantine persecution.

Magyars

Although they originally occupied parts of Ukraine in peace, the nomadic Magyars eventually began crowding the more settled Khazars and later Bulgars. Another name for them was Ugrians, and this (possibly combined with the name of a previous steppe-invader) was distorted into the name of the land they eventually settled into – Hungary. The alternate name is also the origin of the word "ogre" to describe a frightening, uncouth monster.

Pechenegs and Polovsty

The Pechenegs (Patzinaks) were cattle-breeders and raiders, arriving on the steppe surrounding Kievan Russia, according to the *Chronicle*, in 915 A.D. In times of peace, they sold livestock to Russians, but even in the eyes of the medieval Rus, they were barbarians. They were excellent archers, and used both spear and bow from horseback. They made regular raids on travelers, killing them or kidnapping them for slavery. In 967, the Pechenegs nearly succeeded in capturing Kiev, but a clever ruse by a Russian general convinced them that Prince Svyatoslav had returned to the city with reinforcements and a temporary truce was reached.

After the destruction of the Pechenegs by Yaroslav the Wise, the Polovsty (Cumans) arrived to fill the gap on the steppe. Similar to the Pechenegs in fighting- and life-style, the Polovsty were far fiercer and more numerous: their years bordering Russia were years of constant warfare, most notably with Vladimir Monomakh (see p. 51).

THE НЕЛЯТ АЩАКЕИИИГ

(1252-1505)

All this time, the principality of Moscow covered an area not larger than 500 square miles, and the town itself was little more than a village on the Moscow River. When Alexander Nevsky drew up plans for his sons' inheritance, Moscow went to Daniel, his youngest son.

Daniel came to power as grand prince upon his father's death in 1263, and began a pattern of vigorous expansion. He attacked neighboring *appanages* and inherited another *appanage* from a childless relative, eventually seizing the mouth and lower reaches of the Moscow River. Instead of dividing his estate equally, Daniel followed the lead of his father, formally establishing a system in which his eldest son received the lion's share of the principality upon Daniel's death.

Yuri, Daniel's son, carried on the expansionist tradition. Gaining control of the entire Moscow River, Yuri challenged Grand Prince Michael of Tver for rulership of Russia. By marrying a sister of the Tatar khan (the Mongol empire having broken up into smaller khanates, the local Caspian Mongols came to be known by a name normally associated with the region), Yuri gained Tatar favor and won the *yarlik*. This started a bitter war with Michael in which the Muscovite army was crushed; Yuri's Tatar wife died in captivity. Yuri accused Michael of poisoning his bride, and Michael was brought before the courts of the khan and executed. Yuri was reaffirmed as grand prince, but the conflict between Moscow and Tver would rage for nearly 200 years.

Dmitri Donskoy

The next stage in the establishment of Moscow's primacy was the rule of Dmitri Donskoy ("Dmitri of the Don"), the prince of a now-powerful Moscow who, after a period of currying favor with his Tatar masters, decided to challenge their rule.

Dmitri became grand prince as a youth, and with the aid of Metropolitan Alexis (the seat of the Church having moved to Moscow in 1328) began massive campaigns to increase the strength and size of Moscow. In 1367, the wooden walls of the Moscow Kremlin were replaced by walls of stone. During a period when the *yarlik* was out of Muscovite hands, Grand Prince Michael of Tver razed the surrounding countryside but could not defeat the fortified town itself. In 1375, Tver acknowledged defeat and declared Dmitri grand prince, defying the authority of the Tatars to grant the *yarlik*. The khan was forced to either acknowledge the loss of Russia or reassert his power. He chose the latter.

Khan Mamai made an allegiance with Lithuania, and marched 200,000 troops to meet with the Lithuanian army. Dmitri, however, quickly assembled a force of 150,000 men, and engaged the Tatars before the Lithuanian forces arrived.

The battle of Kulikovo was fought in the cold autumn in hilly country along the upper Don River. The Tatar force's mobility was limited; it was accustomed to using its speed to envelop the enemy in wide flanking maneuvers, but the hills and trees did not permit that. Forced into direct conflict with the Muscovites, the Tatars were in trouble. Dmitri routed the Tatar cavalry after losing only 40,000 of his own men. The Lithuanians, arriving two days later, decided not to fight the Russians alone, and retreated. Russia hadn't yet won freedom from the Tatars, but the first blow had been struck.

Raids Against Constantinople

The early Kievan-Byzantine relations were an almost humorous cycle of raids and trading agreements. A small Russian army would sail south and attempt to lay siege to Constantinople. They never succeeded, but on every recorded occasion they left with the beginnings of a new trade agreement.

The closest the Russians came to success was Oleg's attack in 907. According to Russian chronicles, Oleg traveled with an army of soldiers on horseback and some 80,000 additional soldiers in 2,000 boats. Oleg's men slaughtered many Byzantines in the initial attack on Tsargrad, but the boats couldn't enter the Golden Horn (the dividing bay at the city's port), because the defenders had closed it off by criss-crossing the water with a network of heavy chains. Oleg ordered the boats lifted out of the water and wheels attached to them. When the wind was right, the horses and the sail-driven boat-carts descended on the city, burning and slaying.

The Byzantines, terrified, knew that they had been defeated, and that mighty Constantinople would be taken. In a last-ditch attempt to save the city, they tried to trick Oleg by offering their surrender with poisoned wine, but Oleg was too smart to take it. Victorious, Oleg demanded heavy tribute from the city, and sailed back to Russia with a treaty for peaceful commerce.

Byzantine records make no mention of any events that could be interpreted as Oleg's feat. However, the treaty was a reality, and it is likely that Oleg achieved *some* degree of military success in his raid.

The Climax

Over the next century, Moscow would be attacked (sometimes successfully) by Tatars, Lithuanians and Poles, along with other Russians, but would always regroup and expand its borders. Meanwhile, the Khanate of the Golden Horde came into conflict with the adjacent Mongol empire ruled by Timur Lenk (Tamerlane), and was defeated, to break up into a number of smaller khanates after Timur's death.

When Ivan III (known later as Ivan the Great) came to power in 1462, he purchased, annexed and inherited dozens of *appanages* and scraps of territory, "cleaning up" the edges of his new empire. Eventually, aside from a few tiny provinces, only the powerful city-state Novgorod and the lands of Tver stood independent of Muscovite rule.

Ivan campaigned against Novgorod in 1471. The city-state had already begun an internal collapse, its *boyars* and merchants forming a stifling oligarchy. With the growing power of Moscow, the wealth of northern Russia was in decline. The Novgorodian leadership turned to Lithuania for aid. The common soldiers, however, held little love for Lithuania *or* their own leaders, and performed poorly on the battlefield; the regiment under the command of the city's archbishop simply refused to do battle with Ivan. The city was taken and Ivan prepared a generous arrangement which allowed Novgorod to continue using its own systems of internal government and commerce.

This generosity, it turned out, was too much; Novgorod rebelled, once again seeking Lithuania's aid. When Ivan crushed the rebellion in 1478, he abolished all previous Novgorod institutions and carted the *veche* bell to Moscow. The Novgorod *boyars* were scattered throughout Russia (a practice that would serve Russian rulers well into the 20th century), and Novgorod became a working unit in the Muscovite state.

For two generations, Moscow had not bothered delivering tribute to the Tatars, instead sending them occasional "gifts" of treasure. When this ceased as well, Khan Ahmad forged an alliance to bring his might, combined with that of Lithuania and Poland, against Russia. Ivan found an unlikely ally in the Crimean khan, Mengli-Garai, who made powerful raids into Lithuanian and Polish territory. When Ivan's forces met Ahmad's at the Ugra River, the Tatars found themselves without foreign assistance; the Lithuanians and Poles were defending themselves from the Crimean Tatars. Simultaneously, a combined detachment of Russian and Crimean soldiers moved to attack Sarai, forcing Ahmad's forces to retreat. The Tatar hold on Russia had at last ended.

Tver's ruler, yet another Prince Michael, tried to resist Ivan's expansion. Michael made a pact with Lithuania in 1483, but when the Muscovite army arrived he renounced it, proclaiming himself an obedient "younger brother" to Moscow. When Michael later tried to re-establish connections with Lithuania, Ivan placed Tver under siege, taking the city without a fight. The long-time feud between Tver and Moscow ended, with Ivan the Great the victor.

After the Tver victory, several of the remaining independent *appanages* in the upper Oka region swore allegiance to Moscow, renouncing Lithuania, with which they had been allied. Lithuania, unable to return them to the fold by force, had to submit to the changes.

Christianity Comes to Russia

Vladimir expended considerable effort to popularize a formal religion based on the pagan faith he had grown up with, and brought the varied Slavic faiths together at a place of worship in Kiev. This was largely a failure, and in 986 Vladimir began to consider the adoption of a "greater" faith for Russia. He sent emissaries to foreign lands to learn all he could of other religions, and met with many foreign emissaries in return.

When speaking with the Jewish Khazar leaders, he asked them why they had been cast out of Jerusalem. They replied that, "God was angry at our ancestors, and scattered us among the Gentiles for our sins." Volga Bulgars attempting to convert Vladimir to Islam promised him 70 beautiful women in the afterlife; however, they also told him that alcohol was forbidden. Neither faith impressed Vladimir; he wanted no part in the religion of a dispersed people and, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, replied to the Bulgars that, "Drinking is the joy of a Russian. We cannot live without it." His emissaries to the Christian cultures of the West found "no majesty" in the Church of Rome, and Vladimir wanted no part of it.

In Constantinople, things were different. The Russian emissaries were overwhelmed by the beauty of the Church. A great ceremony was held to welcome them, with hymns and incense; the Byzantine emperor himself took the envoys into the church to show them his ways of worship. The emissaries returned laden with gifts and presented a glowing report to Vladimir. They stated that they "did not know if we were in heaven or on Earth," and said, "Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter."

In 988, Vladimir converted himself (and, by declaration, all of Kievan Russia) to Orthodox Christianity. His concubines and indulgences were cast aside and he threw the gilt Kievan idol of Perun, the god of fire and thunder, into the Dnieper. He invited the crippled and poor into his palace, gave them what they needed from his coffers, and fed them well. He ordered the building of a great stone cathedral, the "Church of the Tithe," and began giving 10% of the royal revenue to the Church. He gave 10% of his underlings' money to the Church as well, on their behalf.

The Mongols at War

The 13th-century Mongols were, debatably, the most devastating body of warriors that Europe or Asia had ever seen, proving their superiority against all manner of foes. They were ferocious, swift and cunning, using a combination of light and heavy cavalry formations combined with Chinese war machines. Their skill at mounted archery was unmatched, and they possessed a dedicated corps of scouts and spies.

The Mongols divided their forces (including their administration and taxation units) into groups of 10 (*arbans*), 100 (*jaguns*), 1,000 (*minghans*) and the 10,000-man *numen*, two or three of which formed an army. The system created an efficient chain of command, as no officer had to give orders to more than 10 subordinates. The Mongols were ruthless in enforcing this structure: transfer between units was not allowed, and if part of an *arban* was captured in battle, the survivors were executed for their failures. This increased the ferocity of Mongol attacks: if a single man in an *arban* was slain, the rest had no fate better than to die on the battlefield, taking as many foes as possible with them!

From the Russian standpoint, the most remarkable feature of Mongol armies was their ability to campaign at the height of winter, attacking when Russians were huddled on their stoves awaiting the spring thaw.

Mongol Tolerance

In nearly every way, the Mongols permitted the subject Russians to run their own culture. Especially surprising to Russians was Mongol religious tolerance. Even after the Mongols adopted Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church was not only tolerated, but exempt from taxation on its extensive landholdings. Russian clergy were exempt from conscription, as Batu Khan believed that the prayers of all holy men, regardless of faith, were of value. A Tatar charter of 1308 reveals that they would execute any man guilty of insulting the Russian Church and any Russian leader attempting to tax clergy or their families. In return for Mongol generosity, the clergy prayed regularly for their Mongol conquerors, and a diocese was established for the Golden Horde.

Social Achievements

Ivan was concerned about more than new territories and freedom from the Tatars: he wanted foreign respect for his empire. In 1472, he wed Sophia Paleologus, a niece of Constantine XI, the last Byzantine emperor. Constantine XI had perished on the walls of Constantinople in the final, successful, Turkish assault, and the wedding was sponsored by the Roman Church in the hope that Russia could be brought under the wing of Catholicism and the political might of its pope.

Ivan, on the other hand, saw himself as the rightful (now *legally* so) heir to Constantine's position as protector of the Orthodox people. Philotheus, a Russian monk of later years, wrote that, "the first Rome collapsed owing to its heresies, the second Rome fell victim to the Turks, but a new and third Rome has sprung up in the north, illuminating the universe like a sun," and many others recorded their agreement with this sentiment.

Ivan's perspective had a price. By taking such a view of the western Church, and refusing to establish links with Rome, he cut Russia's final ties with the West.

Nevertheless, he still envied other Europeans, and felt insecure and barbarous when considering the glories of their cities and ceremonies. Seeking to imitate them, Russia became a land of stifling pomp and ritual. Foreign ambassadors, accustomed to the "mere" absurdities of Western courtly behavior, found the Russian system tedious, vain and humiliating.

Ivan brought in craftsmen and artists from distant lands, and ordered the construction of a new palace for himself and three new cathedrals which still stand in the Moscow Kremlin. He adopted the Byzantine double-headed eagle as the symbol of Russia, adding it to his own family's crest. And to emphasize his new position, he created a new title for himself: tsar, or "Caesar."

THE МУСЦОВИТЕ ЕРА

(1505-1682)

When medieval Russia is mentioned, it is the Muscovite Era which usually comes to mind. With the seeds planted in Kiev, and allowed to grow under the rulership of the Tatars, a real nation, truly Russian in thought and practice, arrived after the reign of Ivan the Great. This period saw the growth of the Russian Church, attempts (and failures) at cultural ties to the West, and a cast of notable heroes and villains.

Vasili III, Ivan the Great's son, continued gathering the last of the resistant towns of the west (and fighting repeated skirmishes with Poland) and developing diplomatic ties with the leaders of distant lands, including the sultan of Turkey, Suleiman the Magnificent, and Babar (a descendant of Tamerlane), founder of the Mogul Empire in India.

Under his rule, many foreigners came to permanently dwell in Russia and the "German Quarter" appeared in Moscow (the Russian word for "German" meant simply "one who cannot talk," and was used to refer to all Westerners who weren't "Latins," such as English "Germans"). But Vasili's role in history was overshadowed by the reign of his son, the madman Ivan IV.

Ivan Grozny

Vasili III died in 1533, leaving his 3-year-old son, Ivan IV, as heir. Russia was in the hands of Ivan's mother, Helen, during his minority, and she ran it with the assistance of several men, including a young lover, Prince Telepnev-Obolensky. Helen died when Ivan was only 12, leaving Russia in the hands of the *boyars*.

Ivan's childhood was not a happy one. Before Ivan III, the only obligations of the landowners were their taxes; each *boyar* was essentially the king of his own small domain. With the new order of Russia, the nobles were reduced to servants of the state, required to supply soldiers and other assistance to the tsar.

The *boyars* resented young Ivan for the reforms of his father and grandfather, and after bowing and scraping to him in public, would be cruel to him in private, mocking his dead father and giving him barely enough to eat. They kept him separated from his friends and favorite servants, and made much sport of frightening him.

Responding to the cruel treatment of the *boyars*, Ivan began to delight in cruelty. He loved to throw small animals from the Kremlin towers, and to ride through the streets of Moscow lashing the faces of his subjects. If he saw a person whom he thought was ugly, the person would be ordered decapitated.

After a year, Ivan struck out at the *boyars* when he had Andrew Shuisky, the most powerful *boyar* in Moscow, thrown to the Kremlin's dogs and killed. From that day, Ivan was acknowledged as the true ruler of Russia. At age 17, Ivan officially became tsar, and carefully chose, from a large list of suitable candidates, the beautiful Anastasia Romanov, a respected *boyar's* daughter, as his wife.

The Early Reign of Ivan the Terrible

In general, the first 10 years of Ivan's rule were positive. Young Ivan seemed dedicated to the good of Russia, and was no more psychotic than many of his predecessors. Which is not to say there were no frightening episodes, such as when Ivan personally tortured Pskovian dignitaries by pouring boiling wine over them and searing their flesh with heated pans, all for the "crime" of complaining about their city's governor.

But while the nobles despised Ivan's works, the public loved them, as the horrors that Ivan concocted were largely aimed at the wealthy and self-righteous *boyars*. For example, he formed a small "chosen council" of advisors, comprised of a few *boyars*, the Church metropolitan and Alexis Adashev, a low-level court official. This last angered the *boyars*, since Adashev was not of noble birth and Ivan had effectively sidestepped the *duma*, the collective nobility, by forming his council.

But the most important act Ivan performed in this arena was the establishment and strengthening of the "service gentry." First, Ivan made it impossible to be a landowner without service to the state, and then he began granting frontier lands and certain privileges to trusted servants of Russia in exchange for defined responsibilities, bypassing the concept of noble birth altogether.

In 1549, Ivan called to order the first *zemsky sobor* ("council of the land"), an assembly of landowners comparable to the English Parliament. Its power was minimal (its primary function being the approval of Ivan's proposed reforms), but Ivan also used the *sobor* as a forum for grievances, and listened with genuine concern.



Alexander Nevsky and the Baltic Crusade

In 1054, the final separation of the Russian Orthodox Church from the Church of Rome drove a thick wedge between Russia and Catholic Europe. The pope regarded Russians as practitioners of a bastard faith, heretics to be brought into the One True Church.

After the Mongols reduced much of Russia to ash in the early 13th century but spared northern and western Europe, Russia's European enemies saw that the time was ripe for attack. With the blessing of the pope, Sweden, Germany and others marched eastward in a quest to plunder and annex the Orthodox countries.

The "Baltic Crusade" set the stage for a new Russian hero to emerge: Alexander Nevsky, the prince of Novgorod. Nevsky was so-named for winning a battle at the Neva River in 1241, where the young prince destroyed attacking Swedes and Germans with only a skeleton army.

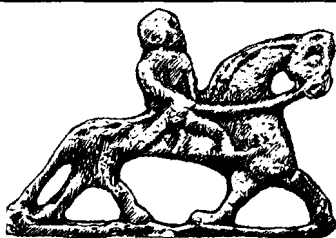
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Alexander Nevsky and the Baltic Crusade [Continued]

Nevsky's most impressive military action took place in April of 1242. The Teutonic Knights (a displaced order of Crusaders, now settled in northern Germany) had taken Pskov and murdered the town's mayor. They then advanced deeper into Russian lands intent on taking Novgorod. Nevsky called an emergency meeting of the *veche*, and formed a largely peasant army. They seized all roads into occupied Pskov, and attacked suddenly, imprisoning at Novgorod all the Germans they could capture. The Knights, outraged, sent a massive army toward Novgorod. Alexander's men took their stand on frozen Lake Peipus.

The battle was, from the outset, hopeless for Nevsky. The Teutonic Knights attacked in a massive wedge of heavy cavalry, storming across the ice and shattering the Russian lines. Astonishingly, Nevsky led his troops in a flanking charge, with the full force of the armed peasants on one side, and his small group of mounted troops on the other. The Germans were forced to form a defensive shield wall and to pepper the Russians with arrows. Nevsky's men penetrated the wall, and routed the Knights, pursuing them as the ice of the lake began to break, drowning hundreds of men from each side.

Alexander Nevsky, already highly respected in Novgorod, became a hero to all Russia, and was later canonized. Ironically, the rest of Russia later considered him a coward when he willingly accepted Mongol rule rather than have his city destroyed. Nevsky's choice was a sound one: whereas other Russian cities were razed, Novgorod's way of life was preserved in exchange for tribute to the khan.



Ivan also achieved much on the military front, expanding Russia's borders by crushing the khanates of Khazan and Astrakhan, leaving only the Crimean Tatars in Russia's part of Asia. These victories won him considerable favor in Russia, and it was probably here that he first earned the nickname Ivan Grozny, or "the Terrible," meant in the sense of "awe-inspiring."

Ivan also began a series of improvements to the Russian military, forming the *streltsy*, the Muscovite "Musketeers," and focusing on engineering and artillery development. To do this, Ivan had dozens of engineers and mathematicians brought to Russia, along with artists, architects and other thinking persons, to stimulate the intellectual growth of his state.

Things Go Badly

At age 23, Ivan fell ill during the Livonian War. Believing himself to be dying, he summoned the *boyars* and his closest advisors, and demanded that they swear loyalty to his young son, Dmitri. Even his closest associates refused, fearing another child on the throne, and preferring Ivan's cousin, Vladimir of Staritsa, as a potential heir. By the time Ivan recovered, his long-standing dislike of the *boyars* had grown into genuine hatred.

Seven years later, his wife died. Anastasia had been an intelligent and gentle force in Ivan's life, and the loss crushed him. The sudden nature of her passing made the paranoid Ivan suspect treachery amongst his council, and two, Sylvester (a priest) and Adashev, were accused and subjected to a "trial" in which they were not even allowed to appear. Sylvester was exiled to a distant monastery and Adashev was thrown into prison, dying shortly thereafter. Ivan proceeded to have their relatives and friends murdered without the dubious formality of a trial, and two Russian princes were slain for objecting to the practice.

Letters and Conditions

In 1564, Ivan loaded a train of sledges with treasure and the few remaining retainers he trusted, and left Moscow without saying a word. Ivan spent a month in the small town of Alexandrov, 60 miles northeast of Moscow, not communicating with the rest of Russia; how his time there was spent is still unknown. Russians began to panic; even an insane ruler seemed better than wars of succession, and the *boyars* waited nervously for news of Ivan's actions.

A month after he left, two letters arrived addressed to the metropolitan of Moscow. In the first, Ivan denounced and insulted the *boyars* and the clergy. In the second (to be read aloud to the masses), Ivan assured the people of Russia that they were not at fault for any trouble, and reassured them of his affection and concern for them.

The Russian people (*boyars* included) begged Ivan to return, and in early 1565 he did, after they had agreed to two conditions: he wanted a division in the state, the *oprichnina*, that he could manage as he saw fit, and he wanted complete endorsement and approval of any punishment he might mete out to "enemies of the state."

The Russian Inquisition

The *oprichnina* was to be a Russia within Russia, a "separate estate" made up of those whom Ivan Grozny favored, and no others – the *oprichniks*. Predictably, they were very rarely *boyars*; Ivan chose them from among Cossacks, craftsmen, Lithuanians, Germans and his own *pomestia* (service gentry), in a sense pitting the classes against one another. All English merchants were granted the status of *oprichnik*, while only certain trusted Russian merchants were so honored.

The *oprichnina* consisted of some 20 towns in Russia, along with the land surrounding them, and other fragments such as select churches. Certain streets and sections of Moscow were *oprichnina* while others were not; a new palace was built in "*oprichnina* Moscow." The remainder of Russia (estimated at less than half the total land) was left in the control of the *boyar дума* and the old system.

Within the *oprichnina*, Ivan formed a kind of secret police, the "black riders," dressed in black, riding black horses adorned with brooms and the heads of dogs to symbolize sweeping away traitors and snapping at the heels of the opposition). The riders destroyed those whom Ivan considered his enemies. There were approximately 1,000 black riders initially, but this grew to 6,000 at the height of the terror.

The horsemen rode through Russia, "purifying" any town, churchyard or estate that the tsar declared an enemy. Even Novgorod was devastated out of Ivan's fear that the city *might* harbor traitors. The black riders roasted hundreds of Novgorodians in the city square, and amused themselves by drowning others beneath the ice of the river. Ivan's paranoia killed countless people, possibly millions: "God knows their names," the tsar remarked, uninterested in an accurate account.

An equally frightening aspect of the eight-year nightmare was the quiet resignation with which most *boyars* submitted to Ivan's actions. Concerned only with their own landholdings, they died individually and without a fight.

The End of the Oprichnina

It is debatable what Ivan intended by his reign of terror, but one result was the (temporary) extermination of the hereditary aristocracy. In addition, by the time the *oprichnina* was abolished in 1573, the black riders had depopulated many areas to the point that the land could not be worked, and poverty and plague were rampant. Moscow was in a horrible state as the Crimean Tatars had taken advantage of the situation and attacked in 1571, taking over 100,000 prisoners (killing twice that number) and, with the exception of the fortified Kremlin, burning Moscow. To Russians, the end of the *oprichnina* must have seemed like waking from a nightmare only to find out that it was not only real, but far from over.

In the final years of his reign, some advances were made (such as the establishment of limited trade contacts with the West, and the conquest of the Khanate of Siber, or "Siberia"), but Ivan's insanity continued. In the last days of his life, he no longer cared about any aspect of his rule and became obsessed with his personal health. He tossed Christianity aside, and turned to the counsel of witches and magicians. Since Anastasia, Ivan had had six more wives, none of whom he loved, and when he died in 1584, he left no clear heir, having killed his one promising son in a fit of rage. His two remaining sons, Feodor, a mentally deficient weakling, and Dmitri, an infant by his seventh wife, were all Russia had left of Ivan's bloodline.

Smutno Vremya: the Time of Troubles

(1598-1612)

At the time of Ivan Grozny's death, Russia was about to explode into the most turbulent period of its history. The heated conflict between the remnants of the princely *boyars* and the new service gentry was reaching a boiling point, at a time when a service gentryman was moving toward the throne. Poland, seeing the weaknesses within Russia, awaited an opportunity to strike. And nature itself would soon turn against Russia in the form of a famine that would bring death to millions. Russia's political and cultural immaturity would multiply these events into the *Smutno Vremya*, or Time of Troubles, a terrible trial lasting 15 years.



Ivan Kalita

Many of Nevsky's descendants extended the influence of Moscow, and the best example of a wily Muscovite prince was Ivan Kalita, who came to power in 1328. "Kalita" was a nickname, meaning "moneybags." Ivan pandered heavily to the khan, receiving not only the *yartik* but also the right to tax vast tracts of Mongol-occupied land. Ivan used the profits from this enterprise carefully, purchasing small scraps of Russian soil, slowly expanding his principality. His reign was a peaceful and prosperous one, and many peasants were attracted to Moscow (while he bought other citizens from Mongol slave-stocks). Ivan now had both land and peasants to work it, while all around him Russia continued to disintegrate into tiny *appanages*.

Ivan Kalita's greatest achievement, however, was not financial. In 1328, Ivan persuaded Theognost, the metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church, to settle in Moscow making his city the spiritual center of Russia. The upstart principality now had a badge worthy of respect, and the Church strongly supported the Muscovite princes' goal of dominance over Russia, often using the weapon of excommunication against the princes' enemies.

Ivan the Terrible and Western Europe

During the reign of Ivan Grozny Russia was not well-known beyond eastern Europe. In England, Russia was seen as a wild land of barbarous cannibals and fabulous beasts. It was from this England that Richard Chancellor, an explorer, sailed in 1554 seeking a northern sea route to the Far East. Just as Columbus had discovered the Americas sitting between Europe and India when he sailed west, Chancellor sailed into the White Sea and "discovered" Russia, landing near the mouth of the northern Dvina River.

Traveling south overland, Chancellor was surprised to find Russia civilized. He met the tsar, and left in 1555 with a trade agreement between England and Russia. England established the Muscovy Company which traded with Russia through Arkhangelsk, bringing both goods and skilled Englishmen to Russian soil.

This agreement stimulated the tsar's desire for contact with the West. Unfortunately, the coastal regions of the Baltic, known then as Livonia, now as Latvia and Estonia, were controlled by Sweden and Poland. Sweden and Poland had everything to gain by keeping Russia isolated and ignorant, and this sparked the Livonian War, Ivan's campaign toward the Baltic, which stretched on for years causing nothing but stress in Moscow.

Ivan's Insanity

Ivan seemed to grow steadily more insane, as shown in his correspondence with Prince Andrei Kurbsky, a *boyar* who fled Russia in 1564 after his formerly good relationship with the tsar broke down.

"The Devil," wrote Kurbsky, "has brought to your side most foul parasites and madmen . . . instead of a brave army, the children of darkness or blood-thirsty *oprichniks*, hundreds and thousands of times worse than hangmen . . ."

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Boris Godunov

Upon Ivan's death his eldest son, the feeble-minded Feodor, became tsar. Unfit to rule, Tsar Feodor submitted completely to his advisors, chiefly his brother-in-law, Boris Godunov, a service gentryman of Tatar stock.

Godunov, an illiterate but brilliant leader, used his position to bring about an age of comparative peace between Russia and foreign empires. He continued Ivan's anti-*boyar* policies, but without the meaningless bloodshed and confusion.

Some blood that *might* have been spilled in Godunov's rise was that of young Dmitri, Ivan's other surviving son, who was found with his throat slit. The townspeople rioted against his guardians, accused by his mother of stabbing Dmitri. Godunov sponsored an investigation, led by Prince Vasili Shuisky and Metropolitan Gelasy, which determined that the boy had been playing with a knife, and had stabbed himself during a fit of epilepsy (see *Dmitri's Death*, p. 63).

Many Russians, especially the Romanovs, the *boyar* family of Ivan IV's first wife, attacked Godunov, spreading rumors that he had had the young prince assassinated to further his own ends. When Tsar Feodor died in 1598, there was no legitimate heir to his throne. His wife, Tsarina Irina, did not wish to rule, becoming a nun, and Boris Godunov was named tsar, thus ending a bloodline that originated with Rurik at the very beginnings of the state.

From the beginning, Boris Godunov's reign was another time of terror for the Russian people. Ironically, unlike the terror propagated by Ivan Grozny, this tsar was not at fault. Godunov's rule was as skilful as ever. He maintained good foreign relations, and formed sound trade agreements with England and others. He attempted to bring enlightenment to Russia by founding a university at Moscow, but the Church, fearing the contamination of other cultures, stopped the plan.

Famine

In 1601, the period of relative calm that began with the death of Ivan the Terrible ended. Beginning in 1591, western Europe was struck by a decade-long famine dubbed "the great dearth." As conditions began to improve in the West, Russia was struck. In 1602 and again in 1603, the crops failed and millions died. Godunov tried desperately to help; the government tried to feed the poor free of charge and to keep supply lines open to distant towns, but there was simply not enough food, and 100,000 people died in Moscow alone. Many who survived turned to scavenging, eating grass, bark and even other people. Huge bands left their villages and wandered as marauding packs of killers and thieves, and the fearful fled for the frontier, leaving too few people to man the fields even when the weather finally turned favorable.

Many believed that God was punishing Russia for its sins, and many eyes turned to Boris Godunov. The *boyars*, eager to have the "ignoble" Godunov removed from power, portrayed him as a criminal, usurper and murderer. More importantly, a rumor spread that Dmitri, the young son of Ivan IV, had not been killed after all, and that Godunov had killed an impostor while the real prince had escaped, soon to return. Russians suddenly had faith in a reprieve, the "messiah" Dmitri, rising Christ-like to return to his throne.

False Dmitri

Answering the cry of the Russian people, their "savior" returned. Known to history only as False Dmitri, a young man claiming to be the son of Ivan Grozny appeared in Russia, ready to take the throne that was "rightfully" his. Many believe

... that he was a man named Grigory Otrepiev, a former member of the service gentry who had become a monk. It seems likely that False Dmitri truly believed himself to be the heir. It is a possibility that he was informed of his "heritage" and built up to power by Muscovite *boyars* who needed a "true heir" if they were to have any real hope of toppling Godunov.

After a short time in Moscow in 1601, where he was pursued by the law for his claims, False Dmitri fled to Poland to plan his return. In Poland, the pretender became Catholic and promised the Jesuits to Catholicize Russia upon seizing power in exchange for their aid in his one-man invasion. In 1604, False Dmitri headed eastward to Kiev, joined along the way by bands of Don and Zaporozhian Cossacks, eager to topple Godunov's position. Pushed back once by the defending armies of the tsar, he eventually arrived at Moscow with a force of 1,500 Cossacks, adventurers, Polish mercenaries and others eager to march into the city.

There was little hope of the gambit succeeding, even though the belief in Dmitri's "legitimacy" had taken root in the countryside: the tsar's army was simply too large. However, in April 1605, Tsar Boris suddenly sickened and died. His military commander joined the ranks of False Dmitri's supporters, Godunov's wife and his son, the short-lived Tsar Feodor II, were deposed and murdered, and False Dmitri entered Moscow amid cheers.

The new regime entered into business. Prince Vasili Shuisky, the investigator who had declared the real Dmitri's death a suicide, reversed his claim and backed the new ruler. The real Dmitri's mother was brought into Moscow for a reunion in which she publicly declared False Dmitri to be her son, and Ignatius, a priest who had supported the pretender from the outset, replaced Job as patriarch of the Russian Church.

False Dmitri's Reign

Tsar "Dmitri" had immediate problems. Shuisky and others began spreading rumors that he was an impostor, after supporting him as the real lost prince. "Dmitri" shocked Muscovites with his foreign mannerisms, his refusal to attend Orthodox Church services and his habit of wandering the streets dressed as a Pole. The Poles who accompanied him were also a cause of stress; Russians and Poles did not get along, and the city was filled with bitter tension. When Tsar "Dmitri" announced that he was to marry a Polish aristocrat, Marina Mniszech, many were furious, even more so after the wedding brought more Poles into Moscow.

Vasili Shuisky proceeded to play his hand well. Less than three weeks after the wedding, he assembled a force of soldiers near Moscow, announcing that it was to "save the tsar from the Poles." After getting closer, he boldly announced that the False Dmitri was, in fact, a false Dmitri. The force overwhelmed the palace guard at the Kremlin.

False Dmitri would have escaped if not for his "mother." While the soldiers attacked from the outside, she convinced the *streltsy* that her "son" was an impostor. The *streltsy*, who had intended to help the tsar escape, grabbed him and handed him over to the attackers. After death, his body was displayed publicly in Red Square, and then cremated. The ashes were loaded into a cannon, and fired in the direction of Poland. Later that year, the original Dmitri was canonized, providing a solution to the Dmitri problem; Dmitri had to be recognized as dead in order to become a saint – anyone who later claimed to be Dmitri would be a heretic in the eyes of the Church.

Ivan's Insanity [Continued]

Ivan raved and blamed Kurbsky for the evils that beset Russia, and expressed his anger that Andrei had sided with Sylvester in the trials following his wife's death. "If only you had not stood up against me with the priest!" he wrote. "Then none of this would have happened. . . . And why did you wish to place Prince Vladimir on the throne and to remove me and my children? Did I ascend the throne by robbery or armed force of blood? I was born to rule by the grace of God . . ."

At the start of the period of the *oprichnina*, Ivan reduced his title to "prince of Moscow," an act interpreted as sarcasm directed at the princely *boyars*. Outside of the *oprichnina* he set up a puppet sovereign, the Tatar Simeon Bukbulatovich, and pretended to render homage to him.

For a short time, Ivan left Moscow again, returning to Alexandrov, where he set up a "monastery" with himself as the abbot and his *oprichniks* as monks. The "monks" drank themselves into stupors, and raped and tortured victims brought into the basement while Ivan beat his own head against an altar until it was bleeding and bruised. Afterward, Ivan addressed the *oprichniks* with extended sermons on good Christian behavior.

Ivan's Justification

" . . . do you consider it "pious illustriousness" for a kingdom to be ruled by an idiot of a priest, or by evil, traitorous men – for a tsar to take commands from others? And is this "contrary to reason and the sign of a leprous conscience" for an idiot to be silenced, for the evil men to be opposed, and for the tsar to rule by divine right? No kingdom ruled by priests has escaped disaster. What do you wish? Do you wish to follow the [Byzantine] Greeks, who wrecked their kingdom and became the subjects of the Turks? Do you advocate such ruination for us? Rather may this destruction fall upon your own head!"

– Ivan IV, in reply to a letter from Prince Andrei Kurbsky, who had criticized Ivan's autocracy.



Dmitri's Death

On May 15, 1591, Ivan Grozny's young son, Dmitri, was found dead in the inner courtyard of Uglich Palace, his throat slit, the knife beside him. He had been playing with wooden blocks in the company of "buffoons" meant to entertain him.

Witnesses said that Dmitri cut himself in a fit of "falling weakness" (epilepsy), but Dmitri's mother screamed that Dmitri had been stabbed. She accused the state secretary, Mikhail Bitiagovsky, of being instrumental in his death.

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Shuisky's Victory

Within 14 months, Russia knew four tsars: Boris Godunov, Feodor Godunov, False Dmitri and finally Vasili Shuisky.

Shuisky's reign was perhaps the most complicated period of early Russian history. Rebellion and civil war were its hallmarks; literally dozens of rebel leaders gathered armies of peasants and nobles alike, attempting to take Moscow, to no avail. The rebel armies suffered inevitable quarrels and schisms, and the tsar remained the master of a sea of bickering factions. Many rebels fought not only against Tsar Vasili, who was viewed (possibly validly) as a backstabbing usurper, but against the entire social structure of ownership and nobility. Throughout the period, minor uprisings of slaves and peasants against their lords were also commonplace.

Several new pretenders also appeared. The southern cities brought forth a False Peter claiming to be the (entirely imaginary) son of Feodor I. A second False Dmitri appeared, claiming to be both the original Dmitri *and* the Dmitri who had defeated the Godunovs despite his lack of resemblance to either. False Dmitri II (known to historians as the Felon of Tushino) set up a government mimicking the one in Moscow, to which much of Russia swore its allegiance. For a while, Tsar Vasili and this "Tsar Dmitri" ran Russia together, each taking taxes, settling criminal matters, etc.

Shuisky, growing desperate, formed an alliance with Sweden, which sent its army into Russia and shattered the Felon's troops, ending his 13-month siege of the St. Sergius monastery. The years that immediately followed saw Tsar Vasili deposed, the death of the escaped Felon (who later was killed in a quarrel over personal financial accounts), and several foreign claims to the throne, including one from Poland and two from Sweden. Poland occupied and controlled Moscow, and Russia, already in chaos, was disintegrating.

Anti-Revolution

The bickering of the noble class had torn Russia into fragments, and it was left to the common people and their love of Mother Russia to gather the pieces together.

The leaders of the greatly respected Holy Trinity-St. Sergius monastery issued desperate pleas for action to the furthest corners of Russia. The pleas stressed that Russia, the inheritor of the glory of Byzantium and last bastion of "true" Christianity, must not be allowed to fall into the hands of heretics from the West. Kuzma Ninin, a poor butcher of Nizhny-Novgorod (present-day Gorky), heeded the call and started a people's crusade to return order to Russia.

Led by a princely warrior, Dmitri Pozharsky, the army marched across Russia, gathering force as it went. Each town it passed through added to its ranks, and all levels of the shattered social structure were represented, creating a "national assembly" in the form of a mobile military force. In September of 1612, Ninin, Pozharsky and their army arrived at the gates of Moscow, taking the city after long and bitter fighting.

Their first action upon taking back the Moscow Kremlin was to convene a *zemsy sobor* ("council of the land") to elect a new tsar. From over half a dozen candidates, the assembly chose Michael Romanov, a cousin of Ivan Grozny, beginning a Russian dynasty that would last until the formation of the Soviet Union. Russians thanked God for the salvation of their country.

The First Romanovs (1612-1682)

The next three tsars, Michael, Alexis and Feodor Romanov, were unremarkable and weak rulers. However, they provided a period of stability during which Russia was allowed to heal once more into a whole country.

Strict social stratification returned in greater force than ever, and short-term attempts to form the *zemsky sobor* into an almost parliamentary democratic body failed utterly. Both the *sobor* and the *boyar дума* became effectively defunct, and years after the bloodshed by the savage *oprichnina*, Ivan the Terrible's dream of absolute autocracy had finally come to pass.

Aside from a Cossack rebellion in 1670 (see *Stenka Razin*, p. 67), and a series of lesser revolts in Ukraine, which was, after many years, becoming part of Russia again, the early Romanov years served only as a prologue to the last great era of old Russia: the time of Peter the Great.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

(1682-1725)

Peter the Great was seen by Russians as a villain, a despot and even the anti-Christ. He stands out as one of the most determined men in history, and his military and social achievements had repercussions in every corner of the world. He was obsessed with the Westernization and modernization of Russia, at any cost; Peter was determined to drag Russia "kicking and screaming into the 17th century."

Peter's Youth

At age 10, Peter I was co-tsar with his mentally deficient half-brother, Ivan V. His older half-sister, Sophia, ruled Russia as regent, which satisfied Peter, who showed no real interest in the duties of state. Peter reached his majority in 1689 and deposed Sophia, and in 1696, upon the death of Ivan, he took the reins of Russian rulership as his own.

Shunning his home in the Kremlin, young Peter spent most of his time in Moscow's "German Quarter," where he developed a fascination with foreign custom and language, and appetites for drinking, lechery and joke-telling that shaped his career and image. He spent time with craftsmen, developing an obsession with ability over birthright, and showing an astonishing capacity to learn. He later boasted knowledge of 15 different trades, and carried a bag of teeth that he had pulled to prove he was an able dentist. Even in later years he sometimes voluntarily took the lowliest positions on the battlefield, entering the fray or serving as a gunner, rather than commanding his army until he thought himself worthy of leadership.

Azov and the Grand Embassy

When Peter finally took on the responsibilities of government, he had several goals in mind: Russia had to expand physically, gaining ports on the Black and Baltic Seas to increase trade and international prestige, and it had to modernize for much the same reasons.

He immediately began a war with Turkey, determined to capture Azov on the Black Sea. This was the first of many campaigns; there was only a single year (1724) in Peter's entire reign in which Russia was not at war.

Dmitri's Death [Continued]

Several times in the past, Bitiagovsky had been guilty of spiteful words and actions against Dmitri's family (the Nagois), who still held "appanage pretensions." The furious townsfolk attacked Bitiagovsky's house and the office of the town prefect: 10 people were killed.

Boris Godunov immediately sponsored an investigation, led by Prince Vasili Shuisky and Metropolitan Gelasius of Moscow. They declared the death accidental suicide. The Nagois' were found guilty of inciting violence, and the townsfolk of murder and robbery. Dmitri's mother was confined to a monastery. Dmitri was buried in Uglich Cathedral, which was unusual (members of the tsar's family were customarily taken to Moscow). Tsar Feodor did not attend Dmitri's funeral.

Many suspect Boris Godunov in Dmitri's death. Essentially the ruler of Russia at the time, he would have had no difficulty arranging the murder. And as Godunov became tsar in name as well after Feodor's death, he certainly benefited. But did Godunov really *need* to kill Dmitri to rise to power?

The Russian Orthodox Church legally permitted a man only three wives in a lifetime. Technically, Dmitri was a bastard, since he was Ivan the Terrible's son by his *seventh* wife from a period when he had cast aside Christianity. Therefore, Dmitri had no *legitimate* claim to the throne. When Dmitri died, Feodor was only 30; there was no reason to assume he would remain childless, giving Godunov the opportunity to step in when Feodor died heirless. And Tsar Feodor had officially granted part of his power to his wife, Irina; in the event of his death, Irina would have had a right to rule.

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Dmitri's Death [Continued]

The Russian people were obsessed with the idea of a leader of Varangian descent. Shuisky himself, as well as Michael Romanov, succeeded to the tsarhood largely because of their claims of royal blood. If Dmitri had lived, *someone* would certainly have pressed his illegitimate claim to the throne; while his legal status was questionable, his blood *did* come from Ivan the Terrible. Meanwhile, the Poles were certain that the Shuisky princes should be considered rightful successors to the throne.

Many contemporary scholars are turning away from the idea of Boris Godunov as a villain. History shows him to be possibly the sanest, most peaceful and most benevolent Russian tsar of the period. Dissenting opinions center on the conflict between the princely *boyar* families and the *pomestie*-granted service gentry. Although Ivan the Terrible's excessive actions equalized the two groups, the distinction still existed, particularly in the minds of the princes. They did not quickly forget who had once ruled free of the duties imposed by the tsar.

While Feodor still lived, several attempts were made by the Romanovs to smear Godunov's public image and to remove him from his place of power. Many see the murder accusation as a similar attack; some have gone so far as to accuse the *boyars* of killing Dmitri in order to have a weapon against Godunov. Others have accused them of engineering the entire False Dmitri scandal to remove him from power.

Any of the above might be true. Godunov-as-Villain presents a strong, clear figure against which to aim "Good Guy Aggression;" a classic power-hungry schemer, with the added bonus of a detailed personality and well-documented motivations. Godunov-as-Victim presents a whole *cast* of potential villains: the princely *boyars*, Metropolitan Gelasy, Prince Vasili Shuisky, Polish trouble-makers and even Dmitri's mother, all bound in a tapestry of murder that could be gamed as a complicated mystery plot! Of course, the GM could have it both ways, by casting suspicions in *both* directions. Either side, or both, could have some measure of guilt.

The land-based siege of Azov was a failure as the city was easily supplied by sea. Peter learned from this mistake and ordered the construction of the first Russian navy since the Kievan Era. Thousands of men worked through the winter to build ships, and hundreds died of exposure or as a result of Peter's merciless punishments. When completed, Peter took the navy south and finally captured Azov in 1696.

Flushed with this small Russian victory, Peter was determined to form an international coalition against the Turks. He envisioned the might of Europe behind him as he moved southward to crush the Ottoman Empire, and from this dream he conceived the Grand Embassy.

The Embassy was a group of 250 men who traveled into Europe *incognito*, with Peter himself traveling as "Peter Mikhailov," in order to see the workings of western Europe from the viewpoint of a common man (or at least common diplomat). Peter wanted to meet with European rulers to gain allies in the war against the Turks, and he wanted to gather knowledge (and knowledgeable *people*) to bring back to Russia. Tired of the foreign view of Russians as ignorant barbarians, Peter was obsessed with Western ideas, even if it meant the eradication of tradition and facing the defiance of the Church.

On the voyage, Peter's men took lessons in seamanship, mathematics, combat engineering and many other subjects of special interest to the tsar. While viewing surgical techniques, many of Peter's retinue were visibly squeamish. Determined not to let weakness stop Russia's advance out of barbarism and into educated Europe, Peter ordered them to go to the corpse and pull out its muscles with their teeth.

While many foreign craftsmen were brought to Russia by the Grand Embassy, Peter failed to gain support for his Turkish war. The West, while impressed by his victory at Azov, still viewed the tsar and his men as boors. When they left the company of King William III of England, the mansion they had used was wrecked, with doors removed from hinges, holes in the walls and paintings, and smashed furniture. The owner of the mansion billed the government for £350 in damages (a considerable sum then); Peter paid it with an uncut diamond in a piece of dirty cloth.

Beards and Caftans

The Grand Embassy had intended to travel onward to Italy, but Peter cut it short due to news of a rebellion of the Moscow *streltsy*. Enraged, Peter had the musketeers captured and tortured, and their mangled bodies displayed in the squares of the city.

Peter now moved to utilize his insight into west-European opinions of Russia. To Westerners, the Russian's caftan and long beard were unfashionable signs of barbarism, so Peter was determined to do away with them. He proclaimed that any Russian who might conceivably come into contact with a Westerner must dress in European fashion, and that only priests and peasants could wear beards – Peter personally cut off those of several Moscow nobles. When his officials arrived to shave the men in one Cossack town, the Cossacks revolted, beheading all beardless men except for one official who fled to the countryside, only returning when he'd grown a beard and could claim to be a convert to the Old Belief.

The shaving of beards also caused an uproar in the Church; since man was made in God's image, to cut a beard was to mutilate God indirectly, and was therefore blasphemy. The priests declared that Peter would stand next to the "shorn heretics" on Judgment Day. After a long conflict, Peter permitted nobles to purchase beard licenses allowing them to keep their chins covered.

In 1699, Peter abolished the Orthodox Russian calendar, which dated events from the biblical founding of the world, in favor of the Julian calendar. The new year began in January under the Julian calendar, and in September in the Orthodox. The priests asked, "How is it possible that the first year began in January, when the serpent tempted Eve with an apple? No apples grow in the bitter winter!" The argument, humorous from a modern standpoint, was taken very seriously by the Russians, who began to see Peter as the tool of Satanic forces.

The Church attempted to rally the public in its decades-long fight against Peter's reforms. In the Troitski Cathedral in St. Petersburg an icon of the Virgin Mary began to shed tears, lamenting (so the priests said) the destruction of the Church. Peter visited the cathedral and dismantled the icon, discovering pinholes in the eyes and hollows behind them filled with lamp oil which oozed out as "tears." Peter declared to the head of the cathedral, "My order is that the Virgin icons should not weep anymore. If they weep with lamp oil, the priests' backs will weep with blood." Miraculously, the miracle of the weeping icon ceased – while Peter lived.

European Retrospect

Four years after taking Azov, Peter made peace with Turkey in order to protect Russia's back during his next military endeavor: a war against Sweden to gain access to the Baltic.

Peter thought that King Charles XII of Sweden would be a pushover, as the unaged king had no real military experience. By a tremendous stroke of bad luck, Charles XII turned out to be a military genius. In their first engagement, Peter's army was humiliated by the Swedes, utterly defeated in a battle where the Russians had outnumbered Charles' forces 5-to-1. But while Sweden bent its attention to Peter's ally, Poland, he rebuilt the army, schooling it in Western military techniques, and marched to the Baltic shores, taking the lands he wanted and building a new city nearby, St. Petersburg.

After spending five years destroying Polish armies, the Swedes returned to Russia but Peter's army retreated before them, destroying anything of use to the invaders in a "scorched earth" policy that would still be used by Russia centuries later. The Russian winter turned harsh, Peter's army destroyed the supply train sent to relieve the Swedish army, and at Poltava in Ukraine Peter finally attacked, destroying the Swedish army and forcing Charles to flee to the Ottoman Empire.

It was this victory that earned Peter the name "the Great" in western Europe, and at the end of the Great Northern War Sweden was no longer considered a great European power . . . but Russia then was.

The End of Medieval Russia

Peter's final years of rule were marked by major new achievements, and the nullification of several earlier ones. Peter's health declined, and the powerful and energetic man began to wear at the edges. Throughout his life Peter had suffered from a facial twitch when angered, and this eventually developed into convulsions that racked his entire body and sent him into a rage. The port of Azov, site of Peter's first major military victory, was lost to the Turks in a war engineered by Charles XII. In 1718, fearful that his weak son from his first marriage, Alexis, would become a tool of the Church or other conservative forces after his own death, Peter had him tortured until the young man died in prison. Ironically, this had a lasting benefit; a law was passed for the first time in Russian history laying down detailed rules for the succession.

Freedom's End: the Ulozhenie

In 1649, Tsar Alexis I and the *zemsky sobor* completed the *ulozhenie*, a new codification of Russian law. The initial goals were to bring together all existing laws, eliminate contradiction and ambiguity, and fill in gaps. The result spelled the end of the free citizen in Russia.

The *ulozhenie* did many things. It made it illegal for peasants and, more importantly, peasants' children to leave the lands to which they were bound; genuine serfdom had finally come to Russia. It also curtailed expansion of Church holdings, granted privileges to the nobility and set up a series of legal barriers across Russia that only the tsar and those near him could cross. Citizens of Moscow, even respected merchants or noblemen, had to petition the tsar *personally* for permission to travel abroad. Those found guilty of doing business abroad without such permission were publicly whipped.

Historians often view this oppression as a necessity of the time, Russia, since the *oprichnina*, had become a land of fleeing peasantry, and Russia required a working force in the fields. The *ulozhenie* was a last resort, enacted after several methods of attracting peasants to the fields, including armed bands kidnapping workers, had been attempted.

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Freedom's End: the Ulozhenie [Continued]

Ulozhenie Excerpts

The *ulozhenie* paved the way for Russia's growth as a powerful state, but at a very high cost:

On Treasonous Thinking

"Should any man think maliciously on the sovereign's health, and should another person report him concerning this malicious thought, there should be made an inquiry into his malicious thought and intended action against His Majesty the Tsar, and such persons, upon investigation, should be executed."

On Peasant Movement

"Peasants of the sovereign's crown villages who have fled from the sovereign's crown villages shall be found and returned, with their wives and children and with all their peasant possessions, to the sovereign's crown villages, to their old plots, in accordance with the registry, without time limit."

On Debased Currency

"If mint masters should make copper, tin or debased coins, or if they should add copper, tin or lead to silver and thereby cause harm to the sovereign's treasury, such mint masters should be executed by pouring molten metal into their throats."

Peter died happy and satisfied. He apparently loved his second wife, a Latvian peasant named Catherine, and he had many children with her. He declared St. Petersburg the capital of a new, westward-looking Russia, and medieval Russia died rapidly as the torrent of commerce and communication shattered the floodgates built out of centuries of isolation.

RUSSIAN TIMELINE

Events marked with an asterisk (*) are critical points of great interest to time-travelers and GMs creating alternate histories.

5508 B.C.: The beginning of the world, according to Orthodox Russian belief.

c. 700 B.C.: Scythians occupy the Russian steppe; Greeks establish cities on the Black Sea.

400 B.C. to 300 A.D.: Scythian, Sarmatian and other large-scale cultural movements in southern Russia. All of these affect the culture of the early Eastern Slavs.

550: First recorded mention of Slavs, in a Greek chronicle.

860: First Varangian raid on Constantinople.

862: Rurik comes to Novgorod; beginning of the Varangian Dynasty.*

865: First "Russian" attack on Constantinople.

881-882: Oleg forms Novgorod and Kiev into a single large state, Kievan Rus.

888 to 898: Cyril and Methodius travel as missionaries into the Slavic countries, and create the basis of the Cyrillic alphabet.*

904: Second Russian attack on Constantinople.

907: Oleg leads an attack on Constantinople that results in a mercantile treaty between Constantinople and Kiev.

911: Second treaty between Oleg and Constantinople.

945: Oleg's successor killed by the Drevlians. Olga, his wife, takes regency of Kievan state, and rules until 957.

955: Olga is baptized at Constantinople.

963: Svyatoslav, grand prince of Kiev, acting as ally to Byzantium, annexes eastern Bulgaria.

964-966: Svyatoslav defeats the Khazars on the Volga.

967: Svyatoslav begins unsuccessful campaign in the Balkans.

971: Tzimisces, emperor of Byzantium, defeats Svyatoslav's forces at Presthlava and Dorystolum.

972: Svyatoslav is killed by the Pechenegs.

978: Vladimir emerges as ruler of all Kievan Rus.

988: Vladimir devotes himself to Eastern Orthodox Christianity and begins imposing it on his citizens.*

996: Poland converts to Roman Catholicism, driving a wedge between Polish and Russian Slavs.

1015-1036: Strife follows in the wake of Vladimir's death.

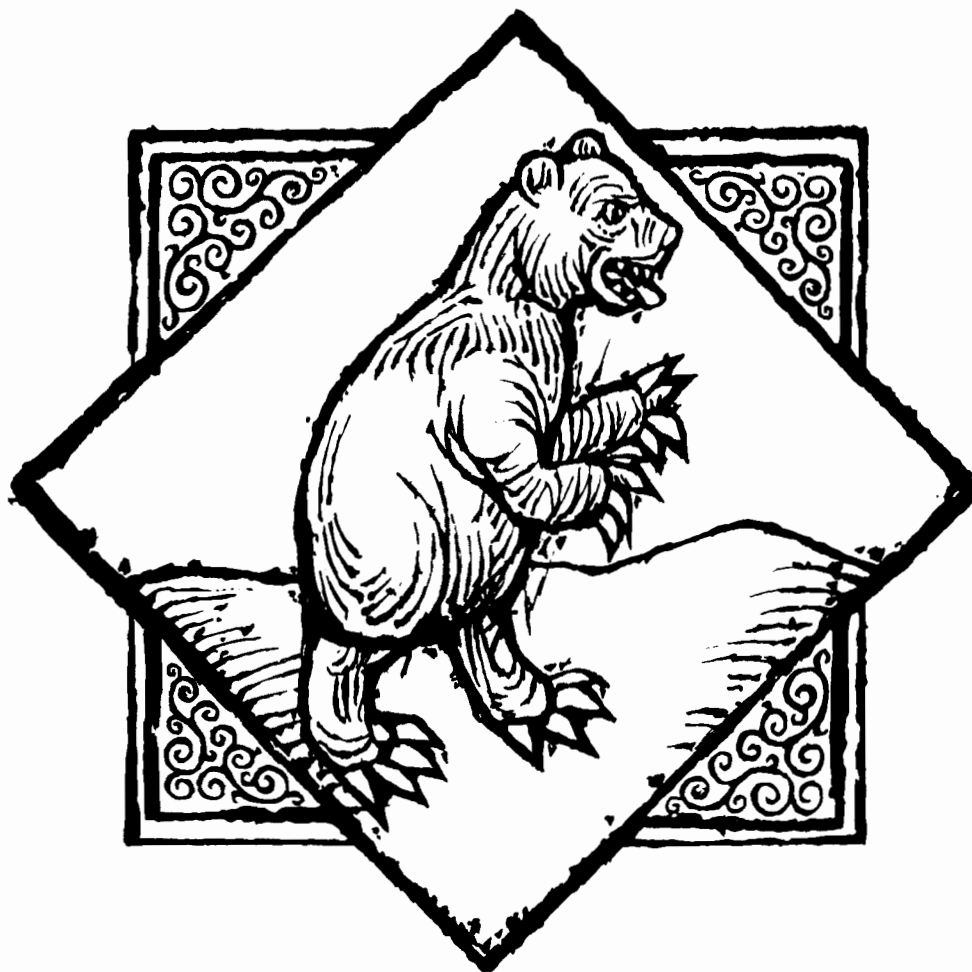
1020: Yaroslav becomes grand prince of Kiev. This is the beginning of Kiev's golden age.

c. 1030: Zhidiata's *Sermon*, one of the earliest known works of Russian literature, is written.

1034: Yaroslav defeats the Pechenegs, effectively eliminating them.

1054: Yaroslav dies; Russian princes quarrel for prominence. Polovtsy appear at the Kievan frontier, filling the vacuum left by the Pechenegs.

- 1067: The Polovtsy invade the Kievan state; uprisings against Prince Iziaslav in Kiev.
- 1073: The *Ruskaia Pravda*, the first Russian legal code, is completed.
- 1095: First election of a "prince" at Novgorod.
- 1097: Kievan Rus is divided into patrimonial estates.
- 1113: Vladimir Monomakh claims the title of grand prince.
- 1115: Completion of *The Primary Chronicle* by the monk Nestor.
- 1125: Vladimir Monomakh dies; Kiev begins its decline.
- 1140: Crossbows appear in Novgorod.
- 1147: First recorded mention of Moscow.
- 1156: A bishop is elected in Novgorod for the first time.
- 1167-1168: Andrei Bogolyubsky, prince of Vladimir-Suzdal, sacks Kiev, wrecks the city and assuming the title of grand prince.
- 1169: Russian capital is temporarily transferred from Kiev to Suzdal.
- 1185: *The Lay of Igor's Host*, among the greatest literary achievements of Kievan Rus, is composed.
- 1195: First Novgorod-Germany-Gottland treaty is concluded.
- 1206: Genghis Khan unites the Mongol tribes.
- 1221: Founding of Nizhny-Novgorod (Gorky).
- 1223: First Mongol invasion of Russia; battle at Kalka River ends in near total destruction of the Russian forces.*



Stenka Razin

The Cossack Stepan Timofeyevich was the essence of liberty and adventure; a swashbuckling pirate, a ruthless brigand and an illiterate drunken revolutionary during the *ulozhenie*-mandated oppression. To Russians he was Stenka Razin, the Robin Hood and Spartacus of the Don.

Throughout the Muscovite Era, runaway peasants were a problem. Alexis I's expansionist policies made matters worse; more land meant more soldiers and more taxes. Peasants, drained by years of plague and flight, were hard-pressed to keep up with the demands, and many more fled. This led to tighter policies, leading to more runaways, and thence to the creation of virtual slavery in Russia.

The Don Cossack land was the most sought-after final destination for Russian fugitives. Known as *golytba*, or "the naked ones," to Don residents, the new Cossacks were settled north of the old ones.

Liberty and equality had defined Cossack society, but this deteriorated. The *golytba*, while given the respect and official support of the Cossack leadership, were kept far from the good hunting and fishing grounds of the lower Don, and weren't granted a share of the Russian money given in payment for the Cossacks' defensive role against the Turks. As a result, the *golytba* found themselves starving in makeshift sod huts. Many became "robber Cossacks," hunted by Russian authorities.

Stenka, a prosperous Don Cossack, hated the poverty of the *golytba*, and in the spring of 1667 gathered 800 starving Cossacks to begin a career of piracy. On the Volga, his small flotilla encountered a collection of boats carrying the treasure of the tsar and wealthy Muscovite merchants and clergy. Stenka's men attacked, and hanged all the officers they caught. Addressing the captured soldiers and slaves, Stenka announced that they were free to go or to join him as Cossacks; "I'm attacking only *boyars* and rich men," said Razin. "With the poor and ordinary man I'll share as if he were my brother." The captives joined immediately.

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Stenka Razin [Continued]

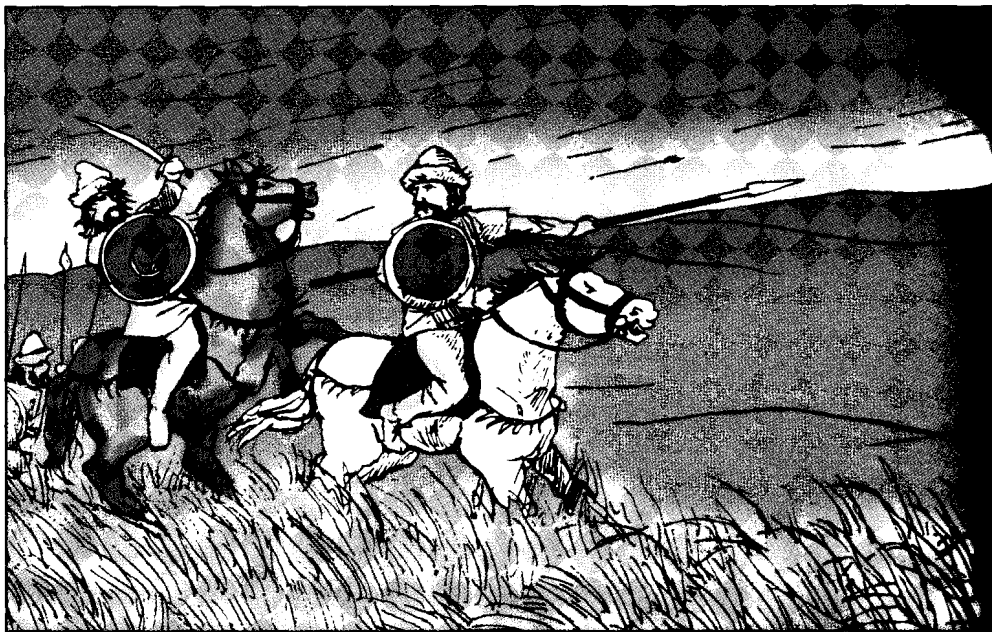
The expedition went into the Caspian and onward to Persia where it plundered vast amounts of gold and jewels, loading its ships until they could barely float, and (according to legend) burying large caches of the excess along the shore. In one raid, Stenka acquired a beautiful, bejewelled Persian princess. In Cossack pirate tradition, women were occasional playthings with no place on such expeditions: after only a single night with her, his men began to whisper that Stenka had turned soft. To keep peace, he threw the girl, jewels and all, into the river to drown, an event that was immortalized in praising Russian folk-songs.

Upon his return to the Don, rumors of his deeds spread like water into a desert. Peasants called him a hero, and Russia, fearing that he might lead a troublesome rebellion, sent an emissary to the Cossack leaders, accusing Razin of preventing shipments of Russian goods to them. Razin appeared before the *hetmen* and accused the Russians of spying. Backed by the cheering *hetmen*, Razin had the emissary beaten and drowned.

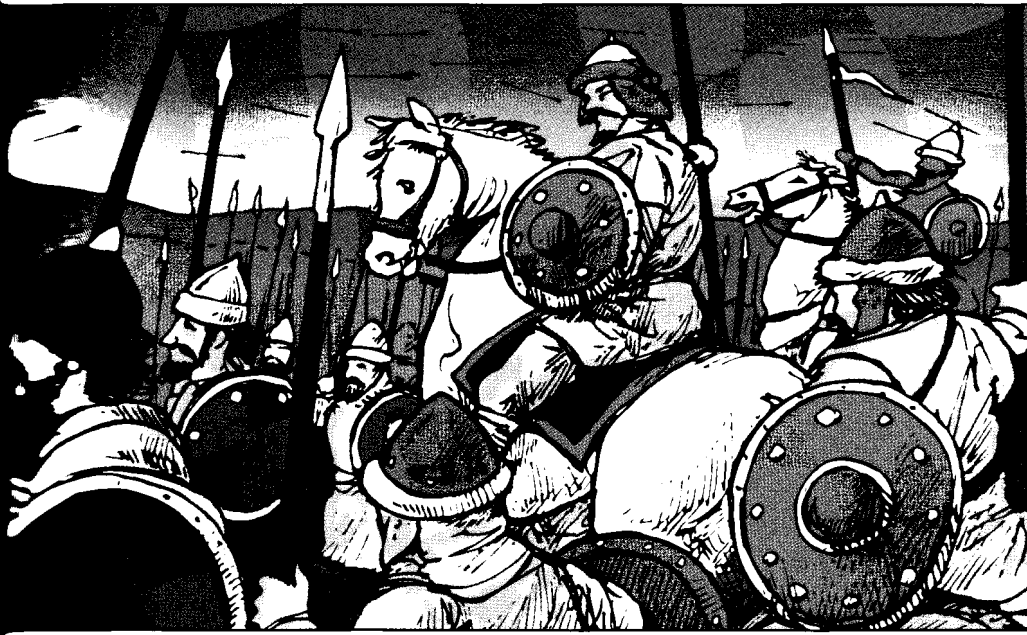
Razin then declared that he would march into Russia to bring "freedom to the poor," meaning *all* men under the bondage of the tsar, and no longer Cossacks alone. Razin had no intention of taking the tsarhood for himself, but simply wished to eliminate it, creating an anarchistic society of equal brothers.

Such idealism was doomed to failure. His initial marches were successful; out-riders recruited in every town they passed, and Razin's army became a huge collection of peasants, escaped prisoners and even former priests who had been forced into the fields by the tsar. By 1670, the number was estimated to be 200,000. But the *streltsy* defending Moscow were an elite, disciplined soldiers, and their halberds and muskets cut a merciless path through the disorganized rebels. Razin, cut by a saber and shot in the leg, escaped with a handful of soldiers, but was soon captured to be brought back to Moscow.

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- 1224: Russia and its allies cannot prevent a Mongol victory and the fall of Kiev.
- 1227: Death of Genghis Khan forces Mongol retreat.
- 1237-1240: Mongols re-enter Russia, take Moscow and sack Kiev under the leadership of Batu Khan.
- 1241: Alexander, prince of Novgorod, defeats the Swedes at the Neva River and is named "Alexander Nevsky" (Alexander of the Neva).* Death of Ogodai Khan forces another Mongol retreat.
- 1242: Formation of the "Khanate of the Golden Horde" at Sarai on the lower Volga; Nevsky defeats Teutonic Knights at Lake Peipus.
- 1252: Moscow emerges as an independent hereditary principality; Mongols name Alexander Nevsky grand prince of Russia.
- 1263: Nevsky dies; his son Daniel becomes grand prince.
- 1270: Novgorod signs a treaty with the Hanseatic League.
- 1325: Ivan Kalita ("moneybags") becomes ruler of Moscow.
- 1328: Ivan Kalita (Ivan I) becomes grand prince of Russia, makes Moscow his capital and has the seat of the Church moved there.*
- 1352: The Black Death arrives in Novgorod and Moscow.
- 1362: Dmitri Donskoy becomes grand prince.
- 1375: Tver acknowledges Moscow as the Russian capital after a long conflict.
- 1380: Dmitri defeats the Tatar khan Mamai at Kulikovo.
- 1382: Khan Tokhtamysh takes Moscow; first minting of coins and first recorded mention of firearms in Moscow.
- 1386: Lithuania and Poland ally against Russia.
- 1389-1425: Vasili I rules Moscow.
- 1392: Death of Sergius of Radonezh, later the patron saint of Muscovite Russia.
- 1395: Golden Horde defeated by Tamerlane.
- 1411: Andrei Rublev, greatest Russian icon painter, completes "Trinity."
- 1425-1462: Vasili the Blind (Vasili II) rules Moscow.
- c. 1430: Khanate of the Crimea separates from Mongol Empire.
- 1430-1466: Khanate of the Golden Horde fragments into three khanates; Council of Florence is held in an attempt to bring Eastern Christianity into the fold of the Roman Church.



Stenka Razin [Continued]

The roads leading to Moscow were lined with burghers and peasants from the surrounding countryside, eager to glimpse their hero. Officials dressed him in rags and chains and dragged him quickly past the crowds into the Kremlin. Showing no sign of fear, regret or pain, Razin was broken bone by bone, quartered alive and then beheaded.

Razin became a martyr, and legends of his greatness grew to godlike proportions: songs about him are sung in Russia today, where he personifies the frustration of the poor. Stenka Razin was retroactively granted magical powers to calm beasts and summon ships full of rebels by tossing pieces of bark onto the water, and it was said that he still walked the land in secret, helping the poor and desperate. One day, said the legends, he would return . . .

1441: Metropolitan Isidore deposed in Moscow for accepting pronouncements of Council of Florence.

1444: First recorded mention of Cossacks in Russian writings.

1448: Church of Moscow is declared "autocephalous" ("having its own head" independent).

1453: Fall of Constantinople to Ottoman Turks; Russia becomes center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.*

1458: Kievan Metropolitan declares his independence from Moscow.

1462: Ivan the Great (Ivan III) becomes grand prince of Moscow.

1463-1468: First limits on peasant movement are imposed.

1470-1478: Ivan III annexes Novgorod, which had been autonomous for nearly five centuries.

1472: Ivan III weds Sophia Paleologus, a niece of the last Byzantine emperor, and adopts the Byzantine double-headed eagle as the symbol of Russian rule.

1480: Ivan III styles himself "tsar." The tribute to the Tatars is ended.

1487: Russians begin to explore Siberia.

1492: The predicted end of the world, according to Orthodox belief.*

1497: Ivan III issues the *subednik*, the Code of Laws.

1505: Ivan III dies; Vasili III rules Russia.

1533: Ivan IV (later Ivan Grozny, "the Terrible") is technically leader of Russia (page 3).

1547: Ivan IV crowned tsar and marries Anastasia Romanov.

1549: Ivan IV calls the first national landed assembly, or *zemsky sobor*.

1552: Ivan IV begins conquest of Khazan, Astrakhan, fragments of Tatar Empire.

1553: Willoughby and Chancellor expedition opens English trade routes to Russia.

1555: The "Muscovy Company" is formed in London, granted privileges for trade throughout the growing Muscovite State.

1556: Astrakhan is conquered.

1560: Anastasia Romanov dies, Ivan IV is distraught.*

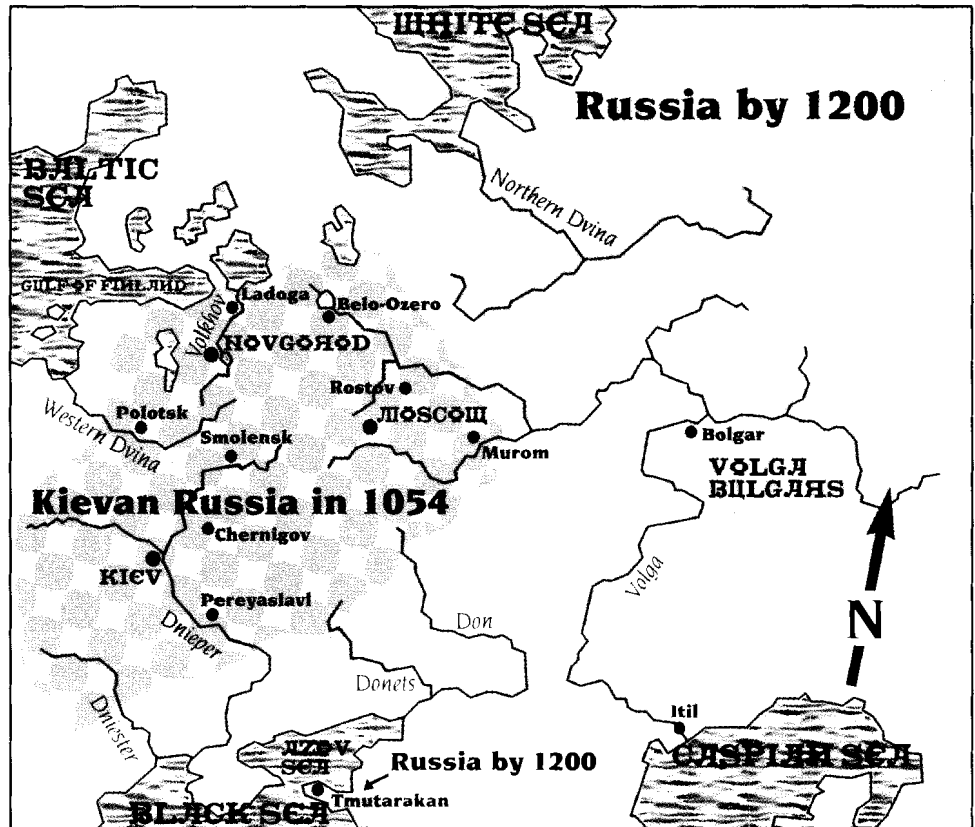
1564: Ivan IV, in power struggle with *boyars*, temporarily leaves Moscow.



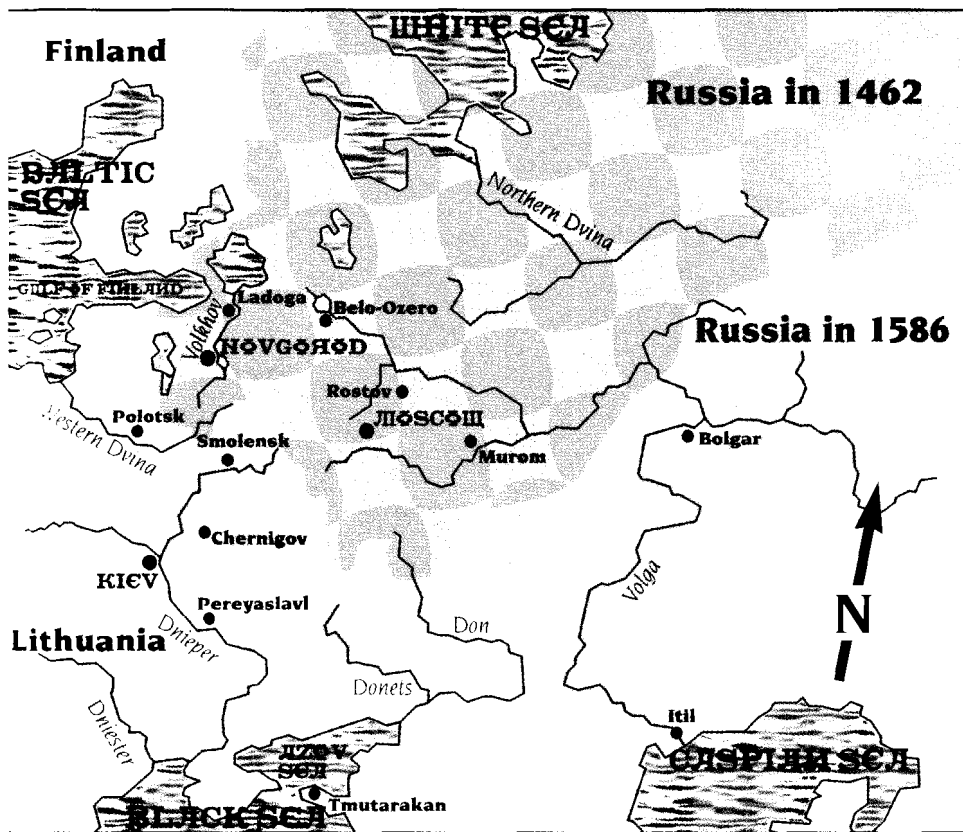
Law and Order Under Tsar Alexis I

"Owing to the ravages of the plague, the emperor has been greatly enriched, as enormous fortunes have come to him from rich victims who left no heirs. He has reformed the currency and helped forward the trade of his country, thus both increasing his power and winning the trust and affection of his people. His criminal law is mercilessly severe on treason, murder, sacrilege and rape. Persons guilty of these offenses never escape being shown around the city, and whipped as they go; many die under torture. We saw some whose heads were beaten off with maces upon a stone. They had been guilty of the murder of their masters. We saw them burn one man in a house they had erected in the square. They tied him inside it and then burned him to death. He had purposely set fire to his master's house. The sodomite is burned without mercy. No one who speaks ill of the tsar ever escapes punishment. A person blaspheming his Maker in horrible and impious language may possibly meet with forgiveness, but he who reviles the tsar is certain to lose his head. Woe to the man who commits any offense, whether he be rich or poor! No intercession, no bribery avails! They drag him off to the judgment, executed, God knows, with the strictest justice, as we so often witnessed: for no ruler of any other country has attained the degree of good government which exists among the Russians."

— From the diary of Marcarius of Antioch, 1655



- 1565: Ivan founds the *oprichnina*, beginning an eight-year reign of terror.*
- 1570: Ivan, suspecting treason within Novgorod, orders the destruction of the city.
- 1571: Crimean Tatars burn Moscow, killing nearly 200,000 and taking half that in prisoners.
- 1573: The *oprichnina* is abolished.
- 1577: Commercial ties with Holland are established.
- 1580: Ivan IV murders his son and heir with his bare hands.
- 1581-1598: Russian conquest of Khanate of Siber, spearheaded by the Cossack Ermak Timofeevich.
- 1584: Ivan the Terrible dies, and is succeeded by his son Feodor (last of the Varangian bloodline); his regent, Boris Godunov, holds most of the power.
- 1589: Job of Moscow is appointed first Russian metropolitan and patriarch of the Orthodox Church.*
- 1591: Dmitri (Ivan IV's remaining son) found with his throat slit, possibly assassinated by Godunov.*
- 1598: Tsar Feodor dies; Boris Godunov seizes power and is elected tsar by the *zemsky sobor*.
- 1598-1612: *Smutno Vremya*: the Time of Troubles.
- 1601-1604: Famine ravages Russia.
- 1601: A false Dmitri appears in Poland, winning support for an attack on Russia.*
- 1605: Godunov dies; his son, Feodor II, is assassinated; False Dmitri enters Moscow and takes over the tsarhood.
- 1606: False Dmitri assassinated by the *boyar* Prince Vasili Shuisky, who becomes a contested tsar.
- 1610-1612: Poles occupy and burn Moscow; Vasili is deposed; the tsarhood is offered to Vladislav, son of the former Polish king.



Harsh Punishment

The tsars and their lawmakers made considerable use of torture and execution to further the interests of the state. Travelers to Russia observed that public executions and torture were so common that a beheading performed at one end of a town would not be deemed worthy of discussion at the other end. Russians were notoriously stoic in their acceptance of such practices, and even the condemned reportedly didn't resist. Russians were also known for their resistance to torture; in the *streltsy* rebellion against Peter the Great, only one man of the rebel army agreed to talk after hours of torture. Torture was performed by *batog*, knout, fire or some combination of the three. The *batog* was a light stick, short and about an inch thick, used for beatings for lesser offenses. The victim would lie on his stomach and two men would rhythmically beat him, replacing broken *batogs* until ordered to stop.

Knouting was the most common form of public punishment, and was often a prelude to execution. Russians seemed to view clean, painless execution as an act of undue kindness, and men often had their feet or hands chopped off before their heads, to ensure suffering. A strong spectator would be chosen by the knoutmaster to deliver a number of hard lashes determined by the judges who'd sentenced the offender: 20 was a typical number as more might kill. The knout, a device inherited from the Mongols (along with the Russian view of torture), was not an ordinary whip; it had three short lashes, each of which was *sharpened* to guarantee deep wounds.

Various fire-related punishments were common. Often, the offender was tied to a long pole and suspended so that his back was over open flame. Occasionally, the victim was knouted first. Hot irons and coals (applied to the knouted back) were also used.

1612: General revolt throws Poles out of Moscow; Michael Romanov is elected tsar and founds the Romanov dynasty; end of the Time of Troubles.

1629: Commercial treaty between France and Russia signed.

1632: Russian trade center in Siberia (at Yakutsk) is founded.

1645: Michael Romanov dies; Alexis I becomes tsar.

1647-1648: Revolt against Alexis in Moscow stemming from Ukrainian salt tax; Bogdan Khmelnytsky leads a Cossack army against Poland; Russian colonization of Siberia reaches Pacific Ocean.

1649: The *ulozhenie* is established, codifying Russian social strata and binding peasants to land creating serfdom in Russia; the trading privileges of the Muscovy Company are revoked.*

1653-1654: Nikon becomes Moscow Patriarch, his "reforms" cause the "schism of the Old Believers."

1666: Postal service established in Russia.

1667: Treaty of Andrusvo partitions Ukraine between Poland and Russia; Poland cedes Smolensk and Kiev.

1670-1671: Don Cossack Stenka Razin leads a peasant revolt that is crushed by Alexis.*

1672: Russia sends embassies to all major European states.

1682: After Tsar Alexis' death, Peter I is co-tsar with his half-brother, Ivan, but his half-sister Sophia is regent.

1689: Peter I deposes Sophia and (unwillingly) marries Eudoxia Lopukhina, whom he forces into a nunnery shortly thereafter.

1696: Ivan dies, leaving Peter sole tsar.

1697: Peter begins the "Grand Embassy" to Europe.

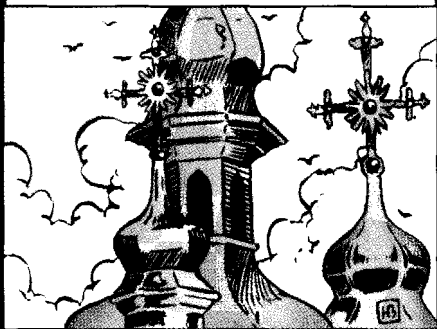
Silver and Gold

Precious metals were in short supply in Russia, particularly gold. Peter, concerned with the constant debasement of Russian coinage, passed a law in 1714 forbidding the export of silver. By the end of the decade, merchants' carts and clothing were searched, and even dismantled and torn, if there was the slightest suspicion that they were carrying coinage made of precious metals out of the country. By 1723, the export of silver carried the death penalty. A related law forbade paying foreign merchants in Russian money. To encourage the passage of foreign gold into Russia, no duty was placed on its importation.

Peter also sponsored three large expeditions eastward in search of gold, in 1714, 1716 and 1719. Each consisted of thousands of soldiers, with groups of Cossacks and engineers attached. Peter had heard tales of pebbles and veins of gold freely visible on the far shores of the Caspian and in the rocks of Siberia. These expeditions were responsible for building eastern river-forts that later grew into towns.

The Holy Synod

Peter's conflicts with the Orthodox Church led to various changes under his rule, the most important of which was the establishment of the Holy Synod. When the Russian patriarch, Hadrian, died in 1700, no successor was chosen by the tsar, and for two decades the Church lacked real leadership. In 1721, Peter made his decision by *abolishing* the position of patriarch, robbing the Russian Church of its "pope." He replaced it with the Synod, a council of 10 priests who answered directly to the tsar, reducing the Church to a state-controlled function. This system remained in effect until the revolution of 1919.



Peter the Great

1698: Revolt of the *streltsy* and the beginning of Peter's obsessive campaign of Westernization.

1700: Beginning of the Great Northern War with Sweden.

1703: Peter marks a cross on the ground at the site where St. Petersburg will stand.

1703-1708: Construction of St. Petersburg; thousands die, and no man may come into the city without a building block.

1708: Russian nobility ordered out of Moscow and into St. Petersburg.

1709: Peter defeats Charles XII of Sweden at Poltava, and is called Peter the Great throughout Europe.

1712: Peter marries his second wife, Catherine; St. Petersburg is named capital of Russia.

1719: Peter's son, Alexis, is tortured to death.

1721: End of the Great Northern War; establishment of the Holy Synod to replace the position of Church Patriarch.

1724: Catherine is crowned Catherine I.

1725: Peter dies; one of his last significant acts is to send Vitus Bering to find a new route to America *via* Siberia.



RELIGION

"This blessed faith spreads now over the entire Earth, and finally it reached the Russian kingdom. And, whereas the lake of the Law dried up, the fount of the Gospel became rich in water and overflowed upon our land and reached us. And now, together with all Christians, we glorify the Holy Trinity, while Judea remains silent."

Hilarion, metropolitan of Kiev, from a sermon circa 1040

From the pagan symbols embroidered on napkins and aprons to the painted icons present in every home, no part of Russian existence was without its spiritual tokens and reminders.

Two strong belief systems, powerful and majestic Byzantine Christianity and the all-encompassing naturalistic faith of the early Slavs, did battle and peacefully blended through the centuries in a unique *dvoeverie*, or dual faith. Both are likely to be major forces in any *GURPS Russia* campaign.

Real-World Religion

This chapter attempts to give an overview from a neutral standpoint, as a window to the minds of a people, limiting descriptions to medieval, and not contemporary, institutions. GMs and players should remember that many people take these beliefs (including the "pagan" faiths) very seriously. GMs planning to include strong religious elements in their campaigns (almost unavoidable in Russia) should be aware of their players' beliefs, keeping them in mind when constructing and presenting scenarios – there's no need for hurt feelings over a game.

The Russian Calendar

When Russia accepted Byzantine Christianity in the 10th century, it also received the Byzantine Empire's calendar. Unlike our own, which begins roughly with the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth, the Russian calendar began with the start of the world, reckoned by the Orthodox as 5508 B.C.

The months of the Byzantine calendar were identical to ours, but the new year began on September 1. For reasons that are unclear, Russia chose to have *its* years begin on the first of March, until the 15th century, when Russia switched to the proper Byzantine system. Russia continued to use the Byzantine calendar until 1699, when it was discarded as part of Peter the Great's Westernization.

In general, dating events with this system is easy: simply add (or subtract) 5,508 years to (or from) any date given. Thus, from the Old Russian viewpoint, Prince Vladimir converted Russia to Christianity in 6496 *Anno Mundi* ("Year of the World"), not in 988 *Anno Domini* ("Year of our Lord"). Since the year starts on different dates, some dates will be off by one year, and some Russian cities used local calendar variants, but such detail can be ignored for game purposes.

For convenience, all dates in *GURPS Russia*, including those in quoted medieval sources, are given according to our dating system.

Incidentally, because of their interpretation of the Book of Revelations, the Russian calendar *ended* at the conclusion of their seventh millennium: 1492 A.D. This "end of the world" caused a great deal of trouble when it arrived (see p. 75).

Russia was a Christian nation from the late 10th century. The Orthodox faith was adopted from the Byzantine Empire at a time when Constantinople was the center of European culture. To Russians, Constantinople (Tsargrad, as they called it) was the home of God on Earth. So impressed were Russians by the splendor of Orthodoxy, that they became overnight imitators, naïvely believing that they had joined the world's greatest religious empire in the nick of time before the world's end.

In a sense, they were right; the world didn't end, but the Byzantine Empire did. By a cruel twist of fate, the Russian adoption of Orthodoxy left it orphaned in a cultural arena that despised it and proclaimed Russians heretics and barbarians. Closed off from the Catholic West, and even from the remnants of Greece by the Mongols, Russia retreated into the forest.

Deprived of its "rightful inheritance" of Byzantine glory, Russia didn't discard the Byzantine Church. By the time Mongol control had been broken and Russia entered the Muscovite Era, the Orthodox Church had evolved into something uniquely Russian, and Russians of the time were among the most pious (and fanatic) Christians in history.

Church History

From its inception, the Russian Orthodox Church was a powerful force. Russians took their religion seriously, and it was as dark and as rich in irony as Russians themselves. As a political organization, the Church was a wealthy, influential body of men with power over all levels of Russian society. It owned entire villages and regions, and its higher priests often came from noble stock. Out of the many monasteries came what there was of Russian culture, from religious writings to icons, the art form most revered by Russians.

But while the Church was always important, its role in medieval Russia changed with the constantly changing times.

Early Orthodoxy

In the Kievan and Mongol eras, the Church was entirely an urban and upper-class phenomenon, and even in that arena there was conflict. Vladimir's decision to cast aside paganism and adopt Orthodoxy was wise under the circumstances, but it had trouble taking root, and the pagan *volkhvy* led many minor revolts against Christianity.

Still, it was a time of great cultural growth (or at least emulation). Within a few years, Kiev grew into an imitation Constantinople, with golden gates, architecture, paintings, bells and services all patterned directly on Byzantine examples. Vladimir spared no expense, and those who willingly adopted Christianity did so with zeal. Russia, a young and primitive nation, had at last gained a place among the empires of the world, Russians thought. The Byzantine Empire thought that it had gained a new province, and tried to exert political authority by ensuring that the Kievan metropolitan (the head of the Russian branch of the Church) was always Greek.

When the Mongols arrived in the 13th century, Russia largely lost contact with Constantinople. The Church was respected by the Mongols, who adopted Islam for themselves but respected all holy men for their "great powers." The Church acted as a mediator between Mongols and Russians, and (although still wildly disorganized) began feeling the power of independence.

The Third Rome

By the time the Mongol threat ended, the Byzantine Empire was falling victim to both Turks and Crusaders. Russia responded by vigorous attempts to establish itself as the heir to the grandeur of Constantinople, and the image of Moscow as "the Third Rome" was strongly promoted. To Russians, this was the final hour of mankind, since the Orthodox faith held that the world would end in 1492, 7,000 years after its creation in 5508 B.C. Russians wanted everything to be "just right" in the final days, and dozens of new saints were canonized to add to the "depth" of Russian worship.

This period was one of large-scale frontier exploration by Russia, which was often led by the Church. Monks, forming a hermitage deep in the wilderness, would find their solitude shattered by the arrival of more faithful, and hermitages became monasteries, which became the centers of frontier towns. Rural priests had several differences of opinion with urban ones, including the belief that the tsar should have no authority over the Church. The tsars disagreed, and many a metropolitan was appointed or dismissed on tsarist whims. Ivan the Terrible had the metropolitan strangled for daring to question his brutality! In 1589, Job, the metropolitan of Moscow, was raised to the position of patriarch, establishing the Russian Orthodox Church as separate from the rest of Orthodoxy.

This period also featured increasing rigidity in Russian religion. While the early period had been notable for the exhilaration and zeal of the Kenoties (see *Christ and the Kenotic Ideal*, p. 76), and the overwhelming freshness of the rush of culture into Russia, by the time Job became patriarch the Church had already begun many petty quarrels about precise details of liturgy and worship (akin to Western arguments about the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin). The slightest deviation in practice, wording or interpretation from the "true" faith was a dire sin.

The Raskol: The Final Days

When the end of the world, promised in 1492, failed to occur, Russian religion maintained its monolithic exterior but deteriorated from within. By the 17th century, the Church had grown casual, divided and decadent, and was in desperate need of reform. Priests and monks were getting drunk, ignoring fast periods and dealing in secular businesses deemed "inappropriate" by sober clergymen.

Kiev, which had brought Christianity from Greece, was to do so again. The scholars of Kiev, backed by the Russian patriarch, Nikon, began to alter rituals, texts and, in fact, every important aspect of the Russian Church, bringing them closer to the current Orthodoxy of Greece. The goal was to get "back to the basics," but it was a flawed process since the Greek rite had changed much since the time of Vladimir.

The alterations, which included no changes in dogma or doctrine, were nevertheless seen as terrible sins by many Russians. The new order demanded that Russians make the sign of the cross with *three* fingers, rather than *two*, for instance, and included modifications to the liturgy that their fathers and grandfathers had known (e.g., in the Lord's Prayer, "Our father" was changed to "Our God"). Many Russian religious leaders who had originally backed the concept of reform turned on Nikon, notable among them Avvakum (see *Avvakum*, p. 78). And although Nikon himself was deposed for other reasons, the *raskol* ("schism") began which would divide the Church of Russia even into the Soviet Era.



The Value of Cyrillic

"Having received the Bible and a vast amount of various religious writings in their own language, the Slavs had no incentive to learn Greek. They were enclosed, therefore, within the narrow limits of an exclusively religious literature. If only our ancestors had learned Greek . . . they could have read Homer, could have philosophized with Plato, could have reached finally the very springs of Greek inspiration. They would have possessed a golden key to classical treasures. But this never happened. Instead they received but *one* book. While in Paris, a poor and dirty city as it was in the 12th century, the schoolmen were already discussing high matters, in the golden and beautiful Kiev there were but monks engaged in writing chronicles and lives of saints. In other words, the weakness and backwardness of Old Russia depended upon that narrow foundation, exclusively religious, on which its culture had been built."

— Father George Florovsky

Christ and the Kenotic Ideal

The Orthodox faith was, more than Catholicism or Protestantism, a Christ-cult. The divinity of Jesus was stressed, as was the *potential* divinity of man. Those who lived as God decreed did not only go to Heaven, they became *deified* in a sense. But since Orthodoxy had an inherently harsher world-view than Catholicism, most people were fated to go to Hell.

While Western Christianity stressed that Christ, in taking on a mortal form, became human as well as divine, with (almost) the full range of emotions and weaknesses of humanity, Greek Orthodoxy taught that Christ was *never* human. He took on a mortal body, but he remained completely divine and perfect, experiencing no base "humanity."

Russian Orthodoxy took a slightly different stance. It kept the Greek view of most things (along with its liturgy and focus on images and glory over ideas), but stressed the compassion and love that Christ held for mankind. The Russian Christ was still divine, but he was not the aloof God-among-lessers that the Greek Orthodox Christ seemed to be. Russians saw direct emulation of Christ as the purest path to salvation; this was the "Kenotic Ideal."

As Christ had renounced part of his divine nature in becoming mortal, to be Christ-like one had to live in total poverty, and be meek, gentle and loving. Many noblemen cast aside their robes for the clothes of peasants and became field-workers in pursuit of this ideal. Wrath was the tool of Satan, and "turning the other cheek" was taken to (by Western standards) ludicrous extremes by devout Russians. Two of the most beloved saints in Russia, Boris and Gleb, were brothers and princes during one of the Kievan civil wars. Instead of joining in the fighting, each meekly offered no resistance to Svyatopolk's attempts to kill them, and died martyrs to one of the fundamental principles of the Kenotic ideal. It was for this that they were canonized and adored by Russians.

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To the *starovery*, or "Old Believers," Patriarch Nikon and the tsar had become anti-Christ, and it was obvious that the end of the world – *this* time – was truly here. In 1667, the persecution of the Old Believers became total; Russians had to either follow the new dictates or openly defy the Church. Many chose the latter, and over 20,000 killed themselves *en masse* by locking themselves in churches and setting torches to them. When soldiers of the tsar (and therefore servants of the anti-Christ) arrived, they resisted violently, and fights broke out among the quarrelling priesthood. Even though thousands of Old Believers were hanged, tortured and maimed (their tongues and hands removed), the resistance survived.

The *raskol* divided the Church, and Peter the Great, coming to power at the end of the major conflicts, conquered it. Tired of the power of the patriarchs, he abolished the office entirely. No longer would the Church have conflicts with the state, since, in the early 18th century, its head was replaced with the Holy Synod, a council of clerics who answered directly to the tsar. Priests were ordered to report any "seditious" talk heard in confessionals, and the Church was reduced to a bureau in the new bureaucracy.

Church Organization

Structurally, the Russian Church was very much like the Roman Catholic. At the top was the metropolitan in pre-Boris Godunov days (a high official appointed by the patriarch of the entire Eastern Orthodox Church), or later the patriarch of the Russian Church (a man theoretically equal to the tsar in power, but more often subservient to him; some very weak-willed tsars were the pawns of the Church, but publicly the autocrat was still the greater power).

Beneath the patriarch were *eparchs* (the Orthodox equivalent of archbishops), each of whom presided over an *eparchy* ("diocese"), a large division of territory centered on a major city. The precise number and borders of the *eparchies* changed as Russia absorbed, lost and reabsorbed territory, especially on the borders with Lithuania and Poland. Within each *eparchy*, *yepiskops* ("bishops") presided over smaller Church lands, the equivalent of Western parishes; a large or rich *eparchy* could have hundreds of *yepiskops*. Beneath this came the local church, headed by its highest priest and overseen by priests, deacons and lesser clergy. Most nobles and gentrymen had their own churches, with "bought" priests who answered to them. Cities often had hundreds of churches, if medieval records are to be believed.

Even when Russia was non-feudal, with free peasant movement and nearly capitalistic attitudes toward commerce and property, the Russian Church operated in a distinctly feudal manner. The lands owned by a church included their own villages and peasants; in local parishes, the ruler was simply a bishop rather than a *boyar*, or, on monastery lands, an *igumen*, the Russian equivalent of an abbot. And each clergyman had a good deal of discretion as to how his territory was run, but little authority elsewhere. More importantly, the Church (which owned an astonishing 33% of Russia at the time of Ivan the Terrible) kept its autonomy far longer than the nobility.

Monasteries and Monastic Life

Separate from the money and glory of the mainstream Church was the monastic Church. Monasticism was a common feature in all medieval societies, but in Russia it was *rampant*. Hermitages and abbeys sprang up like mushrooms overnight; over 200 new monasteries were recorded as built in the 15th century, excluding hermitages and probably many in frontier settlements.

Monasteries were self-contained societies, often with huge landholdings and considerable political influence. The greatest Russian monastery, the St. Pegas/Holy Trinity northwest of Moscow, eventually became a *city* in its own right. Some of the smaller, more distant monasteries didn't consider themselves part of the structure of the Russian Church, seeing themselves as answerable only to God in matters of the spirit and the tsar in matters mundane. Naturally, this was a source of conflict.

While monks were usually immersed in self-inflicted poverty, the *igumen* often commanded vast amounts of money. This meant that monasteries on the borders had to protect themselves from raids by Tatars, marauders and robber Cossacks. Most were built, sacked and then rebuilt a few years later, the second time around. The wealth to be gained from sacking a monastery was fairly high: brigades raiding the Bogoslovsky monastery north of Riazan took Russian cash equivalent to about \$300,000, along with horses, provisions and other booty. The Turks often took not only goods, but men to be sold as slaves.

Aside from these raids, life in a Russian monastery varied dramatically. Some monks lived like kings, getting drunk, living well off of their revenues and running their monasteries like businesses by producing floods of icons and copies of the many books in the Russian canon to be shipped out to schools and other churches. In others, the monastic existence was *extreme*. Monks in Kiev's monastery of the Caves starved themselves into religious ecstasy while slowly starving themselves alive in tiny earthen alcoves. They died, covered in soil, screaming of their victories over the devils that plagued them. Every shade between these extremes was represented.

Beliefs

The differences between the Russian and Roman Churches didn't lie in specific interpretations of the Bible or in picky details of which saints were valid and the number of sacraments. Certainly, those differences existed, and one (the role of Christ) was vital, but the things that made the Russian Church different were *beauty* and the Russian concept of *umilyeniye*.

The word *umilyeniye* means being moved nearly to a state of tears, a sense of vibrant exultation, an open floodgate of sadness and joy and irony and pathos. In short, the feeling you get when you are looking at a thing of such beauty that it is quite obviously of Heaven and not of Earth.

A Russian proverb says, "it is better to see than it is to know," and that sums up the power of Christianity in Russia. To Russians, the ornately decorated cathedral, with its elaborate *iconostasis* (see p. 78) and rich robes for the bishops, was an awe-inspiring image, proof of God's existence by being a literal "Heaven on Earth." The church was no simple "house of God" where the faithful came to learn and worship, the church was *Heaven* where the faithful came to stand in awe before the genuine presence of the Almighty. Next to the ornate splendor of a Russian church, a Roman cathedral seemed tastefully bland.

The medieval Russian Church didn't focus on intellectual debate or even on teaching the Scriptures to laymen; the former came later, the latter never came. It focused on the glory of itself and Creation, and strove to point out just how *small* and *sinful* the average Russian was. To the Orthodox, Hell was the destination of the *average* man; only the truly pious, humble and meek earned the right to live in Heaven. This is the reason that many Russians who could afford to did their best to become monks and die in monasteries.



Christ and the Kenotic Ideal [Continued]

Not all priests and monks were Kenotics, but those who did embrace the ideal (including laymen) were greatly respected. In game play, treat Kenoticism as a -15 point Code of Honor with extreme requirements for good roleplaying, and a compensating reaction bonus amongst the devout. Skillful player portrayal of such piety should be rewarded by the GM and considered carefully during PC creation. Trying to keep such a Code intact under "adventurous" circumstances could be crippling.

Fasting

The devout Russian Christian followed arguably the strictest code of fasting in European Christian history. Wednesdays and Fridays were fast days, on which meat, eggs, milk and cheese were prohibited. There were four extended fasting periods during the year which followed the same rules, and during Lent fish was also taboo. On certain special fast days, only dry, unboiled vegetables were permissible. The total number of fast days varied by time period, but averaged over half of the year!

It is important to note that while the *types* of edible food were strictly defined, the *amount* was not an issue: a Russian could eat as many turnips and as much garlic as he liked, provided he was not a glutton (which was sinful), and provided that he didn't take Communion on the next day (garlic being prohibited immediately before Communion).

Avvakum

One of the historical figures most strongly associated with the *raskol* was the archpriest Avvakum, an Old Believer and member of a staunch resistance group known as the "Zealots of Piety." The group believed that the local parishioners should have a greater say in Church business, and that the liturgy and rituals of the current Church were sacred.

Avvakum, born in 1621 and burned at the stake in 1682, recorded his entire life in the form of an autobiography that revealed the piety of which some Russians were capable. In defense of his beliefs, he was exiled to Siberia twice (once for nine years), and watched with horror as his child and wife were imprisoned. He never gave up his cause, as one incident clearly reveals:

Having been run out of his town with his wife and newborn son, Avvakum wandered for some time, going to Moscow and meeting with the tsar, who ordered him home. When he returned to his village, he saw that his house had been torn down, and he set to rebuilding it.

Just at that time, wrote Avvakum, "the Devil raised up a storm against me. There came to my village dancing bears with drums and lutes, and I, although a miserable sinner, was zealous in Christ's service, and I drove them out, and I broke the *skomorokhs'* masks and drums, on a common outside the village, one against many." Avvakum then *attacked the bears*, clubbing one senseless and driving the other into the fields.

Vasily Shereinetiev, a wealthy aristocrat, was passing the village at the time, and asked Avvakum to bless his son. Avvakum saw that the son had a shaved face, and, instead of blessing him, "condemned him from the Scriptures." Vasily ordered Avvakum beaten and thrown into the Volga.

Such foolhardy actions as attacking bands of *skomorokhs* (not to mention their bears!) and then, on the same afternoon, defying the orders of an aristocrat and calling his son a heretic, can be seen as examples of the Fanaticism disadvantage.

Picture Histories: Icons

Ordinary Russians didn't know the *words* of the Bible, but they knew its *images*. The icon was the fundamental physical symbol of Orthodox Christianity, and through it illiterate Russians could *see* the miracles of the Scriptures. Icons were paintings on wood, depicting scenes from the Bible or the vast collection of biblical apocrypha which Russians loved. Every Russian household, from the palace of Ivan the Terrible to the hovel of the poorest fur-trapper, had icons placed in positions where they could be revered by all, and each church had a collection of them commensurate with its age and prosperity.

Some would call this idolatry, but Russians didn't see it that way. Icons weren't *worshipped*, they were simply *revered*, and besides, Russians believed that they were *not* simply images. Like God in a Russian church, the saints and angels truly lived within the icons, and it was to the icons (whether in church or at home) that Russians prayed.

Icons were credited with a whole range of supernatural abilities, which the GM may certainly define as truth in his campaign. They protected houses from evil spirits and satanic influences, and those in palaces were believed to defend entire *cities* from invaders. Some icons, such as the beloved *Our Lady of Vladimir*: an image of the Virgin Mary, gained reputations as vastly powerful holy items.

Specific abilities varied by icon. For example, an image of Elijah on a flaming chariot (one of the favorite biblical stories within Russia) was favored by farmers, since Elijah was believed to preside over rainfall and the forces of nature.

The Iconostasis

In every Russian church, screening off the sanctuary from the nave (central room), stood an icon stand, or *iconostasis*. The stands of early Kievan Russia were imitations of the Greek design, but it didn't take long for Russian painters to create a separate and enduring art-form. The typical Russian stand was more complex than the Greek, with five to seven tiers of images. The upper-tier icons depicted Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, while the lowest tier was reserved for locally popular saints. Images of Christ, Mary and the disciples and apostles had their own prescribed placements. Russian icons had certain themes distinct from those of Western Christianity, with the Harrowing of Hell (the resurrected Christ tearing open the gates of Hell to release the souls of the patriarchs) and the Last Judgment more popular than the Crucifixion, and the Madonna and Child more popular than images of the Virgin Mary.

Any player characters who are trained artists almost certainly received their training from the Church. The form and colors of the icons formed the basis of centuries of Russian painted art, even when painting began to move into the secular world.

Immediately after the Petrine Period, the medieval icon was all but destroyed. A dramatic shift in the tastes of nobles and clergymen dictated that *gold* be layered on every available church surface, and icons suffered the ravages of the change poorly. Many of the greatest icons were adorned into gaudy unrecognizability, with all of the original art except the saints' hands and faces concealed beneath thick slabs of precious metals and gems.



THE SLAVIC EARTH-CULT

Russia was a closed society, but Russian Orthodoxy was not alone in its role as spiritual guide for Russian souls. Permeating every inch of rural Russian life were the trappings of Old Russian paganism, remnants of a powerful and naturalistic system of cults that thrived, despite the Church's every effort. To the Orthodox, the dancing bears and seasonal festivals of the *muzhiks* were the clear signs of Satan's work on Earth.

Before the arrival of Christianity, Russians practiced a loosely defined nature-cult: they worshiped the trees and the water, and personified them as spirits. Above all, they venerated the soil: the rich, black womb of all life, where all life would return to its end. The Russian view of nature (and consequently religion) had two aspects. One was beauty, and the other was "the consciousness of belonging to nature, of being deeply rooted in it." Orthodoxy provided beauty, but paganism filled the second void.

Mother Damp Earth was the name of the principal Russian deity, and she was given no personality, likes, dislikes or part in godly politics. *Belief* in Mother Earth wasn't necessary; Russians planted in her, lived on her and could *see* that she extended to eternity in all directions. Unlike the forest spirits, Mother Damp Earth was ascribed no supernatural powers. Her abilities were obvious and practical – a Russian need only plant a seed to witness them!

Russian Gods and Spirits

Modern knowledge of the Old Russian pantheon is vague. It is also often unflattering, as the primary sources for information are medieval Christian sermons, which often included detailed, angry denunciations of the peasants' native beliefs and customs. Thus, only through the clouded viewpoint of an enemy can we come to know Russian paganism.

There are some things that are certain: to early Russian Slavs, water, trees, earth and wind were holy. Early Russians cared little for abstracts or celestial images, paying homage only to what they could see and touch, and what would affect their crops or harm a village. They made sacrifices to wells, stones and trees, and celebrated the turning of the seasons. There is no record of a Slavic god of war.

The earliest images of these spirits were feminine, exemplified by Mother Damp Earth. Equally feminine were the *rusalki* (see p. 108) and related nature-spirits, who dwelt in the rivers and trees. Of the two aspects of any feminine cult (sensuality and procreation), procreation always had priority in Russian mythology; fertility, not beauty, was the divine feature worshiped by Russians, and even the siren-like *rusalki* were ugly in the myths of the far north. Later images included masculine deities, Beast Tsars and countless minor spirits.

Each Slavic tribe had its own pantheon; the following is the "collected" version that Vladimir attempted to form into a strong Russian faith. Failing that, he turned outward and brought Christianity to Russia.

The gods, as such, weren't the central theme of Russian paganism. The cult of the *rod* ("blood kinship"), veneration of natural phenomenon and nature as a whole, and belief in fate and destiny were each equally important. This was probably why Vladimir's attempt failed. His focus on consolidating the pantheons of the Rus missed the point, and the very concept of the *rod* (which enforced clan loyalty) worked directly against him.

Dancing Bears

One of the oldest forms of folk entertainment in Russia, the bear-tamer's trade originated in the early pagan tradition, when traveling *skomorokhs* used trained bears to perform divinations. The bear would dance and growl, and by interpreting these actions the wizard predicted the future. By listening carefully to the *tone* of a bear's growling, the tamer would even guess the gender of an unborn child.

Like so many other pagan traditions, this practice eventually evolved into a more acceptable, less *persecutable* form. *Skomorokhs*, or more frequently, specialist bear-owners, trained bears to dance and perform comedic skits. A "bear comedy" consisted of several such acts, with the bear mimicking a young girl prettifying herself in the morning, a clergyman saying *vespers*, a drunk, a lecherous old man and so on. The bear might also wrestle, play a flute or tambourine, or simply dance. The streets of Old Russian towns and cities, from the early 1400s on, often had such entertainers, led about by either solitary owners or full *skomorokh* troupes.

Ghosts in the Bathhouse

In Russian folk tales (which often derive directly from Russian pagan practices), many feasts were associated with the dead, who were believed to come into bathhouses to bathe during the night when most Russians slept. As such, the bathhouse was considered a dangerous place to stray near after dark. The bathhouse was a useful place to pagan wizards, since their divination depended on the intercession of spirits (bear-dances were the exception, since bears were themselves supernatural forest creatures).

According to medieval sermons, food sacrifices were offered up to the dead (called *dziadiy* or *dvedi*, meaning "grandfathers"). Peasants spread ashes about the bathhouse (to record the footprints of the *dvedi*), left feasts of eggs, butter, meat and milk, poured water on the stove and laid out linen. The sermons denounced these practices, saying that devils, pretending to be the ghosts of the peasants' loved ones, appeared, took the feasts greedily, and left their traces in the ashes for the "seduction" of gullible peasants.

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Ghosts in the Bathhouse [Continued]

This is typical of the Christian interpretation of Russian pagan practices. In a campaign where either Christian or pagan forces (or both) are real, the GM should determine which, if any, pagan practices are the work of demons, and which are as the peasants believe them to be. Another possibility is that the demons are only behind *some* instances of a particular practice: "Usually *dyed* Mikhail eats the turnips first, but tonight he ignored them! And aren't his footprints oddly shaped?"

Other Religions

Russian Orthodoxy and paganism were the only forces in Russian religious life. The faiths of outsiders were present, but not a major influence on medieval Russian culture.

Any foreigner in Russia was the victim of a Social Stigma (Outsider), but the open practice of a foreign religion could get him into *serious* trouble. Before the arrival of Christianity, all foreign faiths (and most notably Judaism, Christianity and Islam) were actively persecuted in Kiev; afterward, they were merely looked on with varying degrees of distrust and hatred.

Catholicism

Regardless of the truth, the Roman Church was, when it was considered at all, a villainous force in medieval Russia. Russia's long-time enemies, Poland and its allies, were devoutly Catholic, and this was one of the many reasons for the strong conflict between central Europe and Old Russia. Roman Catholics in a *GURPS Russia* campaign are most likely to be NPC ambassadors or spies (or mercenaries in the "German Quarter" of Moscow).

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Perun, King of the Gods

Chief among the Slavic deities was Perun, the god of lightning and fire, a fearsome bearded figure who visited storms and destruction on Russia. He may have been influenced by the Viking deity Thor, and was symbolized by the oak, which was believed to attract lightning; stones found near lightning-felled trees were considered bits broken from his axe. Perun served as a counterpart to Mother Damp Earth. He lived in the heavens, and yet was necessary to Mother Earth's reproductive role by providing water for crops, "impregnating" the black soil.

Mokosh, Goddess of Horses

Wandering the Earth providing life to water and trees, Mokosh was mildly competitive with the male deities of the pantheon, and had a distinct cult among Russian women that lasted in various forms into the 20th century. She was the patron of horses and women, and was associated with spinning and embroidery, the last of which was a favorite activity of young Russian girls. Mokosh defied the violent power of Perun, and was more closely associated with Volos.

Volos, God of the Dead

Volos appeared as both a young and an old man, an intelligent deity associated with the underworld realm of the dead and with material wealth; he also seems to have been the god of cattle. Venerated by merchants, Volos was the deity by which early Russians swore oaths of agreement, both financial and military. The *Primary Chronicle* told of Oleg's men concluding their treaty with the Byzantine Empire by swearing by their weapons, by Perun and by Volos, while the Byzantines swore by Christ and kissed crucifixes.

Svarog, the Fire God

Svarog was mentioned in various chronicles, but was never given a definite form. He was certainly seen as the source of all fire, and forms of fire-worship were brought even into Christian Russian ceremonies. The term "Svarog's Sons" referred to Earthly flames, and Svarog was seen as the creator of Dazhbog (or Khors), the Sun.

Other Deities

Other figures of the pantheon included the *Rozhanisty* (feminine spirits who presided over birth and "wrote one's destiny," similar to the Viking Norns) and Simgarl (Senmurv), a bird/dog hybrid who protected the home and family, and lived on an island guarded by a fish (for another version of Senmurv, see p. 109).

Spirits of the Wilderness

Not all of the personified deities had human identities. Wind and Frost were given personalities, and some early cults seem to have worshiped the Sun and Moon, as well. More important were various nature spirits, including the Beast Tsars. Each important animal species had a king, a powerful version of the animal. The kings of the wolves and bears were the two Beast Tsars most often appearing in Russian folklore, their tales remaining popular for centuries.

Other spirits included the *leshii*, the malicious master of the woods, and the *vodyanye*, male counterparts to the *rusalki*. Spirits weren't limited to the woods, either: each house had a *domovye* ("household spirit"), and even the communal bathhouse had its own *bannik* to watch over it. Each of these creatures is described in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Pagan Ceremonies and Festivals

Medieval records and the reports of Greek and Turkish scholars have left us colorful looks at early pagan practices, many of which have survived almost completely intact. These range from simple ceremonies, such as decorating birch trees with embroidered napkins in the spring, to large gatherings of drunken villagers engaging in wanton promiscuity and dancing "lewdly" to the music of minstrels.

Many festivals were designed to appease various deities or spirits. The spring decoration of trees provided gifts for the *rusalki*, who emerged from frozen water and the underworld to perch in trees and spread green everywhere. In many villages, young girls left trails of milk on the ground for the spirits to follow from the rivers into the trees. In autumn, festivals focused on the return of the spirits to the underworld, the whole representing the cycle of death and rebirth.



Pagan Priests and Wizards

There were three types of pagan "priests": *veduns*, healer-wizards who were simple wise men living among the *muzhiks*; *skomorokhs*, wandering rural priests who organized festivals and ceremonies; and *volkhvs*, educated, urban pagan leaders who served the early nobility before finally being forced into countryside refuges.

Vedun

Living alone in the forest (often illegally, with his location a secret protected by local peasants), the *vedun* was a common figure, and such men operated in Russia well into the 19th century. They served as advisors and seers for peasants who visited them in times of trouble. In particular, peasant women took sick children to *veduns* to receive traditional folk cures. Healer-wizards made their living from gifts of food and goods, payments from peasants for their services. The *vedomye zheny* ("wise woman") was the female counterpart to the male healer-wizard.

Skomorokh

Skomorokhs were Russian minstrels or clowns who traveled, either individually or in groups, throughout the forest. They took shelter in each village they entered, singing, performing skits and playing the *gusli*. To Western observers (and to the Russian aristocracy), these things seemed to be innocent folk-entertainments, amusing diversions free of threat or substance. *Skomorokhs*, however, were maintaining pagan traditions, and every dance and song had religious significance to pagan *muzhiks*.

Volkhv

The *volkhv* was the urban counterpart to the *skomorokh*, at least in the early days, but the two did not communicate with each other, nor was the pagan faith an organized one. *Volkhvs* were born within noble circles; they were essentially

Other Religions [Continued]

Judaism

Jews were always present to some degree in Old Russia, but their effect on Russian culture was at best minimal until the 18th century. The first Jews to contact Russia were the Khazars, steppe dwellers of the early Kievan Era, whose leaders (and later citizens) accepted Judaism from fleeing Byzantine Jews. While Khazars and Russians were not always on the best of terms, the Khazars were certainly the most peaceful and productive of all the steppe-dwellers, and Judaism trickled into Russia, playing a minor role in the spiritual mosaic of the culture.

As in western Europe, Russian Jews tended to form separate communities within Russia as a whole. In each town or city, a separate neighborhood or street (near the synagogue) was entirely Jewish, and acted with some independence from the rest of the town.

Islam

The only strong representatives of Islam in Russia were the Tatars, who became Muslims in the mid-14th century. Despite their role as conquerors, and their adoption of a distinct faith (the Mongols had practiced an ill-defined pagan religion), the Tatars were highly tolerant of other faiths, and made no attempt to convert Russia.

The Viking Religion

The Vikings were very likely a strong influence on, if not the source of, many of the gods of the Kievan Rus, such as Perun, the thunder-and-fire deity associated by many with the Viking god Thor. Early Russian princes, certainly, practiced some version of the religion of their homeland. Any GM running a campaign focusing on the early Rurikids and the warrior-traders on the Dnieper should have *GURPS Vikings*, which covers the Viking gods (and the Vikings themselves) in detail.

Pagan Trickery

Despite decades of politics and violence, paganism proved impossible to kill. The leaders of the old religion were charismatic and resourceful, capable of raising hundreds of followers or vanishing into the huts of their fellow worshippers as needed. The following is a summary of the techniques of the pagan sorcerer – a resource for pagan PCs and a “toolbox” for giving trouble to Christian PCs.

Magic Potions: The pagan underground was the exclusive source of *potvory*, medicinal potions, in medieval Russia. Other medical knowledge was limited to the grounds of monasteries; this gave the *volkhvy* an exploitable edge.

The wizards kept low profiles, selling their wares from isolated forest cabins or from backpacks as they hiked along Russia's waterways. Content marriages and healthy children are strong markets in any society, and period documents make repeated reference to aphrodisiacs and potions purchased to cure the ills of children.

Most *potvory* were alcoholic, blended from whatever came to hand and “enchanted” with folk charms. Abortifacients are also chronicled, and may have had some genuine herbal component.

Visions of the Future: Many *volkhvy* were soothsayers, telling the fortunes of princes and commoners alike. Petitioners asking whether following Christianity or the old religion would serve them better were told that the future boded well for the pagan. The price of this foretelling could also influence the petitioner's religion (see *A War of Faith*, p. 83).

Drunken Revelry: Russian pagan ritual included a bewildering variety of celebrations, almost all including music, dancing, casual attitudes towards sex and lots of alcohol. Many Russians were proud of drunkenness, and it was the love of drink that prevented Russia becoming Islamic. Pagan priests hoped it could save Russia from becoming Christian, too.

Continued on next page . . .



“court wizards” who pandered to their lords' beliefs and foretold glories for them. They gave advice on rulership, finances and even military matters. Their predictions (at least those that were recorded) were quite colorful: one predicted that the Dnieper would flow backward, and that Greece and Russia would physically switch places!

When Christianity overtook the nobility, *volkhvs* led a long series of revolts within the cities, murdering priests and leading masses of city-dwellers against the symbols of Christianity. In the end, they were forced to retreat into the villages where paganism still thrived. Some traveled as con-men, some probably became *skomorokhs*, and others settled in as locals. Of the three forms of pagan leaders, *volkhvs* were the only ones who failed to survive the “Christian Invasion.”

ДВѢВЕРІЄ АС А ДРАМАТИК DEVICE

The conflict between enduring pagan practices and the Orthodox Church can make for exciting roleplaying. It's a matter of GM taste whether to “take sides” in the presentation of the forces involved.

Both religions had nasty ways of fighting the war for the souls of Russians, and either would make a good “villain,” personified by greedy, murderous pagan charlatans or imperious, corrupt Christian priests. A more cynical campaign could cast *both* as negative forces. The PCs could encounter the conflict from outside, or play holy men on one side or the other.

If the campaign is fantasy, then the existence of magic and spirits changes the nature of the struggle drastically. The GM must decide whether either (or both!) of the religions is the “real” one.

A War of Faith

While Christian priests had control of the nobility and a powerful organization, the pagan leaders held sway over the peasantry; for many years, it seemed an even match.

One of the tactics of the pagans was to tell people to rid themselves of theappings of Christ in order to receive their services. In a story told by the Moscovite scholar Nikon, a group of fortune-tellers, after failing to enter trances caused by spirit possession, explained that the spirits couldn't enter the Novgorodian's house, since he was keeping something that they disliked. The man threw his crucifix out of the house, whereupon the diviners continued their work. (See *Pagan Trickery*, p. 82, for more tactics.)

Christian methods of winning followers were often more direct. According to the chronicles, in the time of Prince Gleb a *volkhv* came into Novgorod claiming that he could walk on water and see into the future. The people, believing the wizard, wanted to kill the city's bishop, and in response, the bishop donned his vestments and took a crucifix before the people. "Those who believe in Christ should stand by me at the cross," he said. "Those who do not should stand by the wizard."

Prince Gleb and his knights stood by the bishop; the rest of the city stood with the *volkhv*. Gleb, angered, approached the wizard, asking him if he could really see the future. The wizard replied that he knew all things before they happened. Gleb drew out an axe that he'd hidden under his cloak, and hacked the wizard to death.



Pagan Trickery [Continued]

The Power of Royalty: Many princes, *boyars* and (later) service gentry held strong pagan ties, preferring revelry and dancing bears to fire and brimstone. *Volkhvy* were usually at their sides, whispering praise and encouragement. This protected both the priests and the nobles, since the bloodier pagan uprisings targeted rich Christians first.

Sleight of Hand: *Skomorokhs* were not above a little ordinary stage-magic when it came to impressing *muzhiks*, and some tricks were lethal. In 1071, a pair of *volkhvy* traveled the Rostov/Yaroslavl/Beloozero region murdering wealthy women. If a village had done poorly trapping furs, the *volkhvy* cut open the women and yanked furs from between their shoulder-blades. In villages where the harvest was poor, grain was produced in the same fashion. The pair gained over 300 followers before they were captured and hanged from oak trees. When the wizards were interrogated, they described their gods as "sitting in the abyss."

Note that *both* sides of the Christian-pagan conflict tended to target women. The writings of Abu Hamid al-Gharnati tell of entire populations of old women being drowned every 10 years in the Oka district, "just in case." Ironically, the tale of Eve's betrayal of Adam convinced many Russians of the wisdom of Christianity.

Russian Pagans and the Finns

The strongest pagan centers in Russia were in the north, particularly Beloozero, Rostov, Yaroslavl and Novgorod. Northern Russia had a large population of Finns, whose native term for pagan priest, *shaman*, has entered general modern usage. Russian *skomorokhs* found succor and picked up new tricks among the Finns for centuries.



5

FANTASY RUSSIA

“A bladder, a piece of straw and a boot were walking in the forest. They came to a river they couldn’t cross. Said the boot, ‘Bladder, let us float across on you.’ ‘No,’ said the bladder, ‘the straw can stretch across and we can walk.’ The straw did as it was told, the boot walked on it, and the straw broke. The straw and the boot fell into the water and drowned, and the bladder laughed and laughed and laughed and burst.”

Old Russian folk anecdote

Russia has an extensive oral tradition, ranging from simple beast fables to the powerful *byliny*, or heroic songs. The Russia presented in these stories is a strange, and

strangely consistent, setting, and yet very different from the real medieval Russia.

The tale-telling *muzhik*, using and embellishing the same body of stories over centuries, created a fantasy Russia built on his own hopes and fears. Culturally, the world of fantasy Russia was comparable to the “Faerie” of western Europe – a place just beyond the perceptible, reflecting on the culture that created it.

The fables and folk tales of Russia paint a grim picture. The gloomy forests, already threatening, took on the aspect of a devouring labyrinth, peopled with evil magicians and beasts. Fire, already a constant threat when most buildings were made of wood, took on an air of palpable, intelligent malice. The chilling winter became a mirthful, uncaring spirit, and each beast could claim to be a tsar, with goals and cares that simply excluded bothersome Russians.

LOCATION IN FANTASY RUSSIA

Fantasy Russia was real Russia as seen by the peasants and hunters who lived there. It can be pictured as existing in layers, much like the rings of a tree or the boroughs of Moscow.

At the center was the peasant *izba* and his village. Nearby was a church, the palace of the local lord and possibly a larger town. The fields and woods around the village were well-known and realistic, with hunting trails, traplines and apiaries in the forest, and fish in the streams; no dragons just yet, and no spirits beyond the occasional ancestral visitation and quiet house-spirits such as the *bannik* and *domovye*. There was no magic beyond the occasional visiting pagan priest, a local wise woman and holy icons. Life meant work, sickness, politics and other “monsters” of the mundane world.

Beyond this core things became less real. The tsar was a semi-mythical figure, a combination of the news of travelers, announcements from the lord and outright lies and myths. Great cities, unless they were very close, also took on a hazy, distant semi-reality. Moscow was the center of all Russia, and other great cities each held their particular wonders, in addition to their political roles and positions as trade centers.

This second layer included the deep forest – woods beyond those familiar to the peasant. This extended for weeks in every direction, and became peopled suddenly with fantastic beasts. *Rusalki* danced and sang openly in the fields, the Grey Wolf stalked the roadside, and Baba Yaga, the bony-legged witch, lived in her spinning hut and ate unwary Russians who failed to offer her the proper respect.

The forest and beyond contained paths and gateways to the third ring. If a bold and strong adventurer wandered the right roads, and avoided their pitfalls, he might come across the way to the Otherworld or perhaps be taken into the realm of the Water Tsar and his vast watery underworld. Traveling far enough, even the glass mountain that led to the land of the dead might be found. This circle was the extreme realm of Russian high fantasy, with kingdoms of gold, copper and silver, and six-legged winged horses, great serpents and shapeshifting wizards. In it, one could find “the wondrous wonder, the marvellous marvel.”

Of course, in a given campaign, the fantastic nature of any of these layers might be entirely in the imagination of the populace; see Chapter 7.

The Forest

The fantastic forest was a *single* place, accessible by simply walking beyond the areas of forest that a character knew. In it, Baba Yaga, the Beast Tsars and other major figures dwelt, usually within a day or two of wherever the hero began his journey.

If Baba Yaga lived a day north of Moscow in the real world, then a Russian peasant near Pskov would have to travel weeks to reach the same hut. In Fantasy Russia, however, all the country's woods blended into a single forest where normal rules of location did not apply, especially when it was convenient for the tale. GMs wishing a more realistic fantasy campaign can ignore this at will, but it was an important feature of Fantasy Russia.

The forest was an extreme version of real forests that the character knew. Trees were thicker and the light was dimmer; even in broad daylight those in the forest would have a -2 base darkness penalty, and the forest at night was completely



A Word of Caution

GURPS Russia is a game supplement, not an anthropology text. Where there are gaps and contradictions in the Russian folk tradition, we have trimmed and mended, choosing versions of the myths that work best for games. Readers interested in further detail are referred to the bibliography, particularly the literature-oriented writings of Serge Zenkovsky and the translated work of Aleksandr Afanas'ev, the Russian equivalent of the Brothers Grimm.

Zagovori

A *zagovor* is a spoken charm, a form of minor magic used by Russian peasants throughout medieval times and (in distant rural areas) into the 20th century. They ranged from a few sentences to hundreds of words, and were used to banish small ills (e.g., toothaches or a flu), attract (or get rid of!) lovers, and so on.

Zagovori could be pronounced by anyone, in his own interest. Professional magicians, doctors and wise women could also speak them over others. Positive requests, in particular, were complex, as this excerpt from a love charm shows:

"Go winds, seven daring winds, and collect the suffering from all the widows, and all the orphans, and all the children of the Earth, and take it to the beautiful maiden, Maria, and plant it in her heart. With an axe of steel cleave her heart in halves, and plant within it grief and sorrow, thirst and craving, pain and suffering. Plant it in her blood, liver, and all parts of her body, 77 parts of her body and one heart, 77 veins and one more vein. May the fair maiden grieve and long for Boris in her dreams all day long. May she not eat, not drink, not walk when walking, not sleep when sleeping, not wash with silk in the warm stream, not rub herself with silky branches. May she go forth and weep bitter tears, and may Boris seem to her dearer than the whole world . . ."

Requests that something be ended follow a simpler formula. First, the charm describes something, and then asks that the problem become more like it. A charm against toothaches describes a corpse, numb and without pain, and asks that the aching patient likewise become numb. Should Boris become tired of Maria, he might speak the following *zagovor* to rid himself of her:

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black (-10). Snow in the winter was twice as deep, and the air was twice as cold. Some important locales, sights and events *within* the forest include:

Baba Yaga's Hut: Always close at hand within the forest (two days walk at most) was the hut of Baba Yaga. Its yard had 12 poles surrounding it; 11 had skull-lanterns on them, but the 12th post was empty. It didn't have to *stay* that way, though, and Baba Yaga had plenty of poles lying around for large parties! The hut was made of logs, and spun about rapidly on animal legs (often those of a chicken). See p. 97 for further detail.

Unhallowed Pits: When a Russian died a sudden, "premature" death it was believed to be the work of evil spirits, and the soul, cheated out of its fated years, became one of the *zalozhniy* (see p. 110). Russians didn't give these unfortunates funeral rites, hence the term "unhallowed." Instead, the bodies were thrown into chasms, tossed into rivers or taken into the forest and tossed into pits dug for the purpose. Travelers in the deep woods might find pits full of the bodies of the envious dead.

Beast Communities: Russian tales were full of talking animals living in communities similar to Russian ones. Sometimes, such odd collections as a heron, a bear and a tiger might have a house together, and humans were occasionally involved. In one of the more unusual Baba Yaga tales (see *Respect*, p. 90), a cat and a bird lived together with a young boy (possibly a rescued runaway or abandoned child). There were even instances where animals *married* humans.

Omens and Signs: Many Russian travelers in folklore came across ominous painted signposts along desolate forest roads or trails. These usually led to adventure. To be more precise, they *warned* of "impending adventure," but the

brave/foolish/invincible hero never heeded them. Player characters will probably behave in a similar fashion.

Gateways to the Otherworld: The path to the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom wasn't *always* "beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands." In many stories, it was as little as a chasm into which the hero could be lowered on tied thongs. In some, the Otherworld and the Underwater Realm were one: entering a stream was the way to find it. In one story, a farmer reached the Otherworld (specifically, his vision of Heaven) by climbing a giant turnip that grew from his basement through his ceiling and up to the sky.

Monsters and Spirits: From the *leshii* to great whirlwinds and various Beast Tsars, monsters and spirits thickly populated the forests of Russian folklore. (See Chapter 6.)



Hermits and Wizards: Isolated huts of minor witches, wise men, hermits, *shashkas* and full-fledged sorcerers were to be found in the deep forest, far from the influence of spiteful Orthodox priests.

The Underwater Realm

Rusalki (water nymphs) were often portrayed as the daughters or servants of the Water Tsar, who ruled a vast, sunless kingdom in the murk and cold of Russian waters. It could only be reached during the summer months; the ice of winter formed an impenetrable barrier between Russia and this realm.

The precise nature of the Water Tsar and his kingdom varied from tale to tale. In some, he was a selfish ruler who abducted unwary Russians and forced them to live in his kingdom, tending his vast undersea herds; good Christians often escaped by praying to see the sun once again. In other stories, the Water Tsar was benevolent, calming the waters, at odds with the winds and other natural forces that made storms. In still others, he was an aloof, uncaring man who allowed Russians to drown without a second glance.

The Land of the Dead

Unlike many unpleasant pagan underworlds, *Peklo*, the land of the dead, was a warm place where tired Russian souls forever forgot Russia's bitter cold and darkness. Free of their earthly bonds, they made happy afterlives for themselves, and occasionally returned to Russia to help out relatives in need.

Peklo was separated from the Russian world by an incalculable distance that only a dead and properly buried spirit could normally cross. Rarely, a well-meaning hero (or a villain with a good enough plan) also made the difficult trip. Along with the distance, other obstacles stood in the path of the living hero, for instance, *Peklo* was above a huge mountain of glass or glassy steel. Amulets containing finemail parings (or clippings of owls' talons) were buried with the deceased, to help them climb the sheer, slick surface.

A journey to this land (e.g., to find a spirit for questioning, or to talk a spirit into returning to Russia for some great purpose) could be the object of an epic quest.

The Thrice-Tenth Kingdom (The Otherworld)

Whereas *Peklo* and the Underwater Realm were described only in vague and conflicting terms, possibly *hundreds* of stories were told of the Otherworld, the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom "beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands."

The Otherworld was sometimes far beyond the horizon, sometimes underground and sometimes in the sky, but always separated from Russia by powerful magic; no simple overland journey, no matter how treacherous, could bring one there. To gain entry to the Otherworld, a hero had to pass some sort of test, defeat some sort of monster, perform a service for Baba Yaga or bypass a magical barrier such as a river of fire. Often, these were combined.

In one story, three brothers came across a hut with a flock of sheep within a fence outside. Hungry and cold, the brothers went inside but couldn't find anyone. Two went to collect firewood. The third decided to butcher a sheep and prepare it for his brothers.



Zagovori [Continued]

"I will rise, Lords' humble servant, not blessed, without crossing myself, from the house to the door; from the gate not to the gate. I shall go out like smoke through the chimney and into the field. In the field flows a river; on the river rides a devil with his mate. In the boat they don't sit; with the oar they don't row; one thought they don't think; one truth they don't speak.

"So may I, Boris, Lord's humble servant Boris, so may I and she on a bench not sit, out the window not look, one thought not think, one truth not speak. White dog, grey cat – one spirit of the Earth. My words under lock and key."

At the GM's discretion, *zagovori* might be real magic. The existence of such minor charms and curses would add an interesting twist to an otherwise-historical campaign. In *any* campaign, the typical peasant *believes* such charms work. This is an example of *Folk Magic* (see p. 92).



When he was done, a man the size of a thumb, with a beard several feet long, came into the room and was shocked. "How dare you butcher my sheep without asking?!" he cried, and proceeded to beat the young man nearly to death. The little man left, and when the two brothers returned, the beaten brother claimed that he'd succumbed to fumes from the stove.

The next day, a different brother was alone. He, too, slaughtered a sheep, and he, too, met the thumb-sized man, who thrashed him just as soundly. When his brothers returned, he made a similar excuse.

On the third day, the youngest brother was left alone, and slaughtered a sheep. The thumb-sized man arrived and yelled at him, but the brother grabbed him by the beard. The thumb-sized man begged for mercy, but the youngest brother took him outside and nailed his beard to a stump. When his brothers returned, the youngest said, "I have captured your stove-fumes!" and took them outside. The beard was still there, but the little man had torn free. The brothers followed his trail of blood, and found an entrance leading beneath the ground to the Otherworld.

Running Otherworld Adventures

The Thrice-Tenth Kingdom can be a place of legend; a source of magical things, beasts and problems. Like Olympus, Nirvana or Asgard, the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom works best when it's an unreachable, unreal place to the player characters. High fantasy is well and good, but the hero invariably takes a back seat to the wonder of it all when the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom is entered.

Still, the Otherworld as an adventure location might be appropriate to the tastes of certain GMs and players. Some prefer the "loose," supremely magical style of play that the Otherworld encourages. Certainly, the PCs can get into a problem so knotty that only a grand quest could save them, and then a trip into the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom might suffice. If the heroes can survive the perils that they'll face, proving both their skills and cleverness (the Otherworld always tested both, and more), they should have a *lot* to brag about!

Locations Within the Otherworld

The Otherworld was composed of multiple levels of spectacular (some would say absurd) fantasy. A few of the most commonly mentioned locales follow; others can be added by the inventive GM:

The Three Kingdoms: There were three kingdoms (sometimes just castles) within the Otherworld: one of copper, one of silver and one of gold. In some stories, the castles were overseen by maidens or ladies who existed only to be rescued. In others, the ladies had powerful magical knowledge or objects. In all stories, the kingdoms were encountered in order; the golden kingdom was the largest and most magnificent, and couldn't be reached until the others were found. They were sometimes guarded by *zmei* (dragons) with increasing numbers of heads for each new castle.

The King's Palace: The Thrice-Tenth Kingdom had a king, sometimes called Tsar Kirbit or Kirbitei. He had a large palace, the traditional beautiful daughter (Vasilisa Kirbitievna) and a large herd of cows. His herdsman had the responsibility of giving the cows away to various *zmei* when they asked for them; the three-headed *zmei* got three cows, the nine-headed *zmei* got nine, and so on, up to the father of them all, the 12-headed *zmei*. The *zmei* lived in the Crystal Mountain. In some stories, Vasilisa was kept in a gilt-topped tower.

Koschei's Death: Koschei The Undying (see p. 99) was immortal because his soul (he called it "his death") was hidden in an egg which itself was hidden far from Russians, somewhere within the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom. The location (which varied) was one of extreme danger and surpassing strangeness.

The Crystal Mountain: Much of the Otherworld was taken up by a huge Crystal Mountain, in which the largest *zmei* lived. The mountain seemed, in some places, to be *growing*, absorbing all of the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom over a period of many years. This may have been the "glass mountain" upon which sat the land of the dead. To destroy the mountain, the hero had to slay the 12-headed *zmei* and cut open its body. In its left side was a coffer, in the coffer was a hare, in the hare was a duck, in the duck was an egg, and in the egg was a seed. If the seed was set fire and brought near the mountain, the mountain would melt.

The Sea: The Otherworld had a vast sea that took weeks to cross, and in it were various islands. In one story, Koschei's death was found on one of these islands, under an oak tree, in a coffer, in a hare, etc.

Otherworld Peasants: The Otherworld had forests and fields just like those of Russia, and many peasants and ordinary folk lived there. The forest had no *towns*, only isolated huts. The inhabitants could be anything from intelligent animals to game hunters, or even groups of friendly maidens guarding magic treasure.

ROLEPLAYING FOLKLORE

Russian folklore, like that of most cultures, is difficult to game in its purest form. While a story of three brothers, two strong and wise and the third foolish, going hunting, quarrelling over a barrel of salt, and fighting dragons in the meantime might be entertaining at fireside (especially if there is *vodka* to be had), it doesn't translate well into adventures. For one thing, most fairy tales involve only a single hero, or multiple characters who don't cooperate. Most *GURPS* campaigns focus on a small group of people who are, if not necessarily friends, at least working toward a common goal.

However, there are many *themes* of Russian fantasy that can be adapted to play, and doing so imparts the feeling of a fable without the limitations. Three examples follow:

Generosity

Russians valued hospitable and generous behavior, and this was impressed upon children in folk-tales. For example, Ivan needed a magical horse and he knew that Baba Yaga had a stable of them. He set off into the forest, hoping he could get one of her magical steeds and that he wouldn't get eaten.

The journey took much longer than it should have, and the hero's provisions ran out. Soon he was weak with starvation. He spied an eagle nesting over her chicks and resolved to kill and eat it. As he aimed his bow at the bird, it cried, "Don't kill me, Ivan! Don't leave my children as orphans!" Ivan was nearly unconscious, but he overcame his need for food and spared the eagle. Within the hour, he arrived at the hut of Baba Yaga and gained entry.

Baba Yaga welcomed him and listened to his request. She fed him and said, "Tend my horses for three days. If you can keep them from running away, you are worthy to own one. If not, your flesh will feed my daughters and your skull will light my yard."



Misery

This was a frightening figure from medieval Russian folklore. A later, simpler version of the spirit is described in detail on p. 108, but earlier versions were much grimmer than the spiteful, secular vice-spirit described there.

The early Misery was a powerful specter, appearing as a vengeful black hawk or raven, or as a grimly smiling, barefoot man with a scythe. His victims were those who had lived dishonorably or sinfully and still thrived. Indeed, Misery was the closest thing to a "just" force in Russian folk belief (see *Injustice*, p. 91). He was the punisher of the sinful, and his influence didn't reach within holy places.

Misery could not directly influence his victims; he had to outwit them, using a subtle arsenal of powers. Misery could manipulate dreams, appearing within them and making them seem prophetic. He would warn the dreamer to do something terrible (e.g., abandon his family) to avoid some imaginary fate. If this failed to trick his mark, Misery appeared again, appealing to the dreamer's vanity, and so on. Once he succeeded, he would change his tactics often in order to prevent early suicide. Misery thrived on worship and submission, and could temporarily make things go well for the victim, only to torment him further with misfortune.

Misery was driven by an overpowering, demonic *need* to fulfil his function. "I attached myself to others," Misery said in one tale, "for I cannot live empty-handed; I wish to live among people, from whom I cannot be driven away with a whim; but my chief seat and paternal home is among the carousers!" Misery took great pride in his dark purpose, boasting that he had taken many wise and rich men to their dooms by outwitting them. "They struggled with me unto their deaths, worsted by their luckless plight, until they took their home in the grave, and I covered them forever with the earth."

Continued on next page . . .

Ivan watched over the horses, but on the third night they ran off into all parts of the forest. Ivan had no hope of catching them all and wept, eventually falling asleep. When he awoke, the magic horses were all safely home and Baba Yaga was raging at them. "Why didn't you stay away? I could have eaten him!" The horses responded, "We tried, Baba Yaga, but the birds flocked against us and nearly pecked our eyes out!" Ivan's act of generosity had saved his life and gained him a magical steed.

Other stories had similar tests in them, and the concept can easily be adapted into a fantasy scenario.



Respect

In Russian folklore being disrespectful was a *bad thing*, and was often fatal! Those who approached many major Russian characters, such as *any* king or prince (beast or otherwise), Koschei the Undying, *zmei* and others, with appropriate respect, going through whatever absurd rituals they demanded without complaint, tended to be treated kindly. Those who didn't, weren't.

Baba Yaga, in particular, demonstrated this in many stories, as she represented the fear young children often have of the elderly, and the frustration they often have with the habits of the old. This tale about a boy, a cat and a bird living together is typical. Each day the bird and the cat went to cut firewood, and the boy was left on his own. The cat explained that Baba Yaga would come by, and that, no matter what she did, getting angry with her was a bad idea. "She's an old woman, after all, and they have their strange ways." The boy agreed to be good.

When Baba Yaga arrived, the boy hid behind the stove. Baba Yaga moved to the cupboard and began counting the spoons. "This is the cat's spoon!" she cried. "This is the bird's spoon!" The boy began to get angry at the old woman for touching the spoons, and when Baba Yaga said, "And this is the boy's spoon!" he jumped out, pointed a quivering finger at her, and shouted "Baba Yaga! Don't touch my spoon!" Baba Yaga swept the lad up and carried him off to be eaten; only by yelling for his friends was he saved.

The next day, they left him with the same message, and explained that they'd be gone for some time. The boy agreed, and the scene repeated itself. When Baba Yaga counted the boy's spoon, he managed (barely) to hold his tongue. So Baba Yaga counted them again. "This," she said, grinning, "is the *boy's* spoon!" The boy, biting his lip, said nothing.

And Baba Yaga did it *again*. The boy gave in, leaping on top of the stove and screaming, "Baba Yaga! *Don't touch my spoon!*" And Baba Yaga carried him off and ate him, for the cat and the bird were too far away to hear his cries.

Injustice

In contrast to the moral lesson of Generosity, and the ethical lesson of Respect, Justice, when it existed at all in a Russian fairy tale, served to punish, and almost never to reward. More often than not, the hero ended up slighted through the fault of his own. A villain, provided he was clever, could win out over a foolish hero. The thought that the world responded with equal fairness to a fair and righteous man was considered absurd by Russian tale-tellers: they had no intention of corrupting their audiences with ideas that might hurt them if taken seriously. This is cynical, admittedly, but it is *very* Russian, and to some extent should be present in any *GURPS Russia* campaign, fantastic or historical.

A clear example of the unjust tale is the story of the cabbage that grew to the sky. The farmer who grew it was poor and old, and had an old wife. One day, he climbed up the cabbage-stalk for many hours until finally he came to the sky, in which he cut a hole and entered the Otherworld. The landscape in all directions was filled with millstones, and each turn of the stones produced a thick slice of bread with butter and cream, as well as a pot of stew. The old man ate and ate, and was very happy.

When he returned to his wife, she was very excited, and he resolved to show her the millstones. Placing his wife in a bag and the end of the bag in his teeth, he proceeded to climb. He became very tired, however, and when his wife asked, "Are we there yet?" for the third time, he wasn't thinking and opened his mouth to say, "Almost." His wife fell to the ground below.

The farmer quickly descended, and found that there was nothing left of her but broken bones. As he cried, a clever fox approached and asked him his trouble. The man explained, and the fox promised to heal his wife. "But," said the fox, "you must not watch me. I'll go in your house, and if you look in she'll die again."

The farmer waited, and the fox began making the woman's remains into a stew. Every time the old man asked after her, the fox said, "She's stirring!" or "She's getting warm!" or some other sinister half-truth. When the farmer could finally wait no more, the fox emerged, and ran off. The old man was left alone and miserable with the clean bones of his dead wife.

While a number of morals can be drawn from this story, the last line of a similar tale says (roughly), "the miracle wasn't that he fell from heaven, but that he reached it at all."



Misery [Continued]

Misery was not alone: misfortune, or "luckless plight" was his ally, and attached itself to his victims. He spoke of his relatives, saying, "There is a godly race of them: we are all gentle and insinuating."

Unlike the later Misery, a "mere" creature from a dark fairy tale, the early Misery is appropriate only in a distinctly horrific *GURPS Russia* campaign. With the exception of the sudden Unluckiness disadvantage, Misery's torment has no mechanical game effect. The dreams, and the character's reaction to them, should be roleplayed, and can be set against the backdrop of a larger storyline: the demonic Misery cannot be portrayed in a one-session adventure! Ambitious GMs fond of building their own fantasies in historical context can flesh out the "gentle, insinuating" pantheon hinted at by Misery, and perhaps reconcile the earlier and later versions. The small spirit of drunkenness might be a child or servant of the greater demonic entity, or simply a spirit taking the same name.

GMs wishing to portray the demonic Misery also have the burden of responding to PC attempts to defeat him. In the original stories, becoming a monk was the only escape.

RUSSIAN MAGIC

Magical Gifts

Wizards and monsters of Russian folklore often had the power to bestow on mortals one of two magical gifts: the power to change shape or to speak with animals.

A hero could be given one of these gifts under almost any circumstances. In one tale, the hero came across a group of animals quarrelling over a carcass. A falcon pleaded to the hero to divide it for them, since they had argued over it for 30 years. The youth gave the head to the ants, the skin to the reptiles, the bones to the beasts and the flesh to the birds. The falcon was so grateful that, from that moment onward, the youth could turn into a falcon whenever he wished.

The power to speak with animals was most often associated with serpents, but wizards were known to grant it, as well. Typically, the hero was about to slay a *zmei* (a many-headed dragon, p. 111), when the desperate beast offered the gift of animal-speech in exchange for its life. In other stories, the hero killed and ate the dragon to gain the power. Eating snakes to speak with animals was also part of Russian magical ritual, and probably dated back to Slavic totemism.

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In general, Russian fantasy can be faithfully recreated by two forms of magic: Traditional Magic and Folk Magic. The first form is that covered in the *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Magic*. Many wizards and most heroes of the extended legends can be represented by the standard *GURPS* rules, with the addition of Lycanthropy rules and the Shapeshifter advantage (see pp. 95 and 37, respectively), and the new spells found on pp. 93-95. Folk Magic is detailed here.

Folk Magic

In folk tales, wizards often had one or two predictable, definite abilities, e.g., the power to turn into one or several types of animal, to fly or to turn invisible. They also possessed some secret knowledge, such as many ways to reach the Otherworld and information on the treasures there. In game terms, these would be represented by Lycanthropy and the Shapeshifter advantage, a couple of simple spells and Area Knowledge: Otherworld (although it's best to charge a stiff Unusual Background for *that* skill).

That's Folk Magic at its most mechanical. Beyond that, anything seems to go. A girl who was forced to marry her brother ran to the old women of the village for help. The old women instructed her to make four dolls and to place them in the corners of her bedroom. When the brother called her to bed, she was to wait. On the night of their honeymoon, when her brother called her, the dolls began an eerie chanting and the earth began to open up. While her brother waited impatiently, the girl was drawn into the Otherworld. The brother arrived and chopped the heads off of the dolls, but he was too late – she was safe.

Did the girl have Magery and cast some sort of "Open Gate" spell? Probably not. For one thing, the old women didn't have 200 hours to teach her the spell, much less the prerequisites. The story contains no hint of fatigue loss on her part, and she uttered not a single magic word; she just made the dolls and did as she was told. The old women were certainly sorceresses, but the story implies that they simply knew that if you did a certain thing another thing would happen under the right circumstances. And *Create Gate to the Otherworld by Sewing Dolls When You've Been Forced To Marry Your Brother* makes an unwieldy title for a spell that shouldn't get much use.

But how does one game such magic? Isn't the prospect hopelessly complicated and deadly to game-balance? Not really. In fact, it's the simplest way to run magic in a *GURPS Russia* campaign!

In a Folk Magic campaign, spells have names, rituals, effects and special circumstances, but no further mechanics. The GM needn't worry about compiling a long list of spells, or even assigning point costs as spellcasters in these stories are rarely the central characters – they're NPCs, not PCs. Wizards and beasts whom the characters meet know the secrets, and they can pass them on to the characters as rewards for good turns done (see the *Magical Gifts* sidebar).

There are no die rolls made for folk spells. The character simply performs the ritual; if it's done right, and the conditions are right, the spell succeeds (although there might be special rules and side-effects that he doesn't know about).

Likewise, not everybody can perform all magic. In Russian stories women have a decided magical advantage. It is doubtful that the girl's brother could have followed her into the Otherworld by making dolls and waiting. He probably couldn't sew, and such simple skills were associated with early pagan rituals, many of which were limited to the village girls. The "sexist" angle continues elsewhere; however, all shapeshifting mages in Russian folklore were men.

This play style can be combined with normal magic. It allows the PCs to noticeably grow in power, and learn arcane secrets, while the GM, since he adds effects only as he wants to, has total creative and power-level control. Once a group gets used to this sort of play, the GM can even assign point costs to the spells if he likes (the ritual to escape marrying a brother would cost 1 character point, at most), permitting PCs to start with a little magic.

New Spells

The spells below (presented in "mechanical magic" format) are either inspired or adapted directly from Russian folklore. GMs engaging in further research will find *dozens* of other magical feats to add to this list.

Note that some of the spells and colleges referred to appear in *GURPS Magic*. A GM without access to that book can ignore them, or simply assign new *Basic Set* prerequisites.

Body of Wind

Regular; Resisted by HT

The subject's body becomes a whirlwind; it can have any radius from two to four times the subject's original size. His Move is 10; he can float through the air, through cracks, etc. Clothes (up to skill/2 pounds) also become wind, but lose any magic powers they might have had while in wind form. The subject remains visible (as a white, whirling mist), retains his normal senses and is able to speak.

A being in whirlwind form is immune to physical (not mental) harm; the only physical attacks that can hurt him are punches from another vaporous creature. Each casting of Destroy Air inflicts 2d damage on him.

Unlike Body of Air, a subject in whirlwind form can affect the real world. Treat him as a human in the center of the whirlwind, with Reach equal to the radius; his ST is *doubled* while in whirlwind form! He can lift things, people and so on (but still has only two hands). His DX is reduced by 4, and for close manual tasks (e.g., lockpicking, surgery, picking up coins) it is reduced by 10. Spellcasting is at -3.

Anyone within the radius of the character must make a ST roll each turn to remain standing. All DX-based skills are at -5, and missile attacks that pass through the whirlwind only hit on a critical success. There is no safe "eye."

Duration: Five minutes.

Cost: 8 to cast, 4 to maintain. Cost does *not* multiply when casting it on large creatures.

Time to cast: Two seconds; the storm springs into full strength immediately upon completion of the spell.

Prerequisites: Magery 3, Body of Air and Windstorm at 16+, and one spell from each of five colleges other than Air.

College: Air.

Call Swarm

Regular

Lets the caster summon a group of small creatures that immediately attack a foe (or foes) stated at the time of casting. There are several versions of this spell; each for a different animal. Each is a separate spell.

Two forms of this spell are widely known in Russia: Bird Swarm and the less common Insect Swarm (which calls only flying insects). Other possibilities include Rat, Snake and Bat swarms.

Magical Gifts [Continued]

In game-play, these abilities are simply advantages earned in play (whether the player has to pay points for them as well as earning them is up to the GM). The ability to change shape in general is described in Chapter Two. The ability to change into a *specific* animal is a special form of lycanthropy (see p. 95). Characters wishing to start play with these abilities may do so if the GM allows it, but a 10-point Unusual Background (Magical Gift) would certainly be appropriate.

And if mages can simply "pass on" the ability to shapeshift, can the characters do so? Can they give innkeepers the ability to turn themselves into birds in exchange for a night's rest? The answer, judging from the tales, might be "yes," but the ability to pass on such magic might be a special advantage, or a spell in and of itself. In addition, such gifts were given in trust, with the understanding that they would be treated with respect and not used carelessly; characters who frivolously give the ability away might find that they have, in fact, *given the ability away*, and can no longer use it! Just the hint that such might be the case should encourage caution.

Passage to Peklo

According to custom, a person who did not receive proper funeral services was doomed to walk the Earth as a ghost (see p. 110), but those who received the rituals traveled to *Peklo*, the realm of the dead.

The "proper" rites varied from period to period. The Slavs cleared the walls and ceilings of hanging objects and cobwebs, so as not to obstruct the flight of the spirit, and often took the body out of the house through a special opening prepared for it, instead of the door. Ibn Fadlan described a 10-day Rus ceremony involving the burning of a dead warrior in a boat with all of his belongings and one of his servant girls, who had sex with all of the warrior's brothers and close friends before being stabbed to death by them. This grim and horrible ceremony, once thought to have originated with the Vikings, may have been Scythian in origin.

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Passage to Peklo [Continued]

Wizards

Russian has no shortage of words that mean "wizard," and the GM and players should use the ones that sound best to them. In addition to *volkhvy* (see p. 81), mages were known as *kudeshniks* (practitioners of witchcraft), *charodey* (wizards who worked charms), *bay-alkniks* (from the Russian words for whispering), *koldun* (from *koldovat*, "to practice sorcery"), *vedun* (referring to arcane wisdom), *veshchij* (seers of the future), *veshchun* (soothsayer), *znakhari* (healer) and others. Each also had a feminine form.

Each term had a distinct meaning, corresponding to the abilities of the mage. This mirrored Western terms such as necromancer or diviner, and can be adapted to correspond to the Colleges in *GURPS Magic*, if desired.

Lycanthropy

One of the most common of Russian fairy-tale powers was the ability to change shape. In Russian tales *muzhiks* passed the time away by constantly turning into animals.

Russian lycanthropy represented the magical ability to change shape, through either a magical gift or knowledge of arcane sciences and the occult, and not a disease or curse. Russian lycanthropes didn't have to change at the full moon, and could change shape any time they pleased. They weren't especially vulnerable to silver, and did not regenerate.

Russian weres have normal stats in human form. However, they have special ST, DX and HT stats, as well as extra DR and possibly PD when in beast form. A were with a DX of 14 or greater receives a +1 to DX when in beast form; DX of 9 or less, suffers a -1. IQ is unaffected by the change. Remember that an animal doesn't have hands; a were in beast form cannot pick locks, open doors and so on, but its DX is its basic attack score, just as if it was a normal animal. Weres in beast form cannot talk. The change from human to animal form takes three seconds. During this time, the were can do nothing and take no active defense.

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When the spell is cast, a group of creatures of the appropriate type converges on the caster's chosen foe, attacking as a *swarm* (see p. B143) until they are killed or dismissed by the caster (which costs no further ST, and the animals immediately return to their business). The spell does not require concentration, and does not count as a spell "on" while the swarm is attacking. All called creatures come from the caster's immediate area (a 20-yard-radius circle) and the spell cannot be cast at range.

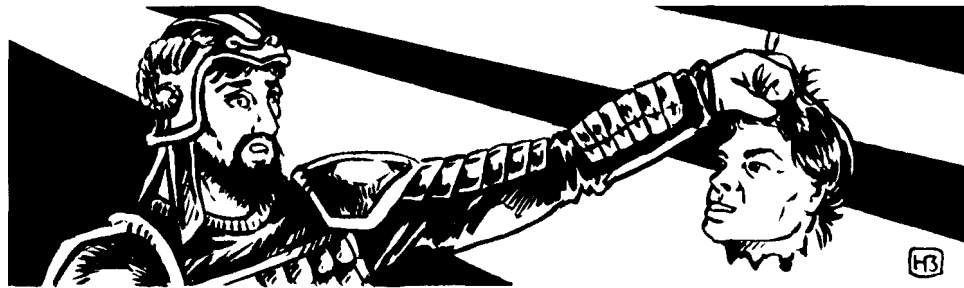
The most typical insects called are honeybees and mosquitoes (see p. B143 and p. 105, respectively). A bird swarm does not occur in nature, but when called is equal to about a dozen small birds, with a Move of 9, dispersed by 10 hits. The birds do 1d-1 damage with beak and claw per turn (armor protects normally). A given area of forest can produce one or two bird swarms, at the GM's discretion. Producing a swarm of insects is less likely, and is very dependent on the area and weather. In an apiary, however, this spell is *deadly*; a single large hive can hold up to 30 bee swarms!

Duration: Special (see above).

Cost: 6, cannot be maintained.

Prerequisite: Appropriate "Control" spell for the animal (Mammal Control for a Rat Swarm, Insect Control for Insect Swarm, etc.) at level 16+.

College: Animal.



Decapitation

The subject's head comes off! When this spell is cast, the subject's head (or one of them, if it has several) comes free of its body, but continues to live on its own. The subject is not harmed, but the head takes falling damage if it isn't carefully removed or caught. The head can talk, see and control the actions of its body normally. If the head is somehow blinded (put in a bag, for instance), it directs its body with great difficulty and if the mage attempted to cast a spell requiring hand motions, the range penalties would apply from his *body*, not his head!

The spell, once cast, is permanent until somebody puts the head back in the proper place and wishes it to attach (if the head is unwilling, proceed to a Contest of Wills). If cast on a foe who then regains the head and re-attaches it, the caster could certainly cast the spell again . . .

Beyond combat, this spell has several uses, for example, a mage with a broken leg could leave his body behind, and travel with the party as a head. In Russian folklore, vain princesses used this spell to wash and decorate their hair easily in the morning. Note that a body cannot feed itself without a mouth.

Duration: As above.

Cost: 4.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisites: IQ 15, five Body Control spells.

College: Body Control.

Divination

This spell is described on *GURPS Magic*, p. 55. New methods of Divination appropriate to Russia include:

Graveweed Summoning: Divination by smoking (in a pipe) weeds grown from a person's grave. When the smoke appears, a single question may be asked of it. The smoke answers with the voice of the deceased, and only answers questions about his own experiences and knowledge. Obviously, this spell is useless until weeds have grown over the deceased's grave – magically forced weed growth doesn't work. There are many other examples of divination by spirits in Russian mythology; most are much more powerful, and should be represented by the Summon Spirit spell. *Prerequisites*: two Plant spells, one spell of each element and Summon Spirit.

Sympathetic Tidings: This spell is rather limited; it only divines whether a given subject is troubled (injured, dead or in dire need of help). Either an article of clothing or a favorite object owned by the subject is needed. When the spell is cast, the object reveals if the subject is in trouble; a dagger bleeds, a shirt turns dark, etc. This doesn't reveal the *nature* of the trouble, only if there *is* any. Casting time is 10 minutes, and Cost is 3. *Prerequisite*: Pathfinder.

Ursomancy: Divining by observing a trained bear (for bear stats and prices, see p. 104). Questions are limited to yes/no answers; with properly phrased questions, the bear could determine the gender of an unborn child, the outcome of a marriage, and so on. Casting time is 15 minutes. *Prerequisites*: two spells of each element and Beast-Soother at 14+.

Of the existing forms of Divination, only Astrology, Haruspication, Pneiromancy and Pyromancy are appropriate to medieval Russia. Rune-Casting might be available to Viking wizards in a Kievan Era fantasy game, at the GM's option.

Swallowing Soil

Regular; Resisted by IQ

This spell causes the earth to soften and collapse, trying to suck the subject underground! Only the very strong-willed can resist the pull of the soil.

When the spell is cast, the resistance roll determines how deep the victim is pulled. For every 3 points the roll is failed by, the character is drawn one foot into the earth. Repeated castings are usually necessary to completely bury a foe. Use the *Combat at Different Levels* rules on p. B123 for buried characters attempting to fight; Dodge is at a penalty equal to depth (in feet), and retreat is impossible.

It requires two full turns of effort and a ST-(depth × 2) roll to pull free of the soil; an additional -1 is applied in winter, when the ground is harder. Victims two feet deep or less come out standing, others come out kneeling.

Victims may also expend ST (taking fatigue) to better their chances. Each ST point spent in this "extra effort" adds 1 to the ST roll; fatigue is taken *after* the roll is tried (successful or not).

Duration: Instantaneous.

Cost: 4.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery, Shape Earth at 14+.

College: Earth.

Information



Lycanthropy [Continued]

All wounds taken in beast form carry over directly on return to human form, point for point, and *vice versa*. A dead or unconscious were reverts back to human form. The four most common types of lycanthrope in Russian fantasy were were-wolves, -bears, -eagles and -snakes; *dozens* more existed. The stats on p. M110 or CI44 can be used for these and other lycanthrope forms, but their point costs are increased by 5.

Christian Miracles

Most of the fantasy material here assumes that the supernatural in a Russian campaign is based on folk tradition and fairy tales which sprang from early paganism. An exciting fantasy campaign can also be run from the *Orthodox* point of view, or with both Christian and pagan supernatural forces real.

Russian Christianity was full of vibrant images and fantastic feats. Early Russians paid less attention to the Bible than to the vast collections of saints' lives and apocrypha which were pronounced non-canonical by the more sober Greek and Roman churches. These works played to the rich Russian imagination, with images of mighty warriors, pillars of flame and saintly miracles. The legend of St. George and the Dragon was as popular in Russia as in any other Christian nation of the Middle Ages.

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МАГИКАЛ ОБЪЕКТС ФЯФЛ RUSSIAN FOLKLORE

Christian Miracles [Continued]

In an Orthodox fantasy campaign, priests pray to God and get answers, and saintly ones can perform miracles. *Volkvy* and *skomorokhs* still travel between villages and hide out in the forest, but they are pawns of the Devil, winning over peasants by appealing to their baser instincts: lust, gluttony and fear. Russians might enjoy it now, but they are dooming themselves to eternal torment.

To the typical *muzhik* there was no division between Christianity and paganism, hence the term *dvoeverie*, which doesn't mean two conflicting faiths, but two faiths practiced at once. The stories once reserved for pagan gods became tales of saints rather easily, and the cult of the Mother Goddess became the cult of the Virgin, remaining almost entirely intact. Peasants worshiped the old gods and the One God side-by-side, apparently never noticing the poor math involved.

Characters in Orthodox fantasy might be priests (even saintly ones), concerned (and probably worldly) monks trying to do battle against the forces of evil, or simple peasants, caught in the middle. Priestly magic is best represented by the Patron advantage. Every Russian of the period had a patron saint, and often kept a small icon with him for solace and luck. In Orthodox fantasy, such patron saints really work miracles on the behalf of the character. Use the normal Patron rules, assuming a base cost of 25 points. Instead of rolling for the appearance of the Patron at the beginning of each session, rolls are made when the character calls upon his saint for aid. The roll is modified for piety: if the character has stayed within the strict tenets of the Kenotic ideal (see *Christ and the Kenotic Ideal*, p. 76), it should be worth at least a +2. Drunkenness or lying (even for a good cause), would be worth -4 or more. Only one try per session should be allowed, unless the characters are in *dire* straits and the GM has need of a *deus ex machina*.

In a campaign based on Russian folklore, magic objects are usually gifts from powerful NPCs in exchange for services (or the promise of services) by the characters. While finding a skull-lantern on the body of a slain warrior is reasonable enough, the thought of a treasure chest containing 200 *rubles*, 400 *grivna*, 1,000 *dengi*, 4,000 *kuna*, a suit of +2 PD leather armor and a flying carpet inspires cold chills, particularly if found in a cramped, underground room.

Most of the magic objects that appear in Russian folktales are fairly traditional: self-sweeping brooms, *guslis* on which anyone can play beautiful music, invisibility caps, invincibility shirts and the whole range of magic potions. There are a few unique items described below.



Guardian Doll

Magical dolls aid young Russian girls in many tales. The most common of these was the guardian doll, an intelligent doll that came to life whenever its owner was in need. In the most popular such story, a little girl was held prisoner by Baba Yaga, and would be eaten if she couldn't perform several arduous chores. While the witch was away, the doll did the work and consoled the girl. The dolls aren't manufactured enchanted objects, but seem rather to be helpful spirits possessing the dolls.

The GM must decide whether such dolls work for grown-ups, and if they work for men (the latter seems unlikely). If they retain their magic when their masters grow up, a player might want one for a PC! A guardian doll is treated as an Ally with a base cost of 15 points. See p. 107 for a typical guardian doll.

Magic Apples

Growing wild in certain forests were trees which sprouted magic apples. Each apple retained its powers for as long as it remained fresh (a day or two in summer, a week or more in winter). There were three varieties: Apples of Youth, Apples of Beauty and Horn Apples. An Apple of Youth restores the eater to age 20, or half his current age (whichever is less) when eaten; further Apples have no effect. An Apple of Beauty changes the eater's Appearance to Very Handsome/Beautiful instantly. A Horn Apple causes a horn to grow out of the character's head; two Horn Apples create two horns (one for each side), but further Horn Apples have no effect. Eating either an Apple of Youth or an Apple of Beauty eliminates the horns.

Rolling Ball

This was a ball that, when dropped on the ground, began rolling at about four feet per second (the speed of a casual walk) toward a single goal, "programmed" into the ball when it was first enchanted. It led its user on the safest and most direct path possible, making decisions as necessary when two paths seemed equally good. When the owner was tired, the ball became a downy bed that protected him from the elements while he slept. When a river or chasm intervened, the ball became a bridge. The ball could only be given away. If it was stolen, it didn't work for the thief: it only led him back to its rightful owner!

Samobranka (Magic Tablecloth)

Many Russian fairy tales feature an endless supply of food, and *samobranka* (literally "self-foodmaker") was a popular myth. When laid over a flat surface and secured firmly, this ordinary seeming tablecloth provided a sumptuous feast (food and drink, hot and cold, with temporary vessels and plates) with no limit to the number of times it could be used.

Servant Box

The Servant Box could only be found on a throne in a small house in the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom. When opened, either 12 or 24 (50% chance) men leapt out and asked the wishes of the owner. The men were super-workers, and could build nearly anything; assume that they have all the tools and raw materials to build nearly any mundane item imaginable. In addition, each was worth a work-force of 1,000 men. Thus, a project requiring 1,500 man-hours (such as a 30-oar shallow boat) could be completed by a 12-man crew in just under eight minutes!

Skull-Lantern

Created from the skulls of Baba Yaga's victims, skull-lanterns adorned her yard, and she was known to give them to worthy seekers. A skull-lantern was a human skull filled with light that shone from the eye sockets and mouth, lighting up a room much like a modern camp-lantern. At sunrise, the light disappeared and the lantern became a normal skull; at sunset, the light returned. Baba Yaga could create these lanterns as easily as killing a trespasser, but no other character in Russian folklore knew the secret of their manufacture.

РЯФЛИЕНТ РЕФПЛЕ

While many of the most common figures in Russian folklore are best described as monsters, some of the most monstrous are best described as characters.

Baba Yaga the Bony-Legged

Baba Yaga was probably the most familiar and powerful image of Russian folklore. She was associated directly with both the forest and the Otherworld, and seemed to have direct control over the powers of life, death and animals.

Physically, Baba Yaga was a huge old woman, too heavy even to walk. She filled her small hut almost entirely, and was often found lying on the stove with her gigantic, disfigured nose jammed into the ceiling or stirring the coals of her fire. She sometimes worked a spinning wheel, wove, or herded her flock of geese simply by staring at them. Her teeth and fingernails were made of iron, and she sharpened both in anticipation of her dinner. The sight of Baba Yaga invariably caused fear and revulsion (Fright Check at -6).

Her powers were many; she knew much of the Otherworld, and, if properly convinced, would help heroes find it, and things within it. She was prophetic but extremely cryptic, ensuring that only the clever benefited from her advice. She made poisons and potions, and had access to the healing waters of life and the deadly waters of death. She spoke to and controlled beasts of the forest, and turned her hapless victims to birds, frogs or even stone. She also had the power to create skull-lanterns. If a Russian hid in her house, she could tell by the smell:

Fire and Vermin

Crucial to understanding much of the symbolism in Russian folklore are two of the most powerful images known to the Russian peasant: fire and vermin.

Fire

Old Russia was cold, dark and made of wood. It is hardly surprising that fire was a sacred and feared thing. From 1330 to 1453, no less than 17 major fires destroyed much of Moscow, and the recorded history of medieval Novgorod notes over 100 blazes. The great Russian celebrations of winter and spring often began as drunken carnivals and ended in tragedy, as entire towns and villages burned to the ground. Forest fires were common and could be gigantic: the steady breeze and unbroken forest could carry a blaze for a week across Russia, leaving ruin in its wake and forcing starving wolves to search for food in villages.

Fire was seen as a "clean," destructive force, as opposed to "unclean" vermin. In a Russian monastery, fires (even cooking fires) could not be lit without ceremony, with flame brought from the sanctuary lamp. Things burned were seen as being taken to Heaven. One 17th-century visitor to Russia wrote that "to make a conflagration remarkable in this country there must be at least 7,000 or 8,000 houses consumed."

The earliest form of drama in Russia was the Byzantine "furnace pageant," a dramatic presentation of the rescue of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from Nebuchadnezzar in the biblical Book of Daniel. Russians gave the show new glory by adding *real* fire to the staging. The most common biblical events used in Russian services and quoted in tales were those dealing with either divine or infernal flames; Elijah, who rode to heaven in a fiery chariot, was one of the best loved biblical figures.

The colloquial personification of fire was "the red rooster;" to commit arson was "to set the red rooster free." Barns and houses in medieval Russia were often decorated with paintings of roosters to appease fire and keep it away.

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Fire and Vermin [Continued]

Vermin

Russia was crawling with vermin, from rats to the dreaded typhus-bearing louse, common in the woollen coats and caftan of every Russian. In summer, huge clouds of mosquitoes descended on peasants, who had little in the way of protection.

These vermin traveled over the ground or in the air, and in the communal baths (see p. 23) would spread from Russian to Russian. The 14th and 17th centuries saw plague outbreaks possibly worse than those in western Europe. A visitor to Russia, staying over in a village on his way to the capital, was warned to sleep with his servants, since the rats might carry him off if he slept alone.

Baba Yaga

Semi-human witch/demi-goddess; age indeterminate (looks 50-90); 5'8", 350 lbs.; greying dark hair; black eyes. ST 13, DX 16, IQ 18, HT 20.

Basic Speed 9, Move 0 (see below).

Dodge 3.

Damage: *Thrust* 1d; *Swing* 2d-1.

No armor; heavy encumbrance from Fat.

Point Total: 787 (plus spells).

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Absolute Timing, Acute Taste/Smell +2, Animal Empathy, Danger Sense, Empathy, Immunity to Disease, Intuition, Unaging, Luck (30 points), Magery 3, Night Vision, Peripheral Vision, Rapid Healing, Status (demi-goddess), Strong Will +4, Toughness (DR 1), Wealthy.

Disadvantages: Appearance (Hideous), Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Fat (-20 points), Gluttony, Intolerance (Russians, particularly men), Lame (effectively legless), Odious Personal Habit (cannibalism), Reputation (-4, everyone, all the time), Social Stigma (witch/pagan symbol/outsider), Stubbornness, Truthfulness.

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"I smell a Russian bone!" was her cry. She moved about by flying on a large stone pestle, steering with the mortar and using her broom to sweep away any sign that she might have left in her wake.

Baba Yaga was a cunning shapeshifter who could turn herself into a serpent, a frog, a pig or even a dismembered goat hung on hooks on her hut's walls; when the victim entered her house, the parts of the goat flew off the racks and reformed into the witch.

If forced into combat, Baba Yaga fought with her broom, her mortar and pestle, a fireplace poker, a crooked scythe or her sharp teeth and talons. In any case, she fought from atop her pestle when in her normal form. Baba Yaga was immortal (she was, in fact, a pagan goddess, forced into her monster role by the arrival of Christianity); if she was killed, she was active in the forest again in a few weeks.

Baba Yaga's Hut

The Hungry Witch lived in a small, windowless and doorless *izba*, made of logs. It stood on two giant chicken legs, and spun rapidly in a yard that contained her geese and horses, and which was surrounded by 11 skull-lanterns on poles with a 12th pole standing empty.

In addition to the fact that the hut may have been alive, Baba Yaga could command it to seal a person inside. Presumably, it could walk out of the yard, but it never did so in Russian tales.

Attempting to force a way into Baba Yaga's hut was a dangerous prospect: it spun at speeds faster than any Russian could possibly run, and (with no visible openings) would sling anyone who managed to grab it into the forest at dangerous speed. To get the hut to stop spinning, the proper spell (a Folk Magic incantation) had to be used, usually something like, "Hut, hut! Still you should be, with your back to the forest and your door to me!" In some stories, the hut wasn't spinning at all, and its legs (if they were even visible) were bent to lower the hut invitingly to the ground.

Baba Yaga's Relatives

In a few stories, Baba Yaga was described as the mother or wife of the largest Russian *zmei*. After heroes slew the beast, Baba Yaga often appeared to wreak her revenge.

In many stories, she had two or three beautiful daughters, who were cannibalistic, but much more likely to be kind to passers-by than their mother. If Baba Yaga was out when the heroes arrived, the daughters would invite them in and feed them, complaining that they rarely got anyone near enough to talk to before their mother ate him. When Baba Yaga returned unexpectedly (which was traditional), they did their best to excuse the strong Russian smell in the hut.

In a few stories, she had 31 daughters, and in one was the husband of Koschei: the Undying.

Baba Yaga's Role

Apart from her occasional role as wife to monsters, Baba Yaga served three primary functions in folklore, and therefore in fantastic **GURPS Russia** campaigns: cannibalistic kidnapper, gateway to the Otherworld and simple attacker.

Cannibal: In this role, Baba Yaga resembles the witch of *Hansel and Gretel*. She lived in the forest, and flew through the woods hunting children to eat. She usually found them when they were lost or gathering mushrooms. She carried them to her hut and attempted to toss them in the oven to cook. In many stories,



Baba Yaga [Continued]

Quirks: Gives cryptic clues; Dramatically changes character toward a person based on his approach; Terrorizes children for fun; Stirs hot coals with her nose; Hates the smell of Russians.

Skills: Acting-18, Agronomy/TL2-20, Alchemy/TL2-20, Animal Handling-25, Area Knowledge (Otherworld)-19, Area Knowledge (Russian forests)-25, Area Knowledge (Russia)-17, Botany/TL2-20, Carousing-20, Cooking-26, Naturalist-20, History-20, Physician/TL2-22, Poisons-19, Riding (Mortar)-18, Staff-16, Stealth-17, Surgery/TL2-20, Survival (Forest)-25, Teaching-20, Theology (Eastern Slav)-30, Throwing-17, Two-Handed Axe/Mace-16, Zoology-20.

Spells: Any that the GM assigns, at 20 or higher – *much* higher! Baba Yaga certainly knows every Animal spell that exists in the campaign. She also knows several Elemental spells, including Flesh to Stone. She knows the secret of making skull-lanterns, as well as many Folk Magic spells.

Weapons: Various. Treat pestle as a baton doing +2 damage, also uses broom (staff), scythe and others. Remember the -6 to melee attacks due to leglessness.

Equipment: Baba Yaga moves about on a flying mortar, which has Move 4 when she simply wills it, and Move 6 when she helps it by "rowing" with the pestle. She has a broom with which she sweeps away her pestle-tracks.

This is a conservative view of Baba Yaga. As a former (or simply weakened) goddess, Baba Yaga can be assumed to be omniscient on several subjects, especially those regarding earth and forest. The above version assumes that she has fallen into a state of semi-mortality, which is in keeping with many later stories.

Koschei the Undying

Demonic personage; age irrelevant (looks dead); 5'10", 80 lbs.; semi-skeletal; red, bristly beard; hollow, dark eyes.
ST 10, DX 11, IQ 15, HT 11.

Basic Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 6.

Damage: *Thrust* 1d-2; *Swing* 1d.

PD 3; DR 4 (magical and inherent).

Point Total: 107 (plus spells and unique advantages).

Advantages: External Soul (unique advantage), Literacy, Magery 3, Night Vision, Wealth (Comfortable), the power to grant extra lives.

Disadvantages: Appearance (Ugly), Compulsive Behavior (wife-stealing), Delusions ("If I woo them sincerely, they might love me."), Gullibility (only when dealing with women), Impulsive, Jealous, Lecherous, Overconfidence, Reputation (-2, everyone, 50% of the time), Skinny, Weak Will -6.

Quirks: Enjoys lying casually when people ask him where his death is ("It's in that broom."); Offers extra lives when he gets desperate; Enjoys hunting in Russia.

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the child managed to trick Baba Yaga into the oven, and in one even tricked her into eating her own daughters first! A party of adventurers could meet this Baba Yaga when the cry arises in a village that a child has disappeared.

Some scholars believe that the children-eating aspect of Baba Yaga is related to a *positive* aspect of earlier versions of the legend. Baba Yaga was representative of the wise women common in Old Russia. An early healing method of these women was to place a sick child on or inside the stove, in the belief that the heat would restore health to them.

Gateway: Baba Yaga was the keeper of uncountable bits of occult lore, and any quest to find the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom could lead adventurers to seek her out. If she was treated with respect, and any tests she put to the characters were passed, then they earned advice or even magical assistance. Her horses were often magical, winged or eight-legged, and could be bargained for with some risk (see *Generosity*, p. 89). In some stories, she was just plain *kind*, in others, she was a monster that any false move could send into a hungry rage.

Attacker: In many tales, Baba Yaga was a horrifying, supremely powerful being who swept out of the forest to level a village or slay a wandering hero. It is this role that the GM should approach most cautiously. It's the easiest to run, of course, but there aren't many parties that could stand up to Baba Yaga.

Koschei the Undying

Koschei was a demonic figure, a skeletal or semi-skeletal man with a coarse, bristly beard and a foul expression. He was the Russian equivalent of the generic Death personification of many cultures, although he didn't reap souls, or possess any "instant kill" powers.

Koschei lived in the Otherworld, where he had a small herd of goats and a comfortable house. His primary goal was to find a wife; he was frightening and inhuman but fell in love easily, and appeared as an abductor of would-be brides in Russian folklore.

He was a powerful, immortal sorcerer (who, like most immortal sorcerers, was killed in every story in which he appeared). If wizards are a real force in the campaign, Koschei has dozens of spells at high levels; his precise magical abilities were never clearly defined in the tales, but they were considerable. In addition to his skills as a wizard, Koschei granted extra lives in exchange for help!

Koschei's immortality came from the fact that his soul was separate from his body. It resided in an egg (or on the point of a pin) which was hidden in a remote corner of the Otherworld. Anyone possessing the egg had Koschei in his power. He began to weaken (taking 1 fatigue every 10 seconds), turned sick and immediately lost the use of his magic. If the egg was tossed about, Koschei likewise was flung into walls, onto the floor and so on against his will. Crushing the egg (sometimes specifically against Koschei's forehead) killed him. Alternately, Koschei could be killed by having his skull smashed in by the hooves of a magic horse (usually one obtained from Baba Yaga).

Koschei's Weakness

The egg, often hidden within a series of animals inside a box, each animal ready to bolt when a hero revealed it, was not Koschei's major weakness. This was women; Koschei tales always centered on a heroic conflict over possession of, or by, a woman. The women he fell in love with could woo him into doing nearly anything, including revealing the location of "his death" (the egg) after some preliminary lies on his part.

Very often, Koschei was found as the prisoner of a woman whom he had tried to seduce. In a game, a PC's potential romantic interest could have a closet which she warns him never to open. If the character looks inside, he finds a pitiful, starved-looking man chained to the wall, hanging by one rib from a hook, or in some other tortured state. He only begs for a drink of water.

It takes three drinks of water to free Koschei. After the third drink, his power and strength is restored, and he breaks his bonds and runs off to find the maiden, gleeful to have a chance to woo her again. If his rescuer is suspicious of the chained man and withholds the third drink, Koschei offers up to three extra lives to him. Later, if the hero tries to destroy him, Koschei is resigned to simply killing him a few extra times!

Koschei's Role

As presented in Russian folklore, Koschei was a one-note demon. However, Koschei can also be played as a tragic, comic figure. Realistically, would any sensible romancer *want* to continue pursuing a lover who kept a dehydrated man hanging by a hook? Certainly, Koschei can't be permitted to abduct women, but saving women from Koschei can sometimes be viewed as saving Koschei from women.

Grandfather Frost

An old man with a long fur coat and hat, a large beard bristling with ice, and cold breath that could crack a man's body, Grandfather Frost was a very *direct* analog for the cruel Russian winter. Like Baba Yaga, Grandfather Frost was derived from early pagan religious practices, and was seen in folktales as a sprightly old codger who delighted in bringing deadly winter each year and keeping it in place as long as possible. He did, however, respond to kindness, as the most popular story about him reveals:



A poor fur-trapper married a mean but beautiful woman. They each had a daughter from previous spouses, and the stepmother hated the fur-trapper's girl. Complaining that they couldn't afford to feed two daughters, she ordered the trapper to load his daughter on a sledge, take her to the forest, and leave her in the snow to die. Too weak-willed to defy his wife, he did as he was told, crying tears which froze on his cheeks. When he left his daughter shivering in the snow, he quickly crossed himself and fled so he wouldn't have to see her die.

The girl, waiting in the cold, was met by Grandfather Frost, but before he could freeze her solid, she smiled and hugged him, proclaiming him an angel sent from God to rescue her. Grandfather Frost was touched by this, and when the fur-trapper went to collect her body for burial the next day, he found her dressed in warm, golden gowns and covered in jewels; gifts of the wealthy winter-spirit. She forgave her father, and they returned happily.

The stepmother demanded that the fur-trapper immediately take *her* daughter to the same spot. He did so, leaving her alone in the snow. When Grandfather Frost arrived, the girl demanded her share of the riches. Grandfather Frost killed her on the spot and skipped off into the trees.

Grandfather Frost's Role

As a demigod of deadly force who is still open to kind words, Grandfather Frost can play any number of roles in a campaign. He can be a dutiful elemental or even a form of protector, as well as a cruel villain. No stats are provided for Grandfather Frost; he was portrayed as anything from an unbeatable godling with

Koschei the Undying [Continued]

Skills: Animal Handling-14, Area Knowledge (Otherworld)-16, Area Knowledge (Russia)-14, Cooking-14, Dancing-10, Riding (Horse)-13, Stealth-14, Tracking-16.

Spells: Koschei was said to be a powerful wizard, and might have any spell at any level. He demonstrated Body of Wind in several stories.

Weapons: Rarely any, Koschei can claw with his bony hands for Thrust cutting damage, and occasionally swings a pestle like Baba Yaga's.

If Koschei is injured in any way except having his skull smashed by a magic horse, he will not die. At any time he wishes, he can simply heal himself instantly to full HT. He never loses consciousness. He can also be killed if his hidden soul is destroyed.

If Koschei is imprisoned by a woman, he wastes away and loses much of his power and strength; only three drinks of water can revive him at that point.

The Breath of Svyatagor

One of the most impressive tales of the Kiev cycle of the *byliny* was the story of the death of Svyatagor. It served as a bridge between the days of giant heroes and smaller, human *bogatyr* of Old Russia.

Ilya Muromets, the most beloved knight in Vladimir's *druchina*, was riding in the high hills, when he came upon a pavilion. It held a bed the size of a village, and Ilya climbed onto it and slept for three days. When he awoke, a giant, his head as high as the clouds, had arrived with his human-size bride, who was the most beautiful woman Ilya had ever seen. They drank mead, ate and made merry, and when they were finished Ilya rested in a tree. When the giant fell asleep, his bride came to Ilya and said that if he didn't come down and talk to her, she would tell her husband that he had been discourteous toward her. Having no choice, Ilya descended.

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The Breath of Svyatagor [Continued]

The wife, who fancied Ilya, told him to hide in the giant's pocket. On the next day, as the giant and his wife rode home, their magnificent steed faltered. When asked what the problem was, the horse replied that it carried two heroes at once, which was a great strain. Searching his pocket, the giant found Ilya Muromets and demanded an explanation. When Ilya told the truth, the giant was enraged and killed his wife immediately. Ilya and he became fast friends, and the giant, Svyatagor, called him "brother."

Svyatagor and Ilya Muromets rode to the giant's home in the high hills, where Ilya notice a huge stone coffin upon which was inscribed, "This box will fit the one fated for it." Ilya, as a joke, lay inside, but the coffin was far too large for him. Svyatagor tried, too, and found the box a perfect fit.

"Ilya," he said, "place the lid upon the coffin."

Ilya refused, not finding the joke funny, and so Svyatagor put it on himself. When he tried to remove it, however, he couldn't, and neither could Ilya, who began to panic.

Svyatagor called Ilya to a crack in the coffin, and when Ilya came the giant breathed some of his breath into the human, giving him some of his strength. Now strong enough to lift the giant's sword, Ilya struck the coffin twice, sparks flew, and the sword nearly broke.

Svyatagor, now suffocating, again called Ilya to the flaw in the coffin so that he could breathe all his strength into him. Ilya declined, saying that his current strength was sufficient; any more and the soil of Mother Russia would not be able to support him. Svyatagor said that this was wise, for his last breath would have been the breath of dying, and Ilya too would lie dead. He told Ilya to take his sword, but to leave his horse tied to the coffin, since no one should own it but Svyatagor. And as Svyatagor breathed out his last breath, the last of the heroic giants left the world.

total control of the elements to a simple old spirit with a few magical powers, a sort of "custodian" of the winter rather than its absolute master. The GM should tailor Grandfather Frost's abilities to suit the campaign power level and style, possibly even changing his powers from adventure to adventure.

The Bogatyrs

The *bogatyrs* were the greatest Russian folk-heroes; super-powerful warriors, some of whom were strong enough to lift castles! They were the main protagonists of the *byliny*, a series of Old Russian epic songs similar in scope to *Beowulf* or the Arthurian cycle. Each *bogatyry* was a larger-than-life hero, a powerful man born usually of a union between a human woman and a supernatural animal. After birth, a *bogatyry* grew to manhood within a few days, and immediately picked up a sword or an iron club and rode out to smash Russia's enemies. The *bogatyrs* weren't immortal, and some of the most moving of the *byliny* tell of their deaths.

Unlike most Russian folk tales (which had undefined or Otherworldly settings), the *byliny* were set in the Kievan and Mongol Eras, when vast waves of invaders were seen as the Children of Darkness, strange magical terrors from beyond the Russian steppe. The Kiev cycle, largest of the *byliny* groups, focused on Vladimir (a composite of Vladimir Monomakh and Vladimir I), who sat at home in Kiev as the patron of the other *bogatyrs*, who acted as his *druzhina* ("knights").

Among the heroes of the Kiev cycle was Ilya Muromets, who was lame but, due to a series of magical elixirs, could smash city walls with his bare hands, and whose horse could leap over mountains. With his mighty weapon, hundreds of foes would fall to a single blow, and he made many journeys to the Otherworld to meet foes who could at least cause him to work up a sweat. Other *bogatyrs* of Kiev included Alyosha Popovich (probably modeled after the historical Alexandr Popovich) and Dobrynya, who battled a giantess large enough to carry him in her pocket. He was defeated after a mighty duel, but then she consented to marry him.

Volga, Mikula and Svyatagor were the older *bogatyrs*, with Svyatagor a huge giant too heavy to walk on Russian soil. He and his giant horse lived in high rocky mountains in the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom or the Carpathians. Ilya Muromets, who was with him when he died, accepted part of his strength and bore his sword. Volga (Volkh) was a warlord, and Mikula was a kind of super-farmer, clearing vast tracts of land with a single stroke. The various other cycles presented many different *bogatyrs*.

The Role of the Bogatyrs

Unless the GM wishes to run a *bogatyry* campaign (an example of Kievan *GURPS Supers*), these great warriors serve best as legends, and as the source of storylines (see *The Breath of Svyatagor*, p. 101-102).

In a Kievan-Era fantasy campaign, the GM must decide whether the *bogatyry* are real. If they are, and the campaign doesn't have a military focus, they can act as occasional NPCs and make things interesting. If the campaign *does* focus on combat, particularly with the steppe-dwellers, there may be no reason for the puny PCs to exist, unless they are heroes of similar proportions.

For those intrigued by the concept of running very *powerful* fantasy campaigns, *GURPS Bunnies & Burrows* provides a simple alternative to the *Supers* rules. Treat the world as if it existed on the *bogatyrs'* scale – all *bogatyrs* are treated as Cinematic (200-300 point) heroes, but a "*bogatyry*-pound" is equivalent to several *thousand* actual pounds. Humans have normal DX and IQ, but their ST and HT are in the "Below One" range. This allows *bogatyry* PCs to be created without any special rules, and giant weapons and gear simply use *Basic Set* stats, since everything is assumed to be in *bogatyry*-pounds.



BESTIARY

“When the wolf shows his teeth, it doesn’t mean he’s smiling.”

Russian proverb

Animals in Russia provided food, clothing and shelter, as well as grist for the mills of storytellers. This chapter details the most important and interesting creatures in Russia, both real and mythical.

Stats are only provided for creatures with which combat is likely, or which PC hunters are likely to pursue. For the stats of

domestic and other animals, see the *GURPS Basic Set* or the *GURPS Bestiary*. Note that some creatures’ stats here differ slightly from the versions given in those books. These are *not* rules changes: they reflect differences in the Russian versions of some animals. The “#” sign indicates an exception to the given information – see the text for details.

Habitat: Each creature has one or more of the following letter-codes to indicate where it is found within Russia: animals with an **S** appear in the steppe, animals with an **MW** are found in central Russia’s mixed woodlands, and animals with a **T** are found in the *taiga* (and, most likely, in Siberia). Animals found throughout Russia are marked “All.” Some mythical creatures have special habitats, explained in the text.

НАТЦЯЛ СЯЄТЦЯЄС

Bear, Russian Brown

ST: 15-24 **Speed/Dodge:** 7/6 **Size:** 2#
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 200-850 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d cr# **Habitat:** All
HT: 14/16-21 **Reach:** C

The animal most symbolic of Russia, the brown bear can be found throughout Russian forests and parts of the wooded northern steppes. Most Russian bears are identical to west-European brown bears, with the notable exception of the Siberian bear, which is much larger and more dangerous. Most medieval Russians believed the bear to be a supernatural creature.

Bears are omnivores that eat more plants than animals. Most bears get out of the way if they hear someone coming, but surprised bears can be quite dangerous. Make a reaction roll (at -1 for Siberian bears) to determine whether the bear is hungry or aggressive or just gets out of the way. Mother bears react at -8 when protecting their cubs.

A bear walking on all fours is a two-hex animal. When standing on its rear legs to fight, it occupies only one hex.

Bears strike with their claws for crushing damage, or bite for the same amount of cutting damage. Russian brown bears (including the Siberian) are unable to "bear-hug."

Russian clowns (*skomorokhs*) commonly used trained brown bears in "bear comedy" acts. Some bears even played simple musical instruments! The base price of a young, untrained (IQ 3-level training) bear suitable for training is \$175. A fully trained bear would cost around \$400 (see the rules on pp. B143-144). These prices assume that the medieval Russian economy is used. In fantasy campaigns using the salaries and costs of living in the *Basic Set* for "Fantasy/Medieval" worlds, an untrained bear would cost \$450.



Boar, Wild

(see p. B144)

Unlike boars elsewhere, wild Russian boars were most common on the steppe, being found only occasionally in forests. Wild boars generally travel in small family groups consisting of a boar, a sow and two to five piglets (halve ST and HT). The adults defend their young, and attack on their own if they feel threatened. They try to knock men down with slam attacks (which include tusk-slashes), and gore them while they are helpless. Use the "large boar" stats from the *Basic Set*.

Cat

(see p. B142)

Domestic cats were popular pets in Russia, and many peasants had a number of them. Russian cats tend to be short-haired, dark and thin. Cats were one of the most common animals featured in Russia's beast fables (see p. 86), and many powerful spirits and monsters were inspired by them.

Cow and Ox

(see p. B144, *Bestiary*, p. 45)

There were several varieties of cattle raised in medieval Russia, the most common of which, found in the western *taiga*, was related directly to a common wild steppe animal. These cattle had tremendous ability to withstand cold, and longer hair than modern American cattle. They weighed comparatively little; the typical carcass yielded less than 200 pounds of meat.

Siberian species were much larger, and had long, shaggy red fur. They were primarily useful for milk. Oxen were used in eastern Siberia.

Dog

(see p. B142)

Russia had many native varieties of dog. In the northernmost territories, particularly near the Urals, dogs were trained to pull sleds. In all of medieval Russia, dogs were used for hunting and as pets. Large packs of wild dogs were not uncommon in some areas.

Fox

ST: 3-4 **Speed/Dodge:** 10/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 5-8 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d-4 cut **Habitat:** MW, T
HT: 12/5-7 **Reach:** C

The fox lives by scavenging and hunting small prey like mice and lemmings. It also raids farms for chickens and other small prey. In the Arctic and the *taiga*, the fox has a thick white coat, elsewhere it is reddish-brown with a white tail-tip.

Fur-Bearers and Small Game

ST: 1-4 **Speed/Dodge:** 4/10 **Size:** <1
DX: 11-14 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 0.5-5 lbs.
IQ: 4-5 **Damage:** 1d-5 cr **Habitat:** All
HT: 12/1-5 **Reach:** C

Russians hunted a broad variety of small animals for food and fur. Animal pelts were one of the exports upon which early Slavic Russia was built. The range of stats here should cover most game mammals; see the fauna lists on p. 16-18 to determine which animals are available in a given region.



Lynx

ST: 4-6 **Speed/Dodge:** 10/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 15 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 20-45 lbs.
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-3 cut **Habitat:** MW, T
HT: 14/7-9 **Reach:** C

The lynx is a large forest cat – the largest cat found in most of Russia (tigers were occasionally found in Ural Siberia). Lynx have very acute vision, and can spot mice 250 feet away and hare 1,000 feet away. In deep winter, they grow thick fur on their feet, allowing them to walk on top of snow.

Lynx are solitary, nocturnal hunters, although occasionally two may work together to bring down a deer. Ordinarily, they don't attack anything larger than sheep or goats, and these only if rabbits and squirrels are scarce. There are no recorded attacks on humans, although they occasionally raid farms.

Lynx are secretive and elusive (Stealth-18), deliberately avoiding humans. They fight only if attacked or cornered, but are vicious when they do fight. They climb well, drop onto prey as well as stalk and pounce, and are strong swimmers.

Mosquitoes

Various flying pests, from horseflies to mosquitoes, were so common in the *taiga* that entire colonies were forced to return to Russia proper. In general, they are only a nuisance, but mosquitoes are capable of attacking as *swarms* (see p. B143). Treat mosquito swarms as swarms of bees that are hiveless and can be dispersed by a strong breeze. As noted in Chapter One, strong breezes simply don't occur very often in the *taiga*, but magic-using characters might be able to produce them.

Prairie Viper

ST: 2 **Speed/Dodge:** 4/7 **Size:** <1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 2 lbs. or less
IQ: 3 **Damage:** Special **Habitat:** All
HT: 15/4 **Reach:** C

The prairie viper (*vipera revardi*) is common on the steppe, and its relatives are common in Russia proper. It is an aggressive, venomous snake – a very real threat to people with TL2 medicine! Anyone bitten by a prairie viper must make a HT-4 roll immediately, and then again at the beginning of each of the next three days. Any failed roll means that 1d+1 damage is taken. Damage occurs within 2d+2 minutes of the initial bite, or on the morning of subsequent days. If all rolls are made, the venom has no effect; any critical failure means death.

Waterfowl

ST: 1-3 **Speed/Dodge:** 4-10/7# **Size:** <1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 3-15 lbs.
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-5 cr **Habitat:** MW, S
HT: 14/1-5 **Reach:** C

Waterfowl are especially common in the shallow lakes of the eastern steppe where they were hunted for food. The above stats cover geese, ducks and related species. A typical duck is six pounds; a typical goose is 12. Assume that every two pounds of live bird is good for one meal after being dressed out. Speed is given for flight (geese fly at a flat 7). On the ground, waterfowl have Speed 2 or 3.



Wolf

ST: 7-10 **Speed/Dodge:** 9/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 50-150 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d-2 cut# **Habitat:** All
HT: 11-14 **Reach:** C

A common and dangerous carnivore, the wolf was feared by Russian peasant and *boyar* alike. Proverbs and children's tales were saturated with the image of the wolf, which, unlike the bear, was given few positive characteristics. In winter, Russian men gathered together in large groups and killed as many wolves as they could find to stave off possible attacks on livestock (and villagers).

Russian wolves average slightly smaller than their west-European counterparts, but are hardier and very cold-resistant. Typical wolves in the forests of medieval Russia use average values (with upper ranges for pack leaders), but the harsher the conditions, the higher the HT and the lower the ST and weight of the wolf; Siberian wolves are very small and very hardy. Note that wolves with ST 7 or 8 do only 1d-3 cut with an attack.

Wolves have considerable fighting ability and good pack tactics. After chasing their prey in relays to tire it out, each wolf rushes in, bites, then dodges out of the way while others do the same. Eventually the prey weakens and can be dragged down. Wolves are largely nocturnal, although they do hunt in the day, traveling in packs of 4-30; lone wolves can also be encountered. Wolves mate for life and are very protective of their mates and cubs.

Medieval Russian history is full of reports of wolf attacks on humans, particularly in the harsh winter months, when their normal prey was scarce. Such reports range from a single wolf attacking an unguarded child to entire starvation-mad packs sweeping into villages. The GM must decide the truth of these reports, but it should be noted that there are *no* similar attacks verified in modern times. In general, large wolf attacks in Russia are limited to cattle and reindeer, but a cattle attack could still mean ruin for an isolated, poor community.

Wolverine

ST: 10-12 **Speed/Dodge:** 8/6 **Size:** 1
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 30-65 lbs.
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d-2 cut **Habitat:** T, MW
HT: 10-12 **Reach:** C

Commonly found in the *taiga*, Urals and Siberia, the wolverine occasionally appears in the central woodlands. The largest member of the weasel family, it resembles a cross between a weasel and a bear. It measures up to 4 feet long (plus another foot of tail) and stands up to a foot and a half tall at the shoulder. It is among the fiercest animals in nature, able to drive a bear from its kill, and bring down a moose hampered by deep snow (moose are occasionally found in the swampy *taiga* regions). It alternates sleep and hunting in four-hour "shifts," day and night.

While wolverines don't normally attack humans, they apparently enjoy baiting them. Trappers are sometimes driven to poverty by wolverines raiding their trap lines, eating the trapped animals and destroying the traps. If hunted, they can double back and destroy the hunter's camp! They are among the cageiest animals in nature: give them IQ 12 for the purposes of figuring out how to ruin equipment, evade hunters, detect and destroy traps, and in general make fools out of Russians. If cornered, they bite for 1d-2 cutting.



СУРЯИЯЦЯЛ СЯЕАЦЯЕА

Most supernatural creatures in Russian folklore began as *gods*, worshiped by the pagan Slavs. Over the course of centuries, they were "tamed" and became simply legendary creatures, losing many of their powers. The listings here combine various versions presented in Russian folklore, and are as close as possible to the source material while still suitable for gaming. Each creature was often drastically changed by tale-tellers to fit the needs of a given story; GMs can do the same!

Many of the creatures had both villainous and kindly natures, depending on the tale. In many stories, it was obvious that the *approach* that the hero took to the entity determined its treatment of humans. The most powerful creatures demanded a certain form of respect (see *Respect*, p. 90, and *Baba Yaga*, p. 97, for more on this theme). GMs wishing to game this may make a reaction roll, *quadrupling* any modifiers that the character has for Charisma, good behavior, cruelty, Odious Personal Habits and so on (most of these creatures don't care about Appearance, however). This reflects the fact that most folk-tale reactions tend to be extreme: the creatures either attack or become almost servile to the hero.



Chudo Yudo

ST: 13 **Speed/Dodge:** 8/6 **Size:** 3
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 250 lbs.
IQ: 10 **Damage:** Special **Habitat:** Black Sea
HT: 13/20 **Reach:** 1, 2

According to early Russians, on the shores of the Black Sea was a realm of dragons and sea-creatures. Over a river entering the sea was a bridge made of white hazelwood, upon which was a sign clearly stating that this was the point where the monsters came out of the sea.

Every night, at midnight, a series of events occurred. First, a magic pitcher leapt out of the water and began dancing. If anyone watched it dance, they must make a Will-6 roll or fall asleep; success still causes 2d fatigue. If the pitcher is destroyed (-4 to be hit, Dodge 11, PD 0, DR 1, HT 1), then they are safe (a new pitcher appears on the following night, however).

After the pitcher's dance was done (or after it was broken), a duck quacked, thunder rolled and the earth shook. The sea surged and boiled, and Chudo Yudo emerged from the waves, summoning his magic horse, which he intended to ride for a time before returning to the sea.

Chudo Yudo was a huge, tentacled beast – an octopus, of sorts, although he had no beak. He walked as quickly as he swam, and spoke intelligibly. If anyone was present when he emerged, he demanded to know their business. Were they here to rob him? To woo his wife or daughters? In any case, Chudo Yudo's base Reaction Modifier is -5; he disliked humans, and would just as soon kill one as help him. He didn't disturb sleeping characters, however.

Chudo Yudo attacks to grapple and constrict. He may grapple one character per turn, but continues to grab new victims every turn up to a total of three captives at once. He can also add additional tentacles to a victim with a new grapple, doubling his effective ST against the captive. Treat constriction as a strangling attack (see p. B112). Chudo Yudo can also Slam very effectively, gaining a +4 to the ST contest.



If he was killed, his horse (which spouted smoke and flame from its mouth and nostrils) obeyed its new owner. It has IQ 14, DX 11, and is otherwise like a heavy warhorse with double strength and double speed. It has Danger Sense and warns its rider verbally.

Alternate Chudo Yudo: In some stories, there were three Chudo Yudos, and they were *zmei*. Each had a horse. Chudo's wife (or wives) was one of Baba Yaga's daughters. His own daughters were beautiful maidens, who lived under the sea and hated Russians.

Domovye (House Spirit)

ST: 2 **Speed/Dodge:** 4/5 **Size:** 1
DX: 10 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 10-30 lbs.
IQ: 9-11 **Damage:** — **Habitat:** Izbas
HT: 12/6 **Reach:** C

The *domovye* was a playful, tiny, furry humanoid who resembled a grinning old man, about two feet tall, wearing a red shirt belted at the waist. He lived behind the stove of every Russian household, the protector of the house and guardian of the family. Occasionally, when adults were away, he played with the children. In many legends, *domovoi* were the spirits of long-dead ancestors.

The spirit was in no way harmful to the household, and did his best to make sure that the flocks were tended, that the weather was good and that the family prospered. They were competitive, and often robbed other houses on behalf of their (unwitting) families. If a family member died, or some other tragedy occurred, the *domovye* wailed with grief at night.

In Ukraine, this creature took the form of a snake, but otherwise served the same function. Various other tales presented *domovoi* as animals, and the benevolent version of the *ovinnik* (see p. 108) was likely derived from them. In all cases, the woman of the house left food for the spirit.

Bannik. Another form of this spirit was the *bannik*, or bathhouse-spirit. This was a *domovye* who lived in the bathhouse and talked to the ghosts that gathered there. When it was time for bathing, it crawled under the benches and giggled. A bucket of water was usually left filled for it to wash in.

The Firebird (Zhar Ptitsa)

ST: 35 **Speed/Dodge:** 20/10 **Size:** 2
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 325 lbs.
IQ: 7 **Damage:** 1d+2 cut **Habitat:** MW, T
HT: 16 **Reach:** C

The Firebird was a unique, benevolent creature, a gigantic bird (an eagle or falcon, in all tales female) with golden feathers that glowed with an enchanting radiance. To capture the Firebird was the goal of many an unscrupulous hero, some of whom succeeded. She was naïve and trusting, falling easily into traps.

In some stories, the Firebird could speak and come to the aid of heroes, even carrying them to distant lands. In such cases, she was in the service of some great sorceress or princess, and performed the aid as a favor to her mistress. In other tales, the Firebird was simply a magical animal, occasionally owned by a gentle king who kept her in a golden cage. The cage was no prison, however, and the Firebird often flew out at night to visit gardens and steal apples, of which the firebird was inordinately fond.

In all stories, the Firebird was a creature of light, illuminating the night "as if hundreds of candles were hiding behind the

nearby trees." Firebird feathers retained their magic eternally, each able to give light to a room like a lantern. A single feather could fetch a dozen rubles or more from the right buyer.

The Grey Wolf

ST: 20 **Speed/Dodge:** 24/10 **Size:** 2
DX: 15 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 600 lbs.
IQ: 11 **Damage:** 1d imp **Habitat:** MW, T
HT: 15/24 **Reach:** C

A gigantic, talking wolf, the Grey Wolf was one of the animal monarchs of the forest, vicious or kindly, depending on the storyteller. He was a fierce combatant, and his sharp teeth and claws were supernaturally deadly.

The Grey Wolf was fond of horseflesh, and ate the horses of travelers while they slept. He also occasionally dined on humans. In one tale, the Wolf waited by a marker in the road which read: "Those who ride to the right will have their horses killed, but they will survive; those who ride to the left will be killed, but their horses will survive." The message was honest; the Grey Wolf acted according to the actions of the traveler. Often after eating a horse the Grey Wolf felt guilty, and offered to let the unfortunate traveler ride him, helping him in his adventures.

In all tales, the Grey Wolf was a shapechanger, and took on many forms to help his friends; he could convincingly mimic any human, and presumably any beast. The limits of this power are up to the GM.

Guardian Doll

ST: 10 **Speed/Dodge:** 5 **Size:** <1
DX: 10 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 0.5-2 lbs.
IQ: 12 **Damage:** 1d-4 cr **Habitat:** Any
HT: 14/4 **Reach:** C

Young Russian girls often owned dolls and played with "imaginary friends." In Russian folklore, those friends were less imaginary, and when a young girl was in need her doll often came to life to aid her. When grown-ups, particularly men, watched, the doll appeared normal, but the doll's owner knew its secret.

PCs are unlikely to run afoul of these benevolent spirits unless they are kidnappers or the like. However, the GM may allow a female PC to have a guardian doll as an Ally (see p. 96). Despite their diminutive size, guardian dolls are treated as human-sized one-hex creatures for all purposes, including combat (see *The Thumb-Sized Man*, p. 109).

This is but one form of "doll creature" found in Russian stories. Other tales included less benevolent and more monstrous spirits that would manipulate children or lead them to their deaths. Some were even capable of killing armed men.

Leshiy (Forest Spirit)

ST: 5-30 **Speed/Dodge:** 6 **Size:** 1+
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 2/3 **Weight:** 60-2,000 lbs.
IQ: 11 **Damage:** Var. **Habitat:** MW, T
HT: 18/5-30 **Reach:** C#

The *leshiy* was in many ways the forest equivalent of the *vodyanoye* (p. 110), although the *leshiy* rarely had a family. He was a primordial Slavic woodlands-personification; a hairy, green-eyed old man, as tall as the tree he lived in, who revelled and had drinking bouts with bears. Far from being evil, the *leshiy* was primarily a guardian of his forest, and each major section of woodlands had only one. *Leshiy* used whips in some stories, and could become any



woodland creature (preferring the form of large bears). A *leshiy* has (at level 15) any Animal or Plant spells that the GM deems appropriate. His reach depends on his height; man-sized *leshiy* have reach C, while the largest might reach out to two or more hexes.

Leshiy caused trouble for thieves in the woods, and amused themselves by misleading lost travelers, either by appearing as friends and lying to them, or simply by removing signposts and trail markers. They permitted nobody to whistle or shout in the forest, and were responsible for echoes. They led maidens into swamps, where they kept them for days, eventually letting them return home when the *leshiy* became bored with them ("deprived of their honor," as it were).

Rumors exist of a spell or phrase that can call the attention of a *leshiy*; the spell is also said to encourage good reactions from them.

Misery

ST: 10 **Speed/Dodge:** 9
DX: 20 **PD/DR:** 6/2
IQ: 12 **Damage:** —
HT: 16 **Reach:** C

Size: 1
Weight: 85 lbs.
Habitat: All

Misery was an evil spirit, the embodiment of a ruined life and of his namesake. He appeared as a thin, dour man with a reedy voice and a childish temper, but was nearly indestructible and could change his size and shape. He worked on a single victim at a time, and no one else noticed him, although mages who suspected Misery's presence could detect him with an IQ+Magery roll. Misery appeared to those whose lives had failed in some way: someone who'd lost his way, money or a loved one was in risk of attracting Misery.

The spirit initially appears as an echo of the victim's actions. If the character is crying, he hears another voice crying with him. If he is sawing wood, another saw is heard. When the victim stops, so does the echo. When the victim calls out, asking who is there, Misery introduces himself, and leaps onto the victim's back. Many older and wiser Russians simply ask, "Is that you, Misery?" since they know of him.

At this point, Misery recommends that his victim go to a tavern and get drunk. Whether or not the victim can afford the time or money is not an issue: Misery sneers at any protests and smoothly convinces the victim to drink. Misery's voice is magical and his victim must make a Will-4 roll in order to resist his suggestions. Misery drinks as much as the victim, and wakes up each morning with a headache (no matter what condition his victim is in), loudly demanding more. His magic voice costs him no ST, and is not treated as a spell.

This process continues until the victim is dead; each day Misery recommends that he forget work, and borrow or steal as need be to get more drink. However, Misery cannot overcome virtue. Characters with Truthfulness get a +10 to resist commands to lie, and those with Honesty get a similar bonus to resist stealing. Codes of Honor and other "virtuous" disadvantages confer similar bonuses, at the GM's discretion.

If Misery cannot get the victim to acquire money dishonestly, he leads his victim to honest money such as buried treasure. Again, he causes the victim to drink himself to death. Use the rules for attribute loss under Alcoholism (p. B30), but roll *weekly* instead of yearly!

Getting Rid of Misery: Misery was childish, greedy and vain, and any of these things could be used to trick him into trapping himself. Very little was needed to hold him (e.g., a corked bottle, or a rock over a hole in the ground); once tricked he was weak until freed. Anyone who freed Misery from a trap became his victim! Misery insisted that the person who freed him was the same one who trapped him, and promised to never let go . . .

Aside from trapping him, little else worked. Combat was a possibility, but Misery was clever and supernaturally quick. Besides, all he needed to do was recommend that his victim take him drinking, and the rebellion ended! Desperate men might ask a wizard for aid, in which case various magical methods could work.

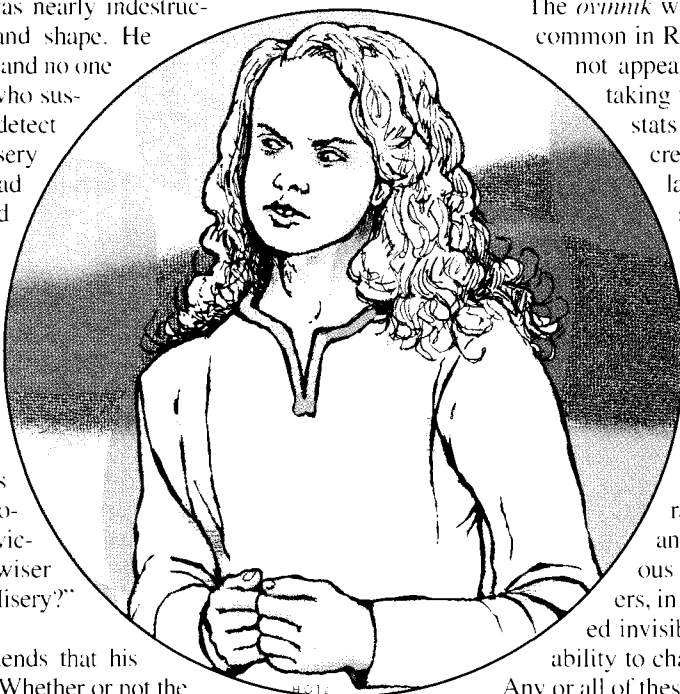
For another version of Misery, see p. 90.

Ovinnik (Barn Cat)

ST: 12 **Speed/Dodge:** 10/9 **Size:** 2
DX: 16 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 300-400 lbs.
IQ: 7 **Damage:** 1d-1 cut **Habitat:** MW, T#
HT: 14/40 **Reach:** C

The *ovinnik* was one of the many "house spirits" common in Russian folklore. Unlike most, it did not appear as a snake or humanoid, instead taking the form of a black cat. The above stats are for a very large example of the creature. In some tales, they were no larger than ordinary cats (use the stats in the *Basic Set*). The *ovinnik* was only encountered in farmyards, and (like most other spirits) was exclusively solitary.

The *ovinnik's* general role was to protect the farmer's grain stores, crops and livestock, while living in the barn and expecting gifts of food. In some stories, however, spiteful *ovinniks* became raiders, stealing food from peasants and becoming nuisances at best, serious threats at worst. Their reputed powers, in addition to physical attacks, included invisibility and fire magic, as well as the ability to charm their enemies before attacking. Any or all of these might be true, at the GM's option.



Rusalka (Water Nymph)

ST: 8-13 **Speed/Dodge:** 6 **Size:** 1
DX: 10-12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 100-140 lbs.
IQ: 10 **Damage:** Special **Habitat:** All
HT: 11 **Reach:** —

Rusalki were spirits of streams and birch-trees, who were once worshiped for their influence over crops, weather and rivers. They were most active during late spring. In some stories, *rusalki* were the spirits of young girls who had drowned, or been cursed by their parents. In almost all stories they were beautiful, and ranged in apparent age from about 7 years old to 15. They dressed in leaves, transparent green gowns or occasionally simple white, unbelted shirts.



When they weren't beneath the frozen winter waters, *rusalki* lived in birches, meadows, cornfields, along lonely stretches of river or in isolated ponds. They rarely lived individually, preferring to dwell in groups of a dozen or so. They danced and sang, diving in and out of the water, riding the stalks of corn to make them sway, and shouting "cuckoo" to each other. On clear summer nights, they bathed, splashing each other with water and then running through the fields and laughing.

The laughter and songs of *rusalki* were deadly to Russian men. Upon hearing them, men became entranced and ran to join the spirits. *Rusalki* led them in dance for a while, and then either grabbed them and began tickling them to death, or enticed them into water so deep that they drowned. *Rusalki* also appeared to those swimming or bathing in rivers, and performed similar deeds. No Russians swam in the rivers (or wandered the forests, or clapped their hands) in late spring, fearing active *rusalki*.

Rusalki were fond of weaving and spinning; their yarn (moss) hung from trees, and their linen was left on the ground. Any man stepping on a *rusalka*'s linen became lame, according to some legends. *Rusalki* rarely killed girls, who were immune to their charming laughter and songs. To be safe, peasant girls left sacrifices of food and embroidery for the spirits each summer.

A PC hearing a *rusalka* must make a Will+1 roll each turn while in hearing range to avoid enchantment. Once enchanted, he gets only one more try (just before being either tickled or drowned), at Will-4, to break free of the spell. *Rusalki* tickling is a Simple attack at DX, which does 1d-4 fatigue per turn to the victim from his laughter. After all ST is gone, the victim begins losing HT at the same rate. He stays conscious until he falls dead.

Senmurv

ST: 16-20 **Speed/Dodge:** 14/7 **Size:** 2
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 1/1 **Weight:** 120-140 lbs.
IQ: 13 **Damage:** 1d cut **Habitat:** MW
HT: 15 **Reach:** C

The original Russian *senmurv* was called Simgarl, and was a powerful deity who dwelt on an island in the Otherworld. It has been linked to the Persian Simurgh and to early versions of the Greek Artemis. The version presented here is one from later Russian myth, as presented in the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*.

Senmurvs were dog-headed birds with dog's paws. They were friendly and helpful to humans, and while they couldn't



speak, they understood human speech. They didn't have much Gesture skill, but could convey ideas such as "yes," "no," "come," "stop" and "silence." Their knowledge of evil creatures and of the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom was great.

Senmurvs served the cause of good, and could tell truly good or evil people by sight, although most average people were too ambiguous for them to sort out. They lived in remote forests, and never sought humans. They usually responded to pleas for aid, if the causes were good. Treasure hunts held no interest for them, nor did quests for knowledge. They lived in groups of up to 10, but usually dispatched only one or two on a quest unless a major force of evil was loose on the world.

A *senmurv* aids a party as a scout (Stealth-14, senses at IQ) and advisor – as much as

a non-speaking creature can advise! Listed speed is for flight; on the ground they move at 4. They can attack, but are reluctant to do so except in desperate straits or self-defense; that's the heroes' job.

The Thumb-Sized Man

ST: 18 **Speed/Dodge:** 6/12 **Size:** <1
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 2 oz. or less
IQ: 12 **Damage:** 1d+2 cr **Habitat:** Otherworld#
HT: 15/3 **Reach:** C

The role of the Thumb-Sized Man in Russian folklore was so varied that generalizations are difficult to make. He appeared as an odd rustic living at the edge of the Otherworld, as a messenger for great entities appearing out of the floor or holes in the ground, and simply as an amusing encounter for heroes. He was less than 2 inches tall, and had a very long beard (one cubit in some tales).

The Thumb-Sized Man can be used as anything from a bizarre enigma or curious running joke to a *deus ex machina*. If the PCs do anything that bothers him or that strikes him as rude, he beats them up, pummeling with his miniature fists for 1d+2 crushing damage (he has Brawling-17). In combat, he was treated as a full-sized man despite his tiny size, and preferred to beat people about the head. He might just show up when characters are alone (e.g., on watch at camp) and beat them up just for the fun of it.

The only way to humble the Thumb-Sized Man is to grab his beard, which requires an ordinary DX roll (Brawling may be substituted). Against this, his supernatural Dodge doesn't work; he dodges beard-grabs only on a 6 or less. By lifting him up by the beard, he was made powerless.

Tsar Zmedyed (King Bear)

ST: 40 **Speed/Dodge:** 7 **Size:** 2#
DX: 15 **PD/DR:** 1/2 **Weight:** 1,000 lbs.
IQ: 11 **Damage:** 2d cr **Habitat:** MW, T
HT: 16/35 **Reach:** C

The greatest of the Beast Tsars, King Bear was gruff and arrogant. He didn't bother much with men, but occasionally he set out to prove his superiority by tricking the human tsar into giving him his children as servants or lunch. Like most of the Beast Tsars, King Bear responded well to proper treatment (which meant lots of bowing, scraping and promises), but was stubborn and didn't change his mind once he'd set a goal for himself or another.

In combat, King Bear was simply an intelligent, heavy and extremely strong Russian brown bear, with all attendant abilities. It is not known whether King Bear could change shape; he presumably could, but didn't bother, considering his own form superior to all others.

Vodyanye (Water Spirit)

ST: 14 **Speed/Dodge:** 6 **Size:** 1
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 0/1 **Weight:** 150-250 lbs.
IQ: 11 **Damage:** Strangle **Habitat:** All
HT: 14 **Reach:** C

Vodyanoi were the rulers of the streams and lakes of Old Russia. All events within deep waters occurred at their whim; if the fishing catch was good or if a river flooded and broke a bridge, *vodyanoi* were to be thanked or blamed. The Eastern Slavs left sacrifices at riversides for them, and some Russians continued to do so for centuries.

Individual *vodyanoi* appeared as handsome young men or balding, pot-bellied old ones; all were male. They took *rusalki* brides, and sometimes enjoyed wandering into villages to buy goods at the market (their left sides, however, were always wet, which revealed them to careful observers).

When they were in mean moods, they waited at riversides to attack passers-by. They could assume almost any shape (animate or inanimate), and did their best to get close enough to attack by surprise. *Vodyanoi* grappled for the neck and attempted to kill by breaking it or strangling the victim. This created a *zalozhniy* (see below), which then served in the *vodyanye's* underwater palace. The palace was usually made of crystal, paved around with pebbles of silver and gold, and those diving to steal the pebbles (or the *vodyanoi's* valuable livestock) encountered several of the spirits, as well as *rusalki* and many undead servants. *Vodyanoi* possessed powerful water magic, but did not use it in battle.

In many legends, the power and attributes of *vodyanoi* waxed and waned with the moon, with the creatures being almost unable to act during the new moon, and strongest during the full.

Another, much later, version of the *vodyanye* can be found in the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*. While not strictly of the period, that version would make an excellent addition to any *GURPS Russia* campaign.

Zalozhniy (The Unhallowed Dead)

ST: 11 **Speed/Dodge:** 6 **Size:** 1
DX: 10 **PD/DR:** 0/2 **Weight:** 145 lbs.
IQ: 9 **Damage:** Var. **Habitat:** Any
HT: 15 **Reach:** Var.

Zalozhniy were those who died premature, and often violent, deaths. These unfortunates weren't given proper funerals, but were simply thrown into rivers, ditches or holes. The ground would not accept the bodies of *zalozhniy*, spitting them back up to the surface.

According to Slavic tradition, such souls were in thrall to evil spirits, since they were not given their fated allotment of life. *Zalozhniy* hated and envied mortals, and, deprived of their proper place in *Peklo*, attempted to lure mortals to similar premature dooms. A *zalozhniy* died after the person's "fated time" came; the





body walked the Earth as long as it had been intended, and no more. In most legends, the corpses did not decay appreciably, and in some they wandered far from their graves.

Zalozhniy had the abilities they had in life, with added resilience due to their undead state; the above stats are for a typical healthy hunter- or farmer-*zalozhniy*. Naturally, unhallowed wizards or children had dramatically different abilities. Few *zalozhniy* had any equipment or weapons; most used trickery to kill mortals.

If a *zalozhniy*'s body was destroyed, a spirit with the same attributes arose and wandered invisibly, unable to physically effect the world. By taking one fatigue per minute, the spirit-*zalozhniy* became visible and spoke, so that it could attempt to continue killing humans.

Zmei (Russian Dragon)

ST: 15-50 **Speed/Dodge:** 5/6 **Size:** 3-12
DX: 12 **PD/DR:** 4/4 **Weight:** 400-2,500 lbs.
IQ: 3-10 **Damage:** Var. **Habitat:** Otherworld
HT: 12/30-120 **Reach:** C, 1

Russians knew of many dragons types, from the traditional winged, fire-breathing kind to sweet-talking giant serpents that appeared at random, turned into princes, and demanded brides. See the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* if stats are needed for such creatures. The most common and distinctly Russian dragon was the *zmei*. The *zmei* of many stories was a unique, powerful entity, either the ruler or the guardian-at-the-barrier of the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom. In other tales, there were three (or many) *zmei*.

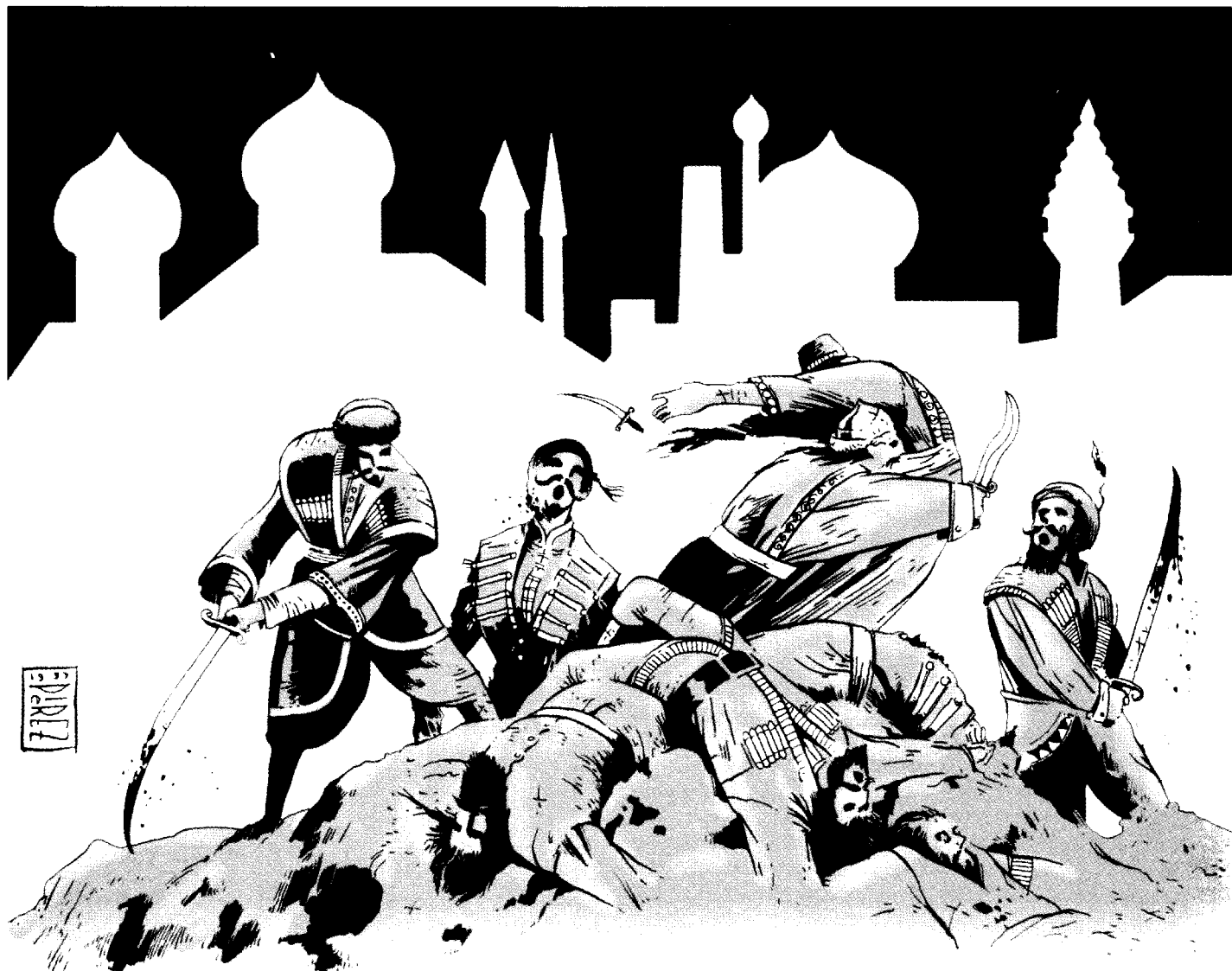
The *zmei* was a huge serpent, often green, with sharp claws (hind legs optional) and a generally snake-like head. In some stories it was limited to ground movement, in others it could sprout wings made of fire (flight speed 15). It had a minimum of three heads, but any multiple of three up to 12 was common; in some tales of quests to the Otherworld, the hero had to battle a three-headed dragon in the Copper Kingdom, a six-headed dragon in the Silver Kingdom and a 12-headed dragon in the Gold Kingdom, or some similar progression.

In some stories, *zmei* were merely fierce monsters to be overcome. In others, they were fully rounded people with individual motivations, and often with a willingness to help respectful heroes. They could often control the weather, and, while they usually dwelt only in the Otherworld, they sometimes visited Russia to seek brides, heralded by sudden thunderstorms and darkness. Many *zmei* had the Swallowing Soil spell (see p. 95), and preferred it to physical attacks. Most *zmei* were shapechangers, and could take the form of whirlwinds (Body of Wind spell). In some tales, the *zmei* rode into combat on a horse (almost always after taking the form of a man first).

Each of a *zmei*'s heads can attack each turn, doing cutting damage based on ST (see p. B140). A typical large *zmei* (ST 30, Hit Points 90, 10 hexes, nine heads) would do 1d+2 cut on a successful attack.

Attacking the heads is the most efficient way to kill a *zmei*; from the front, attacks against the body require a two-hex reach weapon, and are at -1 to skill (attacks from the side and rear are normal). Attacking a *zmei*'s head is at -2 to skill, and each head takes 10 hit points damage before "dying," which also reduces the beast's overall hit points. Brain attacks are at -4, and *zmei* skulls have DR 6. Damage over 10, even for brain hits, is "blow-through" on a *zmei*'s head, and further hits on a killed head do not affect the *zmei*.





7

THE RUSSIAN САМПАЙН

*“And so it used to be.
There were battles and campaigns.
But there had never been such battle as this.”*

**From *The Lay of Igor's Host*,
a 12th-century Russian epic**

There is no “right” way to run *GURPS Russia*. Even in a strictly historical campaign, the action might range from the

darkened cloisters of the Monastery of the Caves to the blinding whiteness of a Siberian winter. The characters could be Romanov *boyars* battling for family supremacy through false smiles and murders, Don Cossacks thundering across the steppe as brothers, clever Novgorod merchants using the *veche* to gain power while sneering at the lowly Russians to the east, simple hunters forced to kill for survival in the wake of the savage *oprichnina*, and so on. Add fantasy and magic, and the possibilities increase a thousandfold.

DECISIONS OF STYLE

Fortunately, the tangle of options found in Russia can be broken down into four simple themes: realism, setting, viewpoint and violence. Each dramatically affects the others: once you've determined two or three, everything else falls into place.

Reality Level

Chapter Five describes, in general terms, how a Russian peasant might view his world. There are three layers: the world he knows (immediately around him), the world at large (distant Moscow, the deep forest) and the Otherworld (the realms of Russia's most fanciful mythology). The farther he strayed from his *izba*, the more fantasy and magic was assumed to be found. "Reality Level" describes *how correct* the peasant is in his assumptions.

There are four rough levels: realistic, historical fantasy, traditional fantasy and mythic. These distinctions are entirely arbitrary, and can flow into each other easily: a traditional fantasy campaign can break every now and then into mythic mode, which is why the Otherworld is separated from Russia in the first place! Likewise, a realistic campaign can even have a touch of what *might be* magic, now and then, and the players might never know the truth.

Realistic

In a purely realistic campaign, the core of realism follows the *muzhik*. As he walks to Moscow, he finds that it is indeed wonderful, but not as glorious as he has heard. The tsar is magnificent, but doesn't display his magical powers or the presence of God around him, if indeed he has those things. There are still, however, the lands that the peasant *hasn't* yet seen, and there might be dragons *there*, instead. Even in a realistic campaign, the belief in magic is strong, but its presence is never felt.

Characters and locations in a realistic campaign are drawn from real history as much as possible. The towns the PCs visit are real ones, or at least very much like them, in the case of inconsequential villages along the road. The people whom the PCs meet could include Boris Godunov, Tsar Peter I or Olga of Kiev.

One potential fantasy aspect of the realistic campaign involves changes to history. It's entirely a matter of GM taste whether the PCs can kill Ivan the Terrible before he begins the *oprichnina*, save Dmitri Fedorovich's life, or even cause trouble between Byzantium and Russia thus preventing Orthodox Christianity from taking hold. Realistically, there's no reason why they shouldn't, provided that the characters are acting from believable motivations and not a malicious intent to disrupt the campaign or the course of history. Truly major changes will invalidate much of the information that this book provides, and the GM will have to do some research and a lot of "winging it" to keep the game realistic afterward. In a time-travel campaign, this problem takes on a whole new character (as discussed in *GURPS Time Travel*).

Historical Fantasy

In a historical fantasy campaign, the *muzhik's* view of his home territory is correct; a *domoye* lurks unseen behind the stove, and the village *babushkas* can cure ills and occasionally see the future. The rare visiting *skomorokh* is really in touch with the Old Gods, and dancing bears are magical, not merely impressive, creatures. Beyond his home, though, there is no second layer. Baba Yaga, if she exists, never comes to eat the children, and the streams of the deep forest, although cold, never seem to have *rusalki* in them (presumably they are being merciful in thanks for the annual gifts of food and ribbons).

Gaming Drunkenness

Drinking (including competitive drinking) was a common pastime in Old Russia, and GMs may occasionally require rules for the effects of alcohol. A late-night ale-house brawl or a deadly wolf attack at the height of winter could catch a vodka-loving *muzhik* at a bad time.

Detailed rules for drinking are presented in *GURPS Compendium II*, pp. 162-165. For quicker determination of drinking's effects, here is a streamlined version:

To determine a character's "drink threshold," divide the better of his HT or Carousing skill by two (rounding down). This is the number of drinks that the character can handle before his intoxication begins to adversely affect him. Overweight characters add 1 to this number; Fat characters add 2. Every drink beyond the threshold causes a -1 penalty to IQ, DX, skill rolls *and* defense rolls, to a maximum of -5. Beyond -5, the character can't do anything but rest, drink more or be ill.

Of course, this assumes that a lot of alcohol is consumed in a relatively short time. All characters, whether actively drinking or not, "burn off" their alcohol at a fairly steady rate. Every half-hour, each character should make a HT roll. Success means that one drink is removed from the PC's drinking tally. Competitive drinking should be treated as a Quick Contest of Carousing, using defaults if necessary.

Example: Stepan Ivanovich is a normal HT 10 Russian without significant skill at Carousing. If he imbibed six large vessels of *kvass* in an hour, he would be at a -1 penalty to DX, IQ, skill and defense rolls. Every half-hour will bring him another opportunity to "erase" one of his drinks with a HT roll. If his total is ever brought back to five or fewer drinks, the penalties for drunkenness will go away. While not truly sober, Stepan would be in fair control of his faculties.

These rules assume all "drinks" to be of equivalent potency. Mead was 10-14% alcohol (a *Compendium II* alcohol rating 2 or 3). Medieval beer was 2-8% (alcohol rating 1 or 2), and *kvass* (a "small beer" flavored with rye) was 2-5% (alcohol rating 1). Old Russian vodka varied, but was often more potent than modern equivalents: most was 30-40% alcohol, but it could range as high as 75%, for an alcohol rating of anywhere from 6 to 15!

Alcohol Tolerance and other alcohol-related advantages and disadvantages can be found in *Compendium I*.

Fishing and Hunting

There are several reasons for a Russian to hunt. The first, obviously, was survival. Another was for fur. The pelt trade was one of the greatest sources of material wealth in Russia. Wolf-hunts were organized simply to rid areas of wolves, and sport hunts were used to train young men.

Hunting For Food: To find prey, the hunter or hunting party should make a Tracking, Survival or Naturalist roll, using the modifiers under the Tracking skill (p. B57). If this roll is only just successful, some small, unpalatable (but edible) game is found. Rolls made by 1 or 2 produce rodents or game birds, and greater successes find larger and tastier game. Note that some "large, tasty game" can be dangerous! See the fauna lists on p. 16 for likely finds in various parts of Russia.

The hunters should use the rules under Stealth (p. B67) to get close to the animal. From there, the hunt should be roleplayed, particularly if the game is dangerous. If the initial attempt to find game was successful, further hunts may be attempted that day, at a cumulative -2 to the "find prey" roll per hunt. Any failed search means that the day has been used up.

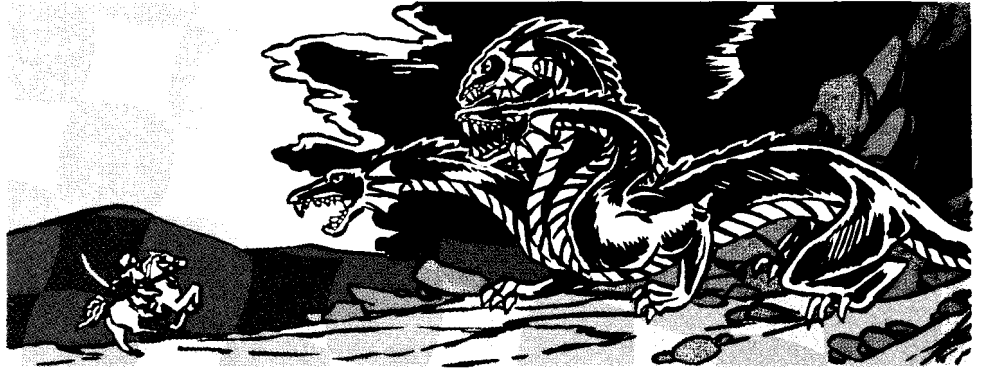
Additional Modifiers: Several things can improve a hunter's chances. A hunting dog adds at least +2 to the roll to find prey, but might harm the Stealth check. Tricks (such as laying out a dead horse to attract wolves, an actual Russian tactic) provide modifiers at the GM's discretion.

Fur: In early Russia, the majority of pelts were acquired by hunting, not trapping. Special blunted arrows were often used to avoid damaging the skins (p. 43). The procedure is as above, but the "find prey" roll determines the creature's *value*.

Fishing: First, the fisherman should make a Fishing, Naturalist or Survival roll. Success finds a good spot; failure wastes an hour in searching (repeat attempts are fine). A critical failure (or *any* failure if rolling against a default) means a poor spot is chosen. While fishing, a skill roll against either Fishing or Survival is required hourly (-2 if only makeshift fishing gear is used). A successful roll catches 1/4 pound of edible fish, plus 1/4 pound per point the roll is made by. Halve the total for a poor fishing spot; double it for a critical success on any roll. One pound of fish makes roughly two meals for a normal man.

For additional detail for hunting, fishing and trapping, see the *GURPS Bestiary*.

Player characters with no magical abilities or secret knowledge are completely plausible in such a campaign. The history of Russia remains constant, and the campaign is again in a definite era in a definite location, even if the village and local nobles are fictional.



Traditional Fantasy

In a traditional fantasy campaign, the major centers of civilization present a realistic core, but on the fringes of the towns, and in some villages and monasteries separated from mainstream Russian life, there are vampires, powerful wizards and malevolent spirits stalking the forest. The player characters may have a wizard among them, who (although not able to split mountains or find the Otherworld at a glance) certainly might summon fire from thin air or remove his own head for easy cleaning. Baba Yaga, Grandfather Frost and the terrible *zmei* are probably rarely met, but their presence is felt under the surface.

In this campaign style, history and time period become mutable. While such a campaign can certainly be given a definite period, in a broad sense (such as "Petrine"), it might also exist in a hodge-podge Russia. Perhaps the Church is like that of the Kievan Era (allowing for greater magical activity and more extreme priestly practices), while the government and culture resemble the reign of Ivan the Great or Ivan the Terrible. The presence of gunpowder, and in fact the existence of western Europe at all, becomes entirely optional.

Mythic

In a mythic campaign, all Russian fairy stories are true: on a distant mountain Svyatagor lies (or perhaps he still walks), in the forests the *rusalki* dance unhindered, and every old hermit or grandmother knows a little magic. The hero can leap on his horse and ride toward the Thrice-Tenth Kingdom, gaining entrance with only a little luck, a sharp sword and a good intention or two. In fact, he probably spends a lot of time there, and monsters come to know and hate him, while Otherworldly peasants recognize him and let him rest in their magic dwellings in time of trouble ("The Golden Kingdom? Been there . . . several times. The queen just *loves* me."). Suddenly the Reputation "Mighty Hero, -2 from Dragons and Koschei, +2 from *muzhiks*" becomes a possibility at character creation. Even the upper reaches of the glass mountain that guards the land of the dead have his initials carved on them.

Such a campaign can be rewarding, provided the GM has the stamina to keep it up. Magic in such a campaign should probably discard "systems" altogether (see *Folk Magic*, p. 92). Characters can be built on any number of points with which the GM can cope.

History and locations might just disappear entirely. Russia becomes abstract: bearded men dance and drink vodka, and there is a town nearby, but few of the locations have names. The tsar lives *some* place, and rides into town with a riddle that needs solving about once a season, promising half the kingdom, his daughter's hand in marriage and all the shoe sales the local shoemaker needs. Nice fellow, that tsar . . .

Campaign Setting

GMs running purely Mythic campaigns can now start working on scenarios. Otherwise, the GM must decide when and where in Old Russia the campaign is set.

The Kievan Era (circa 850-1200)

Advantages: The general sense of adventure, both on the part of Russians and the new Church, means *anybody* can be *anything* with a little courage and effort. Peasants aren't tied to the land by law (although they often are by debt), and can move about seeking their fortunes. Various conflicts (e.g., civil wars when grand princes die, and the struggle between Orthodoxy and paganism) provide plenty of opportunity for physical action, and Russia's crash-course in Byzantine backstabbing provides intellectual conflict. The steppe-raiders are a steady source of cannon-fodder foes and road encounters for Slavic and Viking traders.

Disadvantages: The Kievan Era lacks the flavor of "real" Russia, since it wasn't yet actually *Russian*. No tsar, no caftan-wearing, bearded men with jars of *vodka*, or other elements that make Russia a distinct cultural entity. For a fantasy gamer, things are rocky – the figures of mythology were still *gods*, and lacked a lot of the charm of the later days.

The Mongol Period (circa 1200-1450)

Advantages: The dozens of tiny, bickering *appanages* are a problem for Russia, but mean real variety if the party is mobile. For those fond of intrigue, espionage is practiced between the Church and princes, and among the clergy! The Mongols provide an obvious (and frightening!) enemy, and the PCs can become part of history as true Russian culture emerges. The Christian persecution of *skomorokhs* creates a pagan underground; the earliest Cossacks appear toward the end of this period, and this is the time of Alexander Nevsky!

Disadvantages: Similar to those of the Kievan Era. A subtle problem appeared: *Appanage* Russia has lost Kiev, and doesn't yet have Moscow, leaving it without a solid nucleus of civilization. Most action takes place either in small, growing villages, on the steppe or on the forest frontier. GMs fond of medieval cities might be disappointed, with Novgorod the only one to be found, and *that* far from most of the action.

The Muscovite Era (circa 1450-1650)

Advantages: This *is* medieval Russia. Powerful tsars, Moscow in its heyday, Cossacks on the steppe and Turks beyond them. To the west are plenty of Poles to fight, and the presence of the rest of Europe is felt within Russia only from the "German Quarters" in major cities. The PCs can be *anything*, as political upheavals and vast numbers of runaway peasants create a freedom among social classes. The "evil empire" looms beyond the forests, and Ivan Grozny's black riders terrorize *boyar* and *muzhik* alike within the country.

Friends & Foes

Russia wasn't fully European, nor was it truly Asian. It existed on its own, a cultural stew born from simple Slavic farmers ruled by Viking adventurers, and both trading and at war with Turkey, Persia, England, eastern Europe and the Mongol khanates that stretched from the shores of the Volga to the wastes of Siberia.

With such diverse origins and influences, it almost seems that Russia, and not western Europe, should have been the center of intellectual and cultural Renaissance after the Middle Ages, but this was not the case. While Russia had diplomatic contacts with the whole of the civilized world, it wanted very little to do with it, and the sentiment, for the most part, was mutual. The result was an "iron curtain" that predated Communism by nearly 1,000 years, and a country rich in artistic brilliance and individual spirit, but poor in cultural growth and intellect. The friends and foes of Russia were often distant bogeymen to Russians. (See also *The Early Steppelanders*, p. 52.)

The Northmen

The Vikings created Russia by providing a bloodline for the early Russian rulers and order for the Slavs. Extremist historians known as Normanists have detailed how *every* aspect of Russian culture was owed to the Norse; their opposites, the Slavophiles, try to prove that the Vikings had *nothing* to do with Russian culture.

The Northmen certainly played a large role in Kievan Russia. Not only princes, but lowly traders and merchants descended from Norse stock, and the stereotypical Viking "career" raider-sailor-adventurer, while almost impossible to find in the mercantile/agrarian Norse homelands, gathered heavily along the shores at Kiev and in Novgorod.

By the arrival of the Mongols, however, Viking ties were nonexistent. Rurik had taken rulership on behalf of no one but himself, and Russia had no obligations to distant Viking warlords. The Finns were the only Northmen Russians knew in later centuries, and they were simply "lower-class foreigners" in the countryside northwest of Novgorod.

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Friends & Foes [Continued]

The Byzantine Empire

The Vikings provided the rulers, but Constantinople provided the culture, Russia's rich art and architecture, and its blind xenophobia, are owed to Byzantine traditions (the latter as a result of the language gap and divided Church).

Constantinople (or *Tsargrad*, as the Rus called it) was the subject of many legends and expeditions by early Russians. Beyond the Kievan Era, however, the Byzantines, like the Vikings, weren't an important part of Russian culture. In 1453, when Russia was just getting over the Mongol conquest, Constantinople fell to the Turks, and the Byzantine Empire was no more.

The Mongols

The Mongol khans, each owing fealty to the great khan in Mongolia, were every bit as important to the growth of Russia as the Vikings or Byzantines. It was because of the Mongols that Muscovy, the real Russia, first grew. Russian princes, serving as tax-collectors for the Tatars, took a little extra for themselves, and developed a detailed taxing structure unlike the crude methods they'd used previously. Russians also inherited their stoic attitude toward violence from the Mongols, as well as their views on the necessity of torture; the principal instrument of Russian torture, the knout, was a Mongol development. Some Mongol concepts, such as tolerance of other cultures and religions, were not adopted by Russians.

Well after the Mongol conquest, the Tatars had regular ties with Russia, as regular thorns in its side throughout the periods covered here, as commercial partners and as a source of new Russians (many Russian service gentrymen of later years were part-Tatar).

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Disadvantages: If there's any real drawback to this period, it's the number of options that it presents! The best bet might be to start the PCs as peasants north of Moscow, who have all the appropriate Russian adventures and then "go Cossack," thus not missing any possibilities.

The Petrine Period (circa 1650-1725)

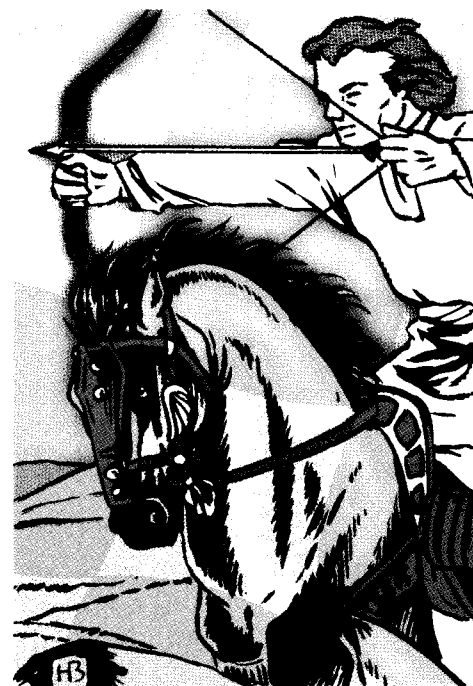
Advantages: For players fond of Church politics and gruesome conflict, the Old Believers schism cannot be topped; a PC band of Old Believer rebels could be hunted by reformers, forced to find sanctuary in sympathetic households and distant monasteries, and to form their own plans to strike back. Peasants and nobles alike were oppressed by Tsar Peter, and the site of St. Petersburg was a place of macabre brotherhood for the dying masses who built it. Accompanying the tsar on the Grand Embassy would make an interesting tour-of-Europe campaign.

Disadvantages: If the group isn't interested in playing the oppressed and rebellious in a dark time of national reform, there isn't much left here. On the other hand, Petrine Russia makes an excellent place to visit for players of *GURPS Swashbucklers*, who can experience the horrors of Petrine Russia without being truly victim to it.

Who and Why . . . and Violence

Once the level of reality and precise period and setting are chosen, the GM still has an important choice to make: Just who *are* the characters, and what are their initial motivations? This is the issue of viewpoint: Russia looks very different through the eyes of a group of Kievan monks than it does to a band of pagan *skomorokhs* of the same period. By the same token, Russian nobles wouldn't often be seen traveling alongside a group of rough fur-trappers, unless all had lost their homes to Mongols or *oprichniks*.

It's likely this question will have been answered by this stage. However, this is also the best time to open discussion with the players. The GM might be eager to run a campaign focusing on the wars against the Tatar khans, but the players might be keen on the skulduggery of a backstabbing, all-*boyar* campaign. This can force a lot of work and compromise on the GM, but it's worth it so that everybody has fun.



One of the most important points of compromise is the role of violence in the campaign. Roleplaying games cannot exist without conflict, but "conflict" doesn't always mean "fighting." Trying to convince a priest that the wine for the Eucharist has been poisoned, when *he* considers the PC a Satan-worshipping heretic, can be difficult, but if the PC fails, hundreds of innocent people might die. . . . On the other hand, there's nothing like a little hard-hitting tactical action to get the blood pumping, and flashing blades, thundering hoofbeats and whistling arrows are a big part of Russian history.

ADVENTURES

This following adventure seeds range from simple scenes to be added to existing scenarios to ideas that could be fleshed out to span several weeks of play. Most of the historical scenarios utilize the late Muscovite Period but can be adapted to any setting.

Prince Vladimir's Raiment (Historical)

The PCs are contacted by Father Alexei Vaskarov, a friendly clergyman, well-known to at least one of them (perhaps from childhood). His church was sacked by a band of robbers and burned to the ground. It is being rebuilt, and although a large amount of money and goods were lost, the church has received emergency funds from the metropolitan.

He admits to the party something that he can tell no one within the clergy, lest he risk his position: something *special* was lost to the robbers. Two weeks prior to the attack, Father Alexei was approached by a widow whose son was very ill. She had had a vision that the touch of a great prince's robe would cure him, and begged for help. Father Alexei knew that the raiments of several great princes were kept in the cathedral, but that he could never convince the bishop to release something so valuable to a parish priest. Against his better judgment, he stole the robes of Vladimir Monomakh, and wrapped the sick child in them while they all prayed. The stiff, worn robes ripped badly during the procedure, and he stowed them away to be mended only to have them stolen.

Father Alexei is very frightened, and asks for the PCs' help. Could they find the robbers, and return the clothing to the cathedral? Once the robes are returned, he intends to confess his sin, but he need not mention the PCs.

Possible complications range from the robbers no longer owning the robes (having sold them to an English merchant in Novgorod, perhaps), to being caught as thieves at the cathedral. If the latter happens, Father Alexei might be too frightened to come forward in their defense.



Friends & Foes [Continued]

Turkey

The Turks were a frequent enemy from the rise of Muscovy onward. They formed the largest part of the Tatar army, and their vast Ottoman Empire was centered at the conquered Constantinople. When Russia gained its own patriarch in 1589, it considered its See the superior one, since most of the remaining Orthodox churches were under Turkish control. Throughout the Muscovite Period, the Turks traded blows with the Cossacks, who were paid to act as a buffer protecting Russia. When Russia wanted peace with the Turks, the Cossacks often embarrassed it by staging raids on Turkish outposts and towns. The Cossacks also sold slaves to Turkish slave-traders throughout the Muscovy Era.

The Turks bullied Russia through the early Romanov reigns, but when Peter the Great came to power, vengeance on the Turks was his priority. He had plans to crush the entire Ottoman Empire, and had some minor successes, but western Europe wouldn't assist him.

Western Europe

To Russians, all other Europeans, from the hated and distrusted Poles and Lithuanians to the usually hated Swedes, to those from distant lands such as France and Spain, were known collectively as *Nemtsy*, "those who cannot speak," with division into two categories: Latins (such as Italians and the Spanish) and Germans (such as the Poles and even the English).

With the exception of short-lived commercial ties with England and France, all Russo-European relations took the form of political or religious wars. The Poles, Lithuanians and Swedes constantly fought Russia, and for many years Kiev was under Polish rule. The Poles often had designs on the Russian throne, and the plot to gain rulership of Russia for Sigismund III might have succeeded if not for the religious differences. "Religious differences" were the justification for the Baltic Crusades, from which Novgorod took most of the blows.



Enduring Legacy

The constant warfare along Russia's western borders had some lasting effects.

In the pre-*perestroika* 1980s, a businessman from Lithuania passing through Orsha (a city near Smolensk, in the Byelorussian S.S.R.) noticed a street named "The Lithuanian's Street." Thinking it an example of the "international friendship between Soviet Socialist Republics," he pointed it out to his local guide.

The guide corrected him: "This isn't a Soviet name; it's medieval. Centuries ago, when Lithuanian troops came to loot the city, they always entered and exited along this street. *That's* why it's 'The Lithuanian's Street.'"

— Romas Buivydas,
Lithuanian GURPS player

Into the Wild Country (Historical)

For this adventure, the characters should be trusted by some Muscovite "movers and shakers." They might be *streltsy* who've shown initiative and skill in tight spots, known spies-for-hire or simply well-connected mercenaries. This adventure works best in the mid-16th and 17th centuries.

The adventurers are approached by a high-level contact with a desperate need for manhunters. Two weeks previously, Ilya Vasilevich Glazunov, a minor operative in Moscow's foreign office, left the city and went south, taking only a horse and an axe. His wife was found dead in their home in Kitai Gorod the next day, with her throat slashed. She had been dead for at least two days. The night before he left, Ilya told two local *boyars* that Moscow should move to crush the Turks once and for all, and that Russia would weaken and fall if it continued to cower in fear. He was drunk, and they ignored him.

The PCs' employer is concerned about Ilya. He must answer for the murder of his wife, and the city's noblemen suspect that he intends to spark a conflict with the Turks. He is known as an ambassador, and has the information necessary to fake a declaration of war. Worse yet, he might be persuading the Don Cossacks to make the first attack on Moscow's behalf. He could convince many Cossacks of the need to gather for war, tempting them with false promises of payment from the tsar. He must be returned . . . preferably alive.

The adventure can be as straightforward as it seems, or it could be complicated, with the investigation a wild chase through the world of the Don Cossacks. Maybe Ilya killed his wife. Maybe he didn't. Her murder might simply have caused him to snap. Ilya could be a victim, and the PCs with him: when they finally find him in one of the Upper Don Cossack settlements, he can explain that the PCs' employer hired his wife's killer and tried to kill him. He knows many secrets, some of which could severely damage the reputations of important people. He only wanted to escape, and he recommends that the PCs do the same.

This could serve as the transition from a Muscovite to a Cossack campaign, or it could turn a Muscovite campaign into a deadly contest between the PCs and their former friends back in the city.

The Skomorokhs (Historical)

This scenario deals with the darker side of the Christian/pagan conflict, from the Christian point of view. The PCs can be Orthodox monks or priests, or devout Christian peasants on Church lands.

A large band of *skomorokhs* enters the village during early winter (November) when the heaviest snows are falling and travel is almost impossible. The village church or monastery objects to the *skomorokhs'* presence, and drives them away, denying them shelter. Several of the villagers harbor the minstrels, and large portions of the town gather at one *izba* to hear their songs. Of course, this has to be stopped.

The *skomorokhs* could be simple peasant minstrels honestly seeking shelter from the snow or hard-core fanatics attempting "spiritual sabotage," trying to make the Orthodox PCs and their brethren look bad. In the first case, the PCs must decide whether they will obey the wishes of the Church, or demonstrate true Christian charity (and suffer whatever recriminations the Church hierarchy visits on them). In the second case, the *skomorokhs* employ their usual repertoire of divinatory tactics, such as declaring that the peasants' grandfathers are screaming in pain from the presence of crucifixes in houses that they would dearly love to visit.

Their bear foresees death for the community, and the *skomorokhs* might even stage a church robbery, murder or arson, trying to pin the blame on the priests.

If the priests demand that they leave town, they declare that the priests are murdering innocents by casting them into the snow, in defiance of all traditions of Russian hospitality and Christian charity. Eventually, it results in an angry village mob with eyes turned toward the Church. Alternately, this scenario can be run from the *other* side of the conflict.



Boyar Peter Kraslov (Historical)

This minor incident can be added to the PCs' travels in nearly any time period from the Mongol invasion onward.

The party witnesses an attack: three peasants armed with axes and wearing helmets are hacking the door from a rich-looking coach sleigh. One of them strikes at a leg of the sleigh, cracking it and causing it to sit dangerously on the runners. A second slaps the rump of one of the horses with the flat of his axe, sending it galloping off the road into some light woods (if it's the 16th century or later, the third fires an arquebus next to the ear of the other horse). A stream, frozen but with steep banks, is about 100 yards directly before the sleigh's path, and screams are coming from within the carriage.

When the attackers see the characters, make a reaction roll for them at a base -2, plus any modifiers that might apply from the PCs' appearance. If they flee, they do so as a group, into the woods opposite the path of the sleigh.

There are several ways to save the occupants of the sleigh. Running close to it and destroying the supporting legs could make it spill before reaching the stream, breaking the horses free: all within would take 1 yard of falling damage. Trying to stop the horses directly is also a possibility. If the heroes are unable to halt the carriage, two of the occupants, a woman and a girl, are pushed free (stunned but unhurt), and when the carriage buckles thereafter only the remaining occupant takes damage.

Vedomosti

Among the many modernizations brought to Russia by Peter I was the *Vedomosti* ("Record"), the first Russian newspaper, edited by Peter himself. An issue was released every 5-14 days, and contained "A Record of Military and Other Affairs Worthy of Knowledge and Recording, which Have Occurred in the Moscow State and Other Adjacent Countries." The circulation was 1,000 copies.

When campaigning in this period, the GM can use the *Vedomosti* to plant the seeds of adventures. An interesting dispatch or story can be used to provide clues or to introduce characters to new storylines. It must be remembered that stories will be days or weeks old; a slower means of information transmission than gossip, but more accurate and farther-ranging.

The following are excerpts from the first issue, published January 2, 1703:

Dispatch from Persia

The Indian tsar has bestowed upon our great sovereign an elephant and many other gifts. The elephant has journeyed overland from Shemakha to Astrakhan.

Dispatch from Kazan

Along the river Sok a great deal of oil and copper ore have been discovered. From this ore a handsome amount of copper has been smelted. This is expected to provide a substantial profit for the state of Moscow.

Dispatch from Siberia

In the Chinese Empire the Jesuits are greatly disliked for their cunning, and some have been put to death.

Dispatch from Narva

On September 26, a Moscow army of 10,000 troops advanced on this side of the river Neva near Notenburg between the Russian and Ingermanland borders. It stopped there and began to make trenches, 500 steps from the fortress on its side of the river. Our men under General Kroniort are on the far side of the river, between it and Notenburg. Not all of them have infantry, cavalry and shells, but they keep the Swedish troops from crossing the Neva when they attempt to do so. They intend to shell the fort at Notenburg, but it is made entirely of stone and the troops besieged there are good. Recently 400 were taken in, and so for now there is nothing to fear.

Crossover Campaigns

GURPS Russia can be used as a setting or as source material for other *GURPS* campaigns. In addition to its contact with other major medieval nations, Russia's culture and mythology can be transplanted successfully into completely different genres.

GURPS Space

Space GMs can use this book almost intact by creating a futuristic society based on Old Russia, particularly the Kievan Era. Imagine a world or system populated by a quiet, agrarian race. In the early days of exploration in this sector, a race of warrior-princes appears, providing rulership and defense against their enemies. As the culture develops, it seeks religious and/or technological validity by adopting wholesale the culture of a nearby system, which has become the center of civilization in this part of the galaxy. Then the space-Mongols show up . . .

GURPS Horror

Russian fantasy is very dark, and even *realistic* Russian games lend themselves well to horror-gaming. See the adventures in this chapter, and watch out for Misery!

Continued on next page . . .

The carriage contains Peter Kraslov, a young low-level nobleman, far from the favor of the grand prince or tsar. He, his wife and his only daughter are on their way to attend Mass. Kraslov is particularly poor; his land is a tiny fragment of forest with an impoverished village. The nearest church is his brother's, who has lands just as small but who is a cunning and ruthless businessman.

The attackers are some of Peter Kraslov's brother's peasants, whom he sends out regularly to terrorize his siblings (there are six Kraslov brothers in all), all of whom he despises. He has on several occasions attempted to deny them Mass on his lands, but the local bishop has intervened.

Kraslov explains the incident as best he can, and is grateful for any help the PCs give him. He can't really reward them, although he puts them up for the night and gives them dinner, but they might be able to call on him for a favor later. He doesn't ask them to mete out any retribution on his brother, but the PCs are free agents . . .

The Arsonist (Historical)

This investigative scenario can take place in any large city, with the PCs anything from lowly *muzhiks* to the tsar's favorite *boyars*.

After a minor fire ruins a building that the characters care about (their home, for instance, or a favorite drinking-house), they are greeted on the street by a well-dressed merchant, Dmitri Petrovich Bedykov. Dmitri deals in logs and planks, cut from the forests outside the city, and is on the scene to secure deals for his wares, even before the flames have died down. He is an unlikeable character, seeming to care for nothing but his business. He rattles on about prices and bargains even as crying mothers carry their children from the site of the fire.

Dmitri's prices, though, are the best in town, and the PCs may not be too disgusted to do business with him. Regardless, they notice that Dmitri seems to know an awful lot about the events that led up to the fire (he'll toss in a few details with mock concern). By the second or third encounter with Dmitri (all in the same part of town, within a few days of each other), the PCs may suspect him of arson.

Exploration of Dmitri's lumberyard reveals nothing suspicious. He lives with his two sons and no wife; he has been too concerned with business to bother remarrying since his wife died three years ago. Dmitri's sons are pleasant and lack their father's obvious greed.

The real culprit, and how to catch him, is up to the GM. It might be Dmitri, with or without his sons as agents. If this is the case, another layer should probably be added to make the plot more interesting. Maybe the sons are doing it without the father's knowledge, to keep the family business healthy and to keep their father from having the time to find another wife.

Perhaps Dmitri is the agent of a *boyar* setting fires as an assassin and then cleaning up on wood profits as a bonus. Investigations would lead from Dmitri into the chaos of city political wars, and the homes (and private atrocities) of the nobility! If the PCs *are* noblemen, they'll have entirely different tools at their disposal.

Alternately, the arsonist might *not* be Dmitri or his family; just because he's heartless doesn't mean he's *evil*. Perhaps the (slightly deluded) daughter of a basket-merchant is in love with the foul man, and is setting the fires as a "gift of love." The miserly Dmitri spurned the woman's advances on the basis of his "poverty," and how better to make Dmitri rich than by giving him business? This last could be played out as a non-supernatural horror scenario, with the degree of the woman's insanity a matter of GM taste.





Pomestie (Historical)

This scenario is set in the early reign of Ivan the Terrible, before the savage *oprichnina*: the 1550s, the decade at the height of change for Muscovy, is ideal. This adventure makes an excellent campaign introduction.

The first snows of autumn are falling and the gigantic open markets in Red Square teem with yelling merchants. The characters are shopping for weapons or supplies.

A huge crowd gathers as guardsmen (or the newly founded *streltsy*) swell out from the Kremlin. Two figures, yelling at one another, are amid them. One of the men is Ivan IV. The second, taller, man is Fedor Timofeyevich, a service gentryman who holds his *pomest* lands along the lakeshore southeast of Novgorod. Ivan is furious with him, but the gentryman insists on belaboring his point, whatever it is. The characters move to catch a better look, along with the rest of the crowd.

As soldiers drag the gentryman onto the *lobno mesto*, Ivan steps up behind him and strikes him hard over the head with his omnipresent pointed cane. He points to one of the player characters (the strongest-looking one), ordering him to serve as the "human rest" for the gentryman, as he declares Timofeyevich a traitor and summons the knoutmaster. Another character is ordered to cut open the man's coat so that he can be knouted. The knoutmaster arrives, and the PC holding the gentryman feels the pressure of no less than 30 hard lashes before Ivan is satisfied. After 19, the PC notices (on a successful Hearing+4 roll) that the man is no longer breathing.

The body of the "traitor," its back covered with blood, is taken to the river and thrown in by the soldiers. Ivan Grozny begins a short speech about the divine right of the autocrat, and puts his arm around the PC who bore the dead gentryman's weight. Ivan declares him a brave and noble man, and states that the lands once presided over by Timofeyevich are now granted to the PC! Refusal would be unwise.

The PCs are taken into the Kremlin, and the ceremony passing the lands onto Ivan's new favorite is completed. The lands in question, consisting of two large villages and a former-abbey-now-estate house, were seized from Novgorod Church holdings nearly a century earlier. The PC is responsible for building its retinue of soldiers, keeping the revenues coming in and answering the needs of the state and tsar.

The PCs travel to Novgorod, and the work of familiarizing themselves with the town and the abbey, and the expulsion of Fedor Timofeyevich's family (his wife, Alisa, is ordered sent to a monastery; his sons are to be given to the Church as slaves) should all be played out. The neighboring gentrymen and remaining

Crossover Campaigns [Continued]

GURPS Fantasy

The time of Yrth's major Banestorm influxes from Earth (*circa* 1050-1200) spans the transitory period from Kievan Russia into *Appanage* Russia, from the death of Yaroslav the Wise to the rise of Ghengis Khan in China. The chaotic nature of this period means that nobody would miss a village or two swept away by one of Russia's great forest fires – a few *skomorokhs* or Orthodox priests might be keeping their old traditions alive in distant corners of Yrth. And who knows what would happen when occasional *later* Russians come into contact with them?

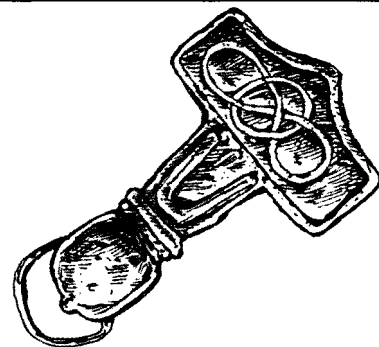
GURPS Swashbucklers

England is the source of much of our knowledge of 17th-century Russia; many English ambassadors reported on the barbaric kingdom beyond civilized Europe (read the writings of Giles Fletcher for inspiration on the British viewpoint). The swashbuckling era also saw financial treaties with France. On a diplomatic mission to Russia, a group of the Kings Musketeer's could come face to face with the Moscow *streltsy*.

GURPS Vikings

An obvious crossover for Kievan Era adventures, the conquest of the Eastern Slavs could be played out with the PCs in the roles historically taken by Rurik and his men. Any GM running a Viking journey to Constantinople (perhaps to join the Varangian Guard) or Itil could use *GURPS Russia* when detailing the river journey. Kypchak raiders and Slavic merchants are likely NPCs.

Continued on next page . . .



Crossover Campaigns [Continued]

GURPS Celtic Myth

There are numerous similarities between the Otherworlds of Celts and Russians, and a connection between the two realms wouldn't be farfetched. Heroes of either land traveling through an Otherworld that has grown familiar after numerous adventures could find themselves awed once again by a chance excursion to another Otherworld. And if they exit the Otherworld into Kievan Rus or Celtic Prydain or Eriu, they find themselves over 1,000 miles (and many centuries) from home.

GURPS Supers

Historical *Supers* (aside from WWII Nazi-bashers) have not been explored well, and medieval Russia would be an interesting place to start: "Out of the Time of Troubles emerged a band of heroes!"

Modern *Supers* fans can mine this book for background: comics and games are full of Soviet supers who are grim men in red powered-armor, boring strongmen armed with hammers and sickles, or bears. *GURPS I.S.T.*, which stresses *international* supers, has already broken this trend with a hero called *Bogatyr*. Further cultural images can be brought onto the battle-worn streets of your *Supers* world with this book. Baba Yaga as a super-villainess? How about as a *hermine*? They don't all have to be young and scantily clad.

GURPS Bunnies & Burrows

Believe it or not, this crossover is a *perfect* fit in several ways. Russian folklore is full of beast-fables: tales of animals living alongside humans or as bands of traveling companions. These animals (cats, birds, dogs, rabbits and other small forest creatures) are often a great deal smarter than the humans that they encounter or live with, and often have to save them from their own foolishness.

Animal roleplaying in Russia can also follow the lines of *The Secret of Nínih* or *Redwall*. Distinctly Russian mice, rabbits or other creatures could live out their lives as a mirror of the culture above them, drinking vodka, dancing and dealing with wicked Beast Tsars (who are also a part of Russian folklore). And when the *oprichnina* burns the human farms, the barn mice and rabbits who feed on the turnip crop suffer as well as the humans.

boyars seem very uncomfortable around the PCs, and their early meetings ("get acquainted" feasts) serve only as opportunities to be coldly observed by their new neighbors. Timofeyevich was *dearly* respected by his neighbors.

This adventure could last two or 20 sessions, as the GM and players see fit. The problems, not only of administration, but of forming an army (and maybe even taking it into battle), are nothing compared to attempting to stay in business when every local nobleman and merchant sees the PCs as some sort of symbol of the tsar's closed-minded intolerance of outside ideas. And just what *was* Timofeyevich so worked up about that he would give up his life to stand by his point? The tsar's men, when asked, claim, behind ingratiating smiles, to have no idea.

The Jealous Boyar (Fantasy)

This can be inserted into any campaign when the heroes are in need of funds. While traveling on the road, they hear a sound – a cross between an eagle's cry and a girl's scream. In the woods beside the track they see a shimmering light.

A peasant boy, not older than 12, is jumping with pleasure in a circle of flickering radiance. In the deep snow beside him lies the Firebird (see p. 107), with one of the child's arrows planted near its heart. The boy is afraid of the PCs, but proud to explain that he has "killed the Devil." His mother had told him many tales of the Firebird, but the parish priest had recently told the children that such creatures are the tools of Satan (naturally, this assumes a campaign where this isn't true).

The Firebird needs help, and once the PCs remove the arrow and bind her wounds, her light returns to full radiance, spreading near-daylight through the evening forest. *Zhar Ptitsa* thanks the characters, and, sensing their need, tells one of them to take a feather so that they can sell it.

The feather provides radiant light and is warm to the touch. When they enter the next village, the heroes find the feather impossible to conceal. None of the villagers can afford to pay a reasonable price, but a merchant staying in the *boyar's* home offers seven *rubles* for it.

Whether or not the PCs sell, they are contacted within a week by the soldiers of Boris Danilovich Agratiev, a moderately powerful *boyar* who controls lands on the upper Volga. If the PCs sold the feather, he now owns it, having purchased it from the merchant. If the PCs still have it, then he wants it, and more. Agratiev offers them 400 *rubles* to find and capture the Firebird, and won't take "no" for an answer. If the PCs refuse, he ponders aloud various accusations of treason he could raise against them, pointing out that he is a close friend of the tsar (if the current tsar is Ivan Grozny or some other *boyar-hater*, then Agratiev is service gentry, instead). He even resorts to throwing the PCs in a cell until they comply.

If they agree to hunt the Firebird, Agratiev sends four of his soldiers with them, one of whom bears weekly reports to him. If the PCs absolutely refuse, or manage to escape the soldiers, they have gained a powerful and obsessive Enemy.

Grandfather Frost (Fantasy)

At the height of a particularly harsh winter, the remote village the PCs are in is completely isolated, unable to get supplies. Starving and freezing, the elders look to the PCs for some sort of solution before the entire village dies. At night, the heroes can hear the cruel whistling wind of Grandfather Frost, who begins one by one to take the lives of the villagers whom they care about.

When a short expedition to a neighboring town to ask for food (a mission which need not employ the PCs) finds this town likewise freezing and dying, the adventur-

ers are begged to seek out Grandfather Frost and end the deadly cold. If they cannot appeal to his better nature (assuming that he *has* one), then they'll have to kill him.

The journey is a series of deadly natural encounters in the forest. The PCs must deal with the cold and wind, and provide food for themselves while hunting for the elusive old man. How they find Frost is up to the GM. Frost's house might be well-known to the characters, or they might have to make deals with the other denizens of the forest to find it. Most of the Beast Tsars would be eager to assist them, since their children are dying. The Grey Wolf might even join in the quest!

In any case, Grandfather Frost is cold toward the characters, insisting that he does what he's meant to do and that their little village is insignificant, its loss part of the natural cycle. He skips nimbly from ice-encrusted branch to branch, laughing and showering them with frosty shards. If the characters appeal to his greed, he is willing to make an exchange for service or some valuable item such as a Firebird feather, leading to a race against time since Grandfather Frost isn't about to let up until the deal is completed.

If the characters try to slay Grandfather Frost it should be a difficult battle, with the spry old spirit sending cold, cutting winds at them while artfully avoiding their blades and magic. The fight should not be impossible, but it should be a challenge that genuinely threatens the lives of party members. If the PCs are getting trounced, Grandfather Frost won't care if they retreat; he's sure that his winter will get them eventually.

If the PCs kill Grandfather Frost, they've made a terrible mistake. Winter continues unabated, getting *colder* without Grandfather Frost's control. The quest then becomes one to *resurrect* the foul spirit (or at least find him a replacement). If he is brought back to life, he might, in gratitude, spare the village.

The Wolf-Knife (Fantasy)

The characters come to know Danila Ivanovich, a rough-edged but basically good-natured rogue who roams from village to village, fleeing the authorities. He works hard for his keep, chopping wood and washing horses for the villages he passes through, and once saved a girl from drowning.

The characters have an opportunity to do Danila a good turn when he is attacked by a bear in the woods outside of their village. When the heroes chase off the bear (which retreats grumpily if outclassed), Danila gratefully offers them a knife, upon which he hastily carves a wolf-head. He says that this secret was passed to him from his father, who was a wizard and a hermit: if someone plants this knife in the ground at midnight, and leaps head-first over it, he becomes a wolf! By leaping back over the knife, he becomes human again. Danila explains that he does this occasionally when he is very hungry; he steals the occasional chicken from the local *boyar* and the blame falls on wolves.

A character tries it that night, and leaping over the knife becomes a wolf in mid-air. Out of the shadows, however, darts Danila, who snatches up the knife and dives into a nearby river. Unable to jump back over the knife, the poor PC is stuck as a wolf!

Soon, Danila tries to blackmail the wolf-man into committing a murder, a theft or a quest for some great magic item. He promises to give the knife back afterward.

It may occur to the characters that the *bear* attacking Danila was another ruse: if they didn't kill it, they might enlist its aid. Regardless, they now have a knotty problem: should they do what Danila demands, or try to get the knife back from him?



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Any good library has dozens of books on Russia, but the overwhelming majority are on such arcana as Soviet economics or the poets of the 1917 revolution. Once the remaining books on the latter tsars and the life of Catherine the Great have been discounted, the eager reader is lucky if he finds a single book about the periods covered here. These remaining few are likely biographies of Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great. Students of the Kievan Era have been warned.

Most primary sources have no standard edition currently in print. Works such as *The Primary Chronicle*, the Giles Fletcher journals, and the observations of ibn Rusteh, Olearius and others are all valuable reading, and several translations can be found. On a similar note, many of the *modern* authors listed below have written dozens of useful works not listed here, some of which were consulted when preparing *GURPS Russia*.

The works on this list were selected on the basis of their usefulness and readability: any listed are valuable to GMs or players interested in further reading. Titles marked with an asterisk (*) are particularly rich, and are especially useful for expanding the detail and flavor of a Russian campaign. GMs wishing even *further* research should look for the many scholarly periodicals dedicated to Russian studies: most college libraries have collections of the *Slavic Review* and others.

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Medieval Russia in RPGs

Surprisingly, the rich history and folklore of Russia has seldom been presented on the gaming table. Thus far, Baba Yaga has had a few appearances in fantasy games of all sorts, along with a handful of other Russian spirits and monsters. A *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* adventure, "Something Rotten In Kislev," takes place in a Russianesque fantasy city, and a few fantasy games focusing on historical play (*Ars Magica* and others) have included a little material on Old Russia, or at least neighboring cultures such as Poland and the Byzantine Empire. Apart from this, nothing has appeared from American or British RPG companies.

The only other example known to the author is *RUS*, published in Australia. Subtitled "Fantasy Role-Playing in Heather Russia," the game focuses on monsters-and-evil-wizards style play in the wilderness and villages of northern Russia in the 10th century. While the game is plagued by inaccurate historical mythological information, poor layout, outdated systems and lack of tactical detail, the game nevertheless creates an intriguing atmosphere, and the encounter tables are worth adapting. *GURPS* GMs running Kievian Era campaigns might find this game useful.

GLOSSARY



Appanage: The practice of dividing property equally among all one's heirs, creating ever-smaller landholdings called *appanages*.

Boyar: Russian landed aristocracy. *Boyars* answered to the prince and, later, to the tsar. The *okolnichii* was a social class immediately beneath them.

Byliny: Heroic folk songs dating to the early days of Russia.

Deti Boyarskie: The petty nobility in Muscovite Russia, literally "sons of boyars." These were the lowest of the service gentry.

Dnieper: Major waterway of the western steppe, flowing south into the Black Sea. Used as a trading route to Constantinople.

Druzhina: The armed retinue in service of a prince. In the *byliny*, they were Vladimir's "knights of the round table."

Dvoeverie: The practice of two faiths, specifically, the persistence of paganism among Christian Russian peasants.

Gosti: The highest ranking merchants, appointed by the tsar to handle trade of monopolized goods. A *gost* was exempt from many taxes, and was empowered to purchase land.

Gostinnyi Dvor: A Moscow marketplace set aside for foreign merchants and goods.

Grand Prince: Ruler of all Russia during the Kievan and Mongol eras. In Kievan times, the grand prince was simply the most powerful of the Varangian princes. Later, the title was granted by the Mongols, through a charter known as the *yarlik*.

Gusli: A popular stringed instrument of the lap-harp family.

Izba: Russian peasant dwelling: a wooden hut or cabin, with one or three chambers, heated by a stove.

Kholop: Slave in Mongol and later eras; *cheliadin* was the term in earlier eras.

Kiev: City on the lower Dnieper, the southernmost fortified trading-town of the Rus, and the Russian capital before the Muscovite Era.

Kvass: A popular weak beer.

Muzhik: A peasant. A literal serf, bound to the soil, was known as an *izgoi*.

Moscow: Capitol of Russia from the *Appanage* Period to the reign of Peter I.

Nemtsy: Foreigner; literally, "those who can't speak," referring to a *nemets'* skill with Russian. Northern and western Europeans were also called "Germans," while southern Europeans were "Latins."

Novgorod: City on Lake Ilmen in northwestern Russia. For 500 years, Novgorod was an independent city-state with colonies as far east as the Urals.

Pomestia: Service gentry, an artificial class of petty noble, created by Ivan the Terrible to challenge and replace the hereditary *boyars*. Service gentrymen were granted *pomest* lands after performing services for the tsar, and their new titles then became hereditary.

Posadnik: Socially elevated peasants.

Skomorokh: Russian minstrel or clown, and possibly a rural pagan priest.

Streletsy: Literally, "those who shoot." Muscovite "Musketeers" in the service of the tsar, who received land and privilege for military service. At times, the *streletsy* were more numerous than the regular Moscow army. Singular: *strelets*.

Tatars: Mongols. Specifically, "Tatars" refers to a group of Mongols on the Russian border at the beginning of the Muscovite Period, and also (confusingly) to some groups of Turkish invaders. *GURPS Russia* uses it to refer to local Mongols after the break-up of the Mongol Empire, circa 1350.

Tsar: Autocratic ruler of all Russia, and owner of all Russian lands and industry. The word is derived from the Latin *Caesar*.

Varangian: The Swedish Viking traders who became the rulers of Kievan Rus.

Varangian Guard: Highly renowned bodyguard of the Byzantine emperor, made up of specially trained Viking warriors.

Veche: A public assembly in a medieval Russian town or city, open to all free men (although sometimes with restrictions or further qualifications) and used to solve issues of town policy and to choose officials. In the early days, every town had a *veche*; Novgorod retained one for centuries longer than most of Russia.

Vedomye Zheny: The village wise woman, often believed to have magical powers. The *vedun* was the male equivalent.

Volkhv: Pagan wizard/priest; the urban equivalent of the *skomorokh*.

Yarlik: A charter granted by the Tatars of the Golden Horde giving rule of all Russia to one of the many princes.

Zemsky Sobor: A "Council of the Land" (a national assembly of sorts) made up of Muscovite *boyars* and other notables.

A Russian Vocabulary

A few Russian words and phrases dropped casually into dialogue can greatly enhance the feel of a *GURPS Russia* campaign. For more Russian words, see the list of character names and epithets on p. 33; *Money* (p. 44) and *Units of Measure* (p. 45) will also be useful in this regard.

Remember to laugh loudly and speak in a booming, thickly accented voice. Call your friends *tovarishch* ("comrade") and drink (or rather *roleplay* drinking) copious amounts of *vodka*! Of course, not every Russian peasant was stereotypical in nature, but a sprinkling of cultural cliché can build a lot of atmosphere.

Adversary: <i>Protivnik</i>	Cossack: <i>Kazak</i>	Occult: <i>Mistichvesky</i>
Amulet: <i>Ladanka</i>	Dog: <i>Sobaka</i>	Oven: <i>Pech</i>
Archaic: <i>Drievny</i>	Dungeon: <i>Bashnya</i>	Owl: <i>Sova</i>
Archer: <i>Luchnik</i>	Father: <i>Batushka</i>	Ox: <i>Vol</i>
Armor: <i>Bronya</i>	Forest: <i>Lyes</i>	Pagan: <i>Yazychnik</i>
Arquebus: <i>Pishchali</i>	Fur: <i>Shkura</i>	Plague: <i>Chuma</i>
Augury: <i>Pryedveshchany</i>	Girl: <i>Devoshka</i>	Prince: <i>Knyaz</i>
Aviary: <i>Ptuchnik</i>	God: <i>Bog</i>	Raven: <i>Voron</i>
Axe: <i>Topor</i>	Grandfather:	Riddle: <i>Zagadka</i>
Bandit: <i>Razboynik</i>	<i>Dyedushka</i>	River: <i>Ryeka</i>
Bastard: <i>Ubliudok</i>	Grandmother:	Saint: <i>Svyatoy</i>
Bear: <i>Mysdyved</i>	<i>Babushka</i>	Salt: <i>Sol</i>
Beast: <i>Zver</i>	Grove: <i>Roshcha</i>	Scabbard: <i>Nozhpili</i>
Beer: <i>Pivo</i>	Hag: <i>Vedma</i>	Scroll: <i>Svitok</i>
Beeswax: <i>Vosk</i>	Halberd: <i>Alyebarda</i>	Scythe: <i>Kosa</i>
Beggar: <i>Nishchy</i>	Harlot: <i>Publichnaya</i>	Skeleton: <i>Ostov</i>
Broadsword: <i>Palash</i>	Hauberk: <i>Pantsihr</i>	Sling (Weapon):
Buckler: <i>Shchit</i>	Hero: <i>Gyeroy</i>	<i>Prashcha</i>
Cairn: <i>Mogilnik</i>	Heroine: <i>Gyeroimxa</i>	Spell (Magic):
Campaign: <i>Kampaniya</i>	Honey: <i>Myed</i>	<i>Ocharovat</i>
Cannon: <i>Pushka</i>	Horse: <i>Loshad</i>	Star: <i>Zbiezda</i>
Castle: <i>Zamok</i>	Hovel: <i>Lachuga</i>	Tavern: <i>Gostinnitsa</i>
Cathedral: <i>Sobor</i>	Icon: <i>Obraz</i>	Torture: <i>Pitka</i>
Cave: <i>Peshchiera</i>	Icebound: <i>Zatery</i>	Vermin: <i>Gad</i>
Chainmail: <i>Kolchuta</i>	Mace/Club: <i>Zhezl</i>	Warrior: <i>Ramik</i>
Combat: <i>Bitva</i>	Mountain: <i>Gora</i>	Weapon: <i>Oruzhye</i>
Conspiracy: <i>Zagovor</i>	Necropolis:	Werewolf: <i>Oborotyen</i>
Comrade: <i>Tovarishch</i>	<i>Kladbishchye</i>	
Conjurer: <i>Volshibnik</i>		



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