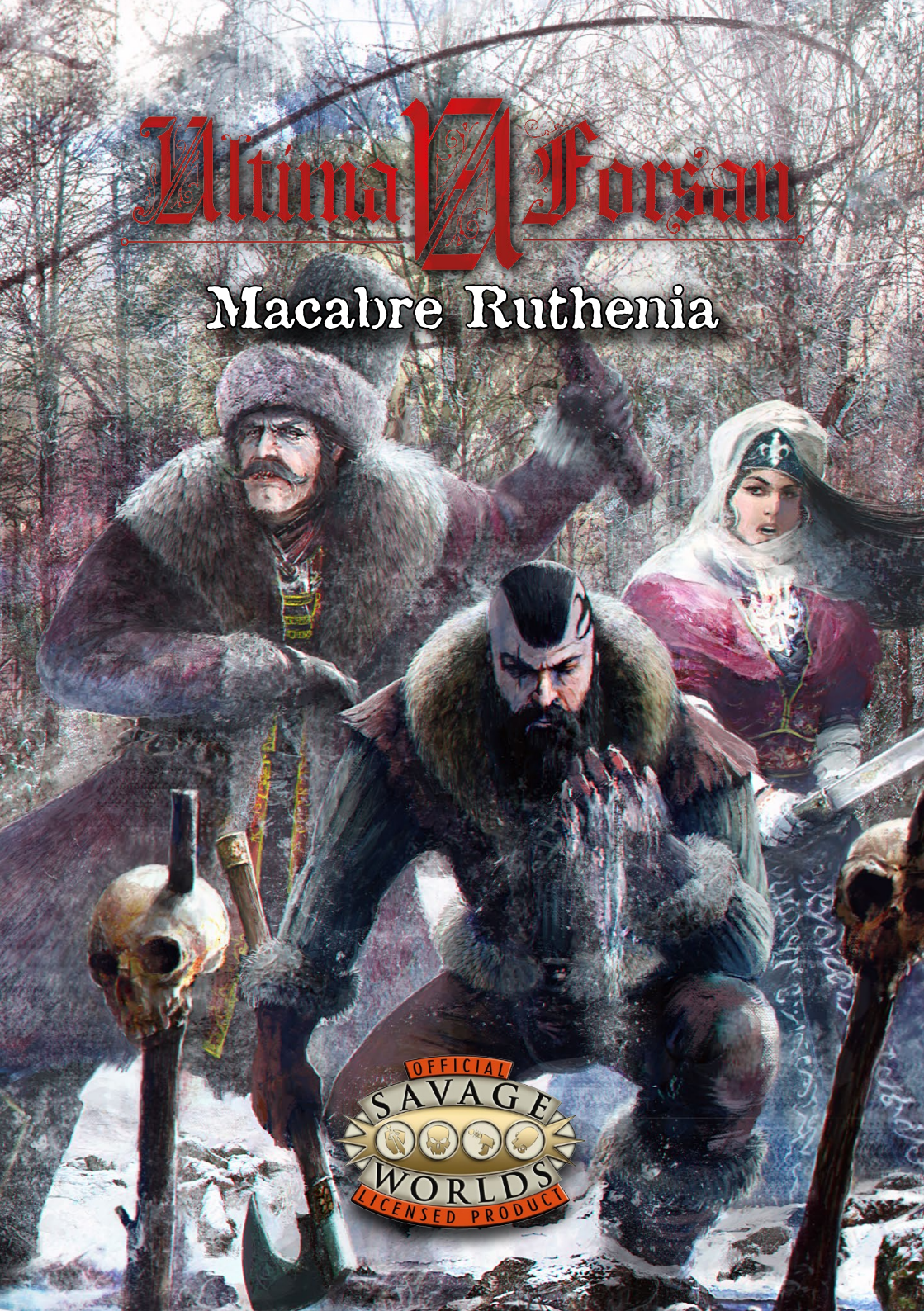


Ultima V Forsan

Macabre Ruthenia



Ultima Forsan

MACABRE RUTHENIA



ULTIMA FORSAN

by Mauro Longo & Giuseppe Rotondo

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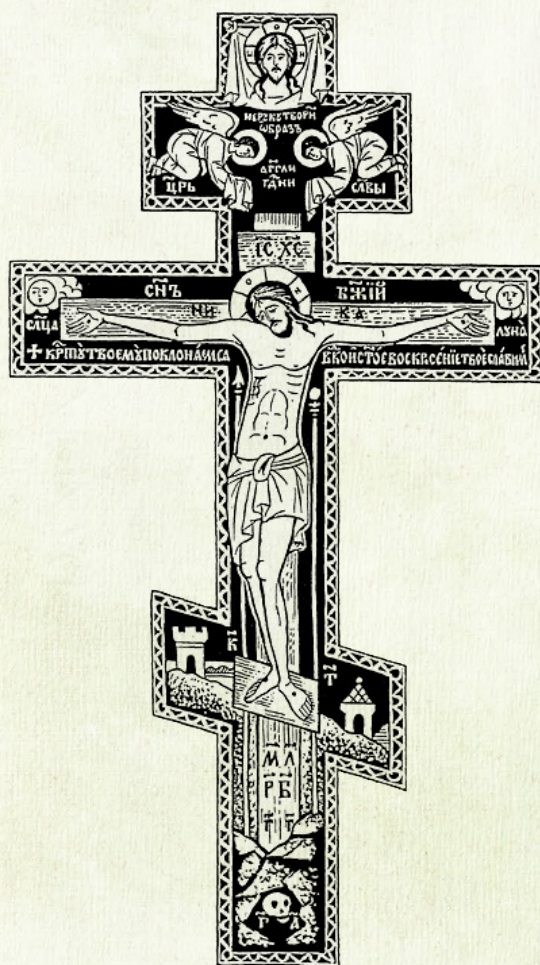
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So let us begin, brothers, this mourn –
from Vladimir of yore to nowadays Igor,
who girded his mind with fortitude, and
sharpened his heart with manliness, thus
imbued with the spirit of arms, he led his
brave troops against the Dead land in the
name of the Russian land.

Then Igor glanced up at the bright sun and
saw that from it with darkness his warriors
were covered.

And Igor says to his Guards: "Brothers and
Guards! It is better indeed to be slain by
Husks than to be saved, although wounded;
so let us mount, brothers, upon our swift
steeds, and take a look at the blue Don."

The Mourn of Igor's Campaign



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Introduction

Chapter One

Introduction



his companion is about Great Mother Russia's huge patrimony of history, traditions, legends and myths and its breathtaking

landscapes, the wild lands and the boundless vastness of these regions.

We are passionate about the history of this land, its fantasy characters and its titanic, wild geography; we love it even more filtered through the lens of imagination and when we retrace its centuries-old history.

If we manage to infuse you with our passion and get you to play heroic adventures set in Ultima Forsan macabre and wild Ruthenia, we will have achieved the greatest result ever. Before continuing, however, we have to point out a few things.

Such a vast territory, complex history and mixture of different peoples have to be very simplified to be understood and “playable”, most of all in the “fast, furious and fun” Savage Worlds style. This is why we have explained as follows:

*** Ruthenia:** In Ultima Forsan Macabre Europe, this term indicates all the regions which are the subject of this companion, plus some others bordering on them. In particular, Ruthenia comprises: the Duchies of Lithuania, Muscovy, the Principality of Smolensk, the Republic of Novgorod, the Pleskov Republic, Archangelopolis, the fortified villages on the Neva Bay, the harbors along the Volga River, the

region surrounding Matrega and all the lands lying between these territories. Generally speaking, the name ‘Ruthenia’ indicates all the regions lying between Old Poland and the Kingdom of Hungary to the West, the Kalmar Union to the Northwest, the Volga River to the East, and the Sultanate of Sevastopol to the South.

*** The Ruthenians:** Named after them, Ruthenia is populated mostly by Ruthenians, who also call themselves Russians. Recently, their population has started to split into different groups, such as the Great Russians, White Ruthenians, Small Russians and Pomors, but for convenience's sake they are still considered a single ethnicity. They are East Slavs, whose origins date back to the Ancient Kievan Rus, and therefore, they still share some physical traits and language.



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* **The Ruthenian Language:** Countless different dialects notwithstanding, this region has a common written language, understood by everybody, which is called Ruthenian. This ancient East Slavic language originated directly from the language of the Ancient Kievan Rus. Ruthenian is written using the Cyrillic alphabet.

* **Tartary:** “Tartary” extends to the east and south of Ruthenia. The term “Tartary” is an imprecise European geographical term which indicates the limitless vastness of the steppes and the wild lands extending beyond the Volga River, encircling the Ural Mountains and continuing to spread out towards the unknown lands of the Far East. The term “Tartary”, therefore, roughly indicates all the lands east of Sevastopol and Ruthenia, as far as the borders of the known world. However, while Tartary is borderless and its northeastern territories are largely unknown, the area along the Silk Road and as far as Serindia it is much better known by the Westerners, who even give different names to those countries and peoples.

* **Tartars:** The so-called Tartars, who can also be found in Ruthenia and along the Silk Road, are all populations who, to a Westerner’s eye, appear to belong to one

single people inhabiting the limitless lands of Tartary: any kind of Turkish peoples, Mongols, Khazars, Tatars, Siberians, and nomads living in the most isolated areas of Asia. All these peoples actually have a thousand different names, languages and traditions, and to them it is the Europeans who all look like one another.

* **The Tartar Language:** The “Tartars” speak an infinite variety of languages and dialects. Through centuries of nomadic life, before and after the Plague, they have been merging their traditions, languages and customs. Strictly used for literary and commercial purposes, in many important cities there exists a common language generically known as “Tartar Language”, written in an alphabet that is also called Tartar.

Should your game sessions require more details, feel free to examine in depth and further complicate all ethnic, linguistic, social and political aspects belonging to these territories, taking whatever texts and historical information you have at your disposal as your starting point.

Rubles and Florins

The most widely spread currency in Ruthenia is the Ruble, a silver coin whose value is determined by its weight. Since the Florin—and its equivalent currency—is as widespread, and deemed quite practical in many cities more open to trade, such as Novgorod, Pleskov, and Moscow, the Ruble’s real value has recently been made equal to that of Florins within almost all the Fiefs of this region.

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Ruthenia's Heroes

Chapter Two

Ruthenia's Heroes



his chapter introduces some new Archetypes and Edges that allow you to further personalize your Ultima Forsan heroes

NEW ARCHETYPES

BLACK MASTIFF

The Oprichniki are the members of an elite battalion of veterans and ‘war hounds’ in the service of the Great Prince of Muscovy, who is the absolute ruler of the Principality of Muscovy. The origins of this order, together with many of its quainter characteristics, are in the Black Army of Hungary, with its vast political power, strict training and severe discipline. The Oprichniki’s leather armor and black leather tabards carry the silver emblem of a mastiff to indicate they are the ‘Great Prince’s Mastiffs.’ They serve more as spies and Moscow’s political police—and as Ruthenian counterparts of the better known Teutonic Inquisitors— than as warriors or guards.

BOGATYR

Bogatyrs are errant knights who wander the steppes and the taiga. Motivated by high ideals, these lonely, romantic heroes travel the country helping those in need of protection in exchange for a dignified welcome, kind gifts and a mention in their bards’ ballads. They are often called upon to flush out a Stray or a particularly dangerous Abomination wandering

through the Wilderness, or to help a maid being tormented by the Yagas. Their most valuable possessions are their steeds, spears and swords. Rumor has it that strangers, women, and even Tainted can now be found amongst them.

BROTHER OF THE SWORD

At the time of the Old Kingdoms, the Christian chivalric order of the Brothers of the Sword ventured further than any other into the northeastern bleak, pagan lands of Livonia. During the Darkest Age, they became the most important military power in Lithuania and were crucial to the safety of the region, even if the Grand Duchy was split into scores of smaller duchies. Today, the Brothers of the Sword are still a well-organized force active in Old Lithuania and in the Principality of Smolensk. They welcome in their ranks local aristocratic cadets, German, Hungarian and Polish veterans as well as adventurers from Western Europe. The Brothers are no longer a religious order and are now known as a unit of skilled and well-trained fighters. Their fighting techniques involve the use of two swords, both against outlaws or common enemies, and against the Dead. The Order does not accept any Tainted among its members, but many well-integrated women serve as officers, knights and squires.

CIRCISSIAN

Renowned for their charm, zest for life, passionate nature and ardor for battle, the Circassians are a well-organized and respected river-nomadic people, widespread along all the main rivers of the region. They live on barges equipped like wagons and are very hospitable,

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despite never setting aside their flair for business. Thanks to their charisma, most of their customs and weaponry have been adopted by the other peoples of this region; the Deadwater, the Circassian dagger and the shashka are the most common examples of this. They have nothing against the Tainted, whether they are members of their own people or strangers.

COSSACK

Cossacks are mercenary adventurers and fighters who live and travel with their families, both in small and large units; they are, therefore, midway between a genuine people (even if they are made up of a hundred different ethnicities) and a company of mercenary soldiers. Brave, strong and trustworthy, the Cossacks make a living either serving one prince or another, or hunting, fishing, raiding on a small scale and attacking Tartars' settlements on either side of the Volga River. Typically, they wear wide caftans open at the front, fur headwear and a Circassian—a long and heavy leather tunic with bandoliers attached to it. Their weapons of choice are usually pistols, spears, Circassian daggers, shashkas and long and short whips. They are also partial to Deadwater, silver amulets and the gopak dance, which they execute squatting with their arms crossed, and is also a way of keeping them fit. A community of Tainted warriors, led by the Ataman Taras Bulba, lives according to the same customs and traditions, but isolates itself from the other Cossacks. Its members are called White Cossacks.

DRUZHINNIK

A Druzhinnik is a knight belonging to the Druzhina ("Company"), who is a member of the personal guard of a prince or a chief, and of his elite warriors. These Ordained Knights are used to fighting and traveling through wild lands and in the harshest weather on steeds that can endure the most rugged terrains. They usually fight on horse, with spears, swords and their deadly axes, which they use with the utmost skill, both in a melee and as a ranged weapon. They ride into battle wearing light chainmail and always carry the necessary equipment to travel through the Wilderness for months in a row.

Each Druzhina is usually composed of a few dozen Druzhinniki, all faithful friends of their lord; they are his allies, and it is said they are incapable of fleeing or surrendering. When a Druzhinnik is not working for his prince, he can devote himself to his favorite activities. These knights fight with extreme fervor against the Plague Spawn or their lord's enemies, and they do not fear Death.

FOLK HERO

Ruthenian tales feature a lot of young woodcutters, wise farmers and fearless trappers who find themselves facing the Dead, the Yagas or even old Koschei, cunningly fooling them or defeating them with their physical prowess. Such folk heroes are farmers, carpenters or carters who —not content with staying at their farm or village— go in search of adventures, armed only with powerful axes or good bows, with which they can bring down a flying goose from a hundred paces.

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HIEROMONK

The Order of the Hieromonks has been established only recently by the patriarch of Moscow. These monks—who can only be Untainted—are always welcome and treated with the utmost respect by any court and Orthodox community in Ruthenia. Wise, inquiring and open-minded, Hieromonks research and study the Manna and the Saints—or Merovlites. They are also skilled healers and Plague experts, and many of them are Alchemists too, even if they only use this art for religious and beneficial ends.

YENISCH

These nomads are actors, musicians, painters, writers, poets, acrobats and bards, and the very embodiment of the most romantic and poignant gypsy spirit.

Their moving songs, tear-jerking poems and anguished paintings are in very high demand by the nobles and the well-off citizens of this region. When they are not traveling or working at their masterpieces, these dissolute and passionate wanderers can be found sitting in a circle on the ground or at the tables of some town tavern, playing tarot or fortune-telling while they drink prodigious quantities of Hippocras, a strongly spiced wine. They have nothing against the Tainted, whether they belong to their people or are strangers.

KALDERASH

Kalderash are nomads of the plains, who travel through Ruthenia on special wagons, each of them unique and built like an actual traveling workshop. They are skilled tinkers, coppersmiths, inventors



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Ruthenia's Heroes

and smelters and have turned their houses and means of transportation into laboratories on wheels, equipped with mechanical parts, furnaces, smokestacks, lathes and mills. The Kalderash are good travel companions because they are cheerful and open-minded. They have nothing against the Tainted, whether they belong to their own people or are strangers.

KHAZAR

Khazars are a nomadic people. They are well renowned for their linguistic, bureaucratic and accounting skills, but most of all for their quaint tales and the tall stories they recount about any subject. These people, whose origins are still unknown, came from the heart of Tartary more than a century ago; since then, they have spread throughout Ruthenia, their members often working as moneychangers, accountants, stewards and traders for princes, khans and boyars. Their skills in speaking different languages and handling money and weights are unmatched, which gives them great influence but makes them suspect, too. There are those who say that these wily and mocking sons of Tartary must have some huge secret or belong to a sect aiming to control the region. At present, Khazars follow many different religions, philosophies and customs, and Tainted Khazars are well integrated among their own people.

KOLDUNÛ

There are not many inventors or alchemists in Ruthenia, except for the scholars who can be found at court in some cities and of course, the Kalderash.

On the other hand, the Kolduns—the Wilderness Warlocks—are quite widespread. These grim, untrusting witches are held in great respect by the common people and the inhabitants of isolated villages and farms. They are healers, fortune-tellers, harbingers of doom and gloom, and hucksters. Many of them also indulge in aberrant practices and can be considered real Necromancers. Even if many of them are clearly just charlatans, apart from Starets, Bogatyrs and Black Mastiffs, nobody else would ever dare cross them because of superstition and for fear of revenge. Kolduns do not belong to any brotherhood or coven; they are almost always male and can at times be Tainted. Rumor has it that many of them are disciples or allies of the Yagas or of Koschei the Immortal or that they learned the Dead's secrets from the Karakizlar or the Kurganian Skeleton-Men.

KURGAN

To the east of the Volga River, in the heart of Tartary, where Erlik Khan's hordes are the undisputed rulers, there lives a grim and mysterious race, the only one of Ruthenian stock to wander so extensively beyond the borders of civilized lands. These people take their name from the Tartar word for those prehistorical burial mounds, dating back to the Cimmerian age, which the Kurgans now inhabit, having turned them into palaces.

These people are made up of tribes who have regressed to a barbaric and wild life, adorning themselves with bones, skulls and blue tattoos. They live, literally, inside old burial mounds, among the bones of nameless ancient dead, and they

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worship their pregnant women and their forefathers. Kurgans are usually tall and muscular, and they are merciless and silent fighters. Their main characteristics are to carry powerful steel swords, wear gold and silver trinkets, and tattoo their bodies with pictures of beasts and totems; they wear dark goatskins adorned with the bones of their forefathers. Despite practicing a mysterious Cult of the Dead, they never bowed to the Golden Horde and actually oppose it in their own wild way. These superstitious people's priests are almost always Tainted. They are called Skeleton-Men, regularly practice Necromancy and Vivisection and de facto rule their tribes.

RIVER PIRATE

The renowned *ushkuiniki*, Novgorod river pirates, are a strange cross between a band of raiders and a legalized (in Novgorod, at least) mercenary company. In their homeland, these brave and mocking rascals legally sell the booty from their 'ventures' and just enjoy life. When the time comes to leave for another venture, they set sail in their light and sturdy snake-boats, sailing up and down Ruthenia's freezing rivers and attacking other boats or small villages. Their ballads describe brave attacks, clever ploys, and fights against Samara pirates and river Abominations. There are few Tainted among them, but they are welcome if they prove themselves useful.

POMOR

Pomors are arctic sailors, whalers, hunters and fishermen accustomed to sailing the northernmost routes, from the Baltic Sea to the many coasts of Northern Asia.

These tough seafarers, used to the harshest climates, mostly live in Archangelopolis general area, or in the colonies they have established along the Asian coasts, as far as the harbors of Cipangu and the Sea Urchins Bay.

SKOMOROKH

Skomorokhs are traveling actors, acrobats and jugglers, who can often perform real Witchcraft tricks in the squares and courtyards of the villages they visit. Their performances may include dancing trained bears, stripteases, prestidigitation, puppet shows, ventriloquism, and all sorts of comedy, but also the most exquisite musical performances. While the Skomorokhs are seen as 'scum' by priests and soldiers alike, because of their scandalous behavior, their established status and tradition allow them to be satirical—at times deeply so—at the expense of the ruling authorities or to perform in some obscene show without being persecuted. There are many Tainted among them.

STARET

Starets are monks, priests or even simple farmers who answered a 'summons from above' and became country prophets, wandering mystics, healers, itinerant preachers. Their fame precedes them and they are often worshipped as 'saints' or 'God's chosen', by the commoners and farmers living in the most isolated villages—a practice the official Church in Moscow deems to be extremely dangerous.

Many Starets are Tainted or have a grim and solemn demeanor, and some of them even exhibit some amazing powers (which

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are no more than Witchcraft, however). Some among the faithful—even some nobleman or middle-class citizen—at times make a personal show of devotion toward a Staret, acting as his servant.

By their nature, the Starets are solitary people, who live outside any form of hierarchy, but they nevertheless have an acknowledged 'leader', Seraphim of Radonezh—who runs the notorious Monastery of Saint Michael—in Archangelopolis.

STRELTSY

The Streltsies are Pleskov's main body of guards, a well-trained corps of harquebusiers and pikemen who specialize in defending the borders against the Dead and any invaders, but also in firefighting because of the elevated number of furnaces and laboratories in the city. When fighting against the Dead, they use both harquebuses and Bardiches skillfully, the latter a special cross between a halberd and a cleaver which is also used as a support for the harquebus,

for executions, and to give the Spawn their Last Death. They do not accept any Tainted among their ranks, and one of their duties is to enforce curfew and quarantine rules of the city.

TARTAR NOMAD

Strengthened and hardened by the wild, nomadic life he leads with his family and herd, a typical Tartar nomad is a refugee who puts as much distance as possible between himself and the Golden Horde, most probably after his own tribe, together with many others, was subjected to all sorts of atrocities. Being a peaceful traveler and a good herder does not prevent him from also being—when the need arises—a raider and a warrior ready to defend his own (or to take what he needs), brandishing his scimitar. What one can be sure of is that these nomads are the best guides who can be found east of the Volga River.

Volkhvs, Znakhar and Vedma

Since the Days of God's Wrath, the Kolduns—the Wilderness Warlocks—are the most widespread witches in Ruthenia. This does not mean there is no other kind.

Witchcraft, prophecy and other similar practices are common also to the Volkhvs, pagan shamans, who are a legacy from lost ages, and still know the names of the ancient gods and the most ancient traditions. The Volkhvs believe they are the embodiment of the wildest, most religious and natural spirit of their land and are usually enemies with the Kolduns.

The Znakhars are country healers, both nomadic and settled, who recognize the benefits of herbs, animal medicine and ancient wisdom. Quite often they visit the villages' Banjas, offering their services to those in need. From this point of view, they are the common people's alternative to the doctors and barber surgeons who can be found in the cities and also to the Plague Doctors.

The Vedmas are witches who can be found in the Lithuanian Duchies. Unlike the Kolduns, they hold secret meetings, and it is rumored they make evil pacts with the Zaltys.

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NEW EDGES

BACKGROUND EDGES

KHAZAR SPIRIT

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+

The Khazar Spirit Edge allows the character to add +2 to all Gambling and Persuasion (to cheat, bargain or trade) rolls and to all Smarts Tricks.

KURGAN

Requirements: Novice, Strength d6+, Vigor d6+

Savage, mysterious and grim, the Kurgans are seen as outsiders by all other cultures and because of their macabre tattoos and ornaments.

Characters with this Edge, therefore, suffer the Outsider Hindrance, along with any other Hindrance they have already chosen, without getting extra points.

However, they also gain the Brave Edge even if they do not have the necessary requirements and start the game wearing furs, bones and trophies armor that gives one Armor point to torso and arms and weighs 2 pounds.

COMBAT EDGES

RUTHENIAN WRESTLING

Requirements: Novice, Strength d8+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+

Stenka na Stenku ('wall against wall') is a weaponless martial art, which is said to be used by Ruthenian farmers to kill even Fell Bears. This Edge works exactly like the Martial Artist Edge (and, therefore, counts

as Martial Artist for other Edges that include it as a Requirement). Moreover, when you get a rise on a Combat roll with a weaponless attack, besides inflicting additional damage, you can also move your opponent by 1" or push him prone to the ground (see Going Prone on Savage Worlds Deluxe), provided he is not Large, Huge or Gargantuan.

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

BOGATYR

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Strength d8+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d8+

At character creation, these steppes' errant knights receive a riding horse, full leather armor (covers torso, arms and legs), a steel helmet (enclosed), a knight's spear and a medium shield.

While free from any bond or vow of obedience typical of other knights, along with any other Hindrance they may already have, Bogatyr's also receive the Heroic Hindrance (without any added points). However, they also get the Command and Charismatic Edges even if they do not have the necessary requirements.

BROTHER OF THE SWORD

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Strength d8+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d8+, Riding d8+

The Brothers of the Sword are sworn to obey their Order. At character creation, they receive a war horse, a chain hauberk (covers torso, arms and legs), a steel helmet (enclosed) and two long swords.

They can always find shelter in the seat of other Christian Chivalric Orders as well

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as in the castles and fortresses of Lithuania and of the Principality of Smolensk.

They get the Two-fisted Edge even if they do not have the necessary requirements.

DRUZHINNIK

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Strength d8+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+, Riding d8+, Throwing d6+

The Druzhinnik are the members of the personal guard of a prince, to whom they owe obedience.

Taking this Edge at creation, a character receives a war horse, a chain hauberk (covers torso, arms and legs), a steel helmet (enclosed), a long sword, a knight's spear and a Topor, a medium shield carrying the coat of arms of their Prince or leader and clothes suited to withstand the harshest climate.

They get the Brave Edge even if they do not have the necessary requirements.

COSSACK WARRIOR

Requirements: Novice, Fighting d6+, Survival d4+

At the beginning of the game, all Cossack warriors get fur headgear and a caftan, a leather Circassian (see New Gear) and two weapons. They can choose from: a flintlock pistol, a spear, a Circassian dagger, a shashka, and a whip.

They get the Trademark Weapon Edge, applied to one of the weapons they obtained through this Edge even if they do not have the necessary requirements.

BLACK MASTIFF

Requirements: Novice, Strength d6+, Fighting d6+, Intimidation d6+, Riding d6+, Streetwise d6+

The Black Mastiffs serve as spies and Moscow political police, and they answer directly to the Great Prince of Muscovy. At creation, characters with this Edge receive a black leather tabard (covers torso, arms and legs) carrying the silver emblem of a black mastiff, a pot helm, and a sword. They also get a riding horse and a large mastiff (see *Savage Worlds Deluxe Bestiary*).

Because of their experience and toughness, they get the Strong-Willed Edge even if they do not have the necessary requirements.

BOATMAN

Requirements: Novice, Boating d4+

Usually, a waterway means everything to Circassians, Pomors, River Pirates and all sorts of sailors, it is their home and their life. Characters having this Edge add +2 to all Boating rolls and ignore any Unstable Platform penalties when on a boat.

STRELTSY

Requirements: Novice, Strength d6+, Fighting d6+, Shooting d6+, only Untainted

The members of Pleskov's guard specialize in defending their borders against the Dead and any invaders.

At creation, characters with this Edge receive a wheel harquebus with twenty shots and a bardiche, a chainmail coat (covering torso and arms) and a pot helm.

Their training also allows them to use the bardiche or the harquebus alternatively as if they had the Quick Draw Edge.

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New Gear



ere is a list of the Gear most commonly used by Ruthenia heroes. Some of the following items are specific to this setting and are explained in detail in the notes. The florin is the standard monetary unit, accepted and commonly used on all markets, from Novgorod in the North to Astrakhan in the South.

NEW ARMOURS

Circassian Robe: This long and heavy leather tunic covers torso, arms and legs just like leather armor. It sports bandolier-

like pockets to carry ammunitions and gunpowder.

NEW WEAPONS

Bardiche: A Bardiche is a special battle-axe (or short-handled halberd) with a curved half-moon blade and a five-foot-long handle. If there is enough room to use it comfortably, it is quite effective against the Dead and can also be used for executions. It is Pleskovy's Streltsies' favored weapon.

Circassian Dagger: A Kindjal, or Circassian Dagger, is a short and sturdy dagger, whose wide blade has a sharp, well-tempered point.



Chapter Three New Gear

ARMOR

TYPE	ARMOR	WEIGHT	COST	NOTES
Circassa	+1	14	60	Covers torso, arms and legs; see notes

RANGED WEAPONS

TYPE	RANGE	DAMAGE	ROF	COST	WEIGHT	STRENGTH	NOTES
Wheel-lock harquebus	4/8/16	Notes	1	500	14	d6	See notes

MELEE WEAPONS

TYPE	DAMAGE	WEIGH	COST	NOTES
Bardiche	Str+d8	14	400	+1 damage when used with 2 hands
Whip	Notes	6	300	Reach 2; Parry -1; See notes
Circassian dagger	Str+d4+1	3	150	-
Rogatina (or Bear Spear)	Str+d8	18	300	2 hands; Parry +1; Reach 1
Shashka	Str+d6+1	4	300	Parry -1
Topor	Str+d6	2	150	See notes

Rogatina (Bear-Spear): A Rogatina, or Bear-Spear, is a six-foot-long spear with a wide, flat blade. Right under the blade, there is a crosspiece that helps to keep the speared prey at a distance from the wielder. It is used not only against large wild beasts, but also against Fell Beasts and the Dead.

Shashka: This long, curved blade is used mostly by Circassians and Cossacks. It is extremely sharp and well-tempered, strong and light, and it has no hand guard because

it is not suited for crossing blades with human adversaries and only for fighting and beheading the Dead.

Topor: This axe is typically used by warriors, but any farmer or adventurer worthy of his name will carry one because it is practical, sturdy and easy to handle. It works well against wild animals, the Dead, knights wearing a chain or leather armor, and it can be used to work wood and leather without risking of damaging it.

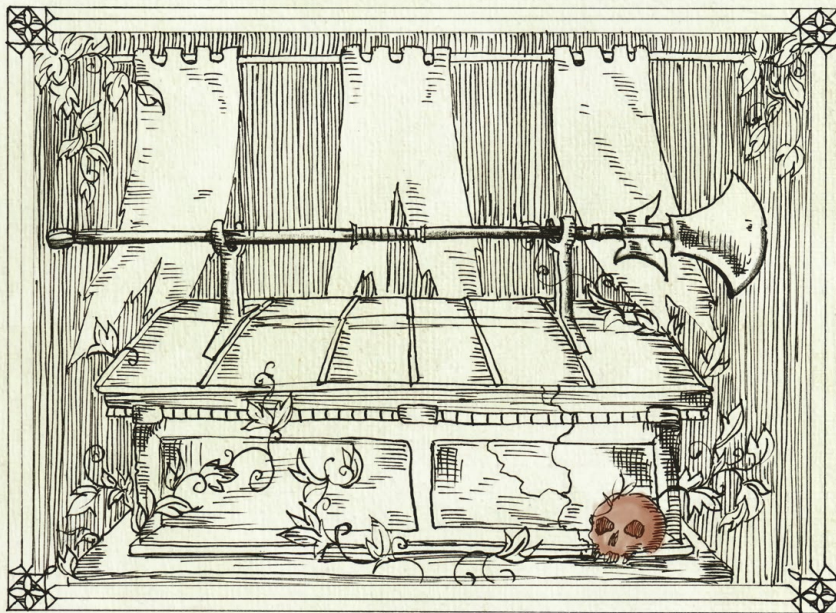
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New Gear

Wheel-lock harquebus: This well-advanced weapon, which represents the latest evolution of the harquebus now available on a large scale, is quite widespread in the cities of the Hanseatic League, which produce most of them. It is standard gear for Pleskovy's Streltsies. Just like common harquebuses, this weapon has to be loaded with two "shots" to be able to work, adds +2 to Shooting rolls, and the inflicted damage varies according to the range: 3d6 damage at Short Range, 2d6 at Medium Range and 1d6 at Long Range. Moreover, its magazine-carrying mechanism allows the weapon to be fired six times before reloading is necessary. Reloading the four slots in the reloading wheel requires two rounds (or just one with a successful Agility roll). Unfortunately, the reloading mechanism is quite fragile: getting 1 on the Shooting

die (Wild Die aside) will jam the wheel and the weapon will misfire. One round and a successful Repair roll are necessary to unjam it.

Whip: This weapon can cause next to no real damage to the Dead or living foes, but it can wrap itself around their throats or legs, effectively blocking them. In combat, it inflicts only d6 damage. With a raise on a Combat roll, however, instead of inflicting added damage, the whip wraps itself around the stricken area (to be determined according to the Injury Table). To free himself, the victim has to defeat the Combat roll with a Strength roll or can try to tear the whip out of the wielder's hands with an opposed Strength roll. A whip can be also used for various Agility Tricks within its Range.



ASSORTED OBJECTS

Caftan: It is common wear for Ruthenians, while traveling or in daily life. It is a coarse, cotton, knee-length, long-sleeved tunic. It can be elegant or practical, light or heavy enough to wear on long trips across frozen lands.

Deadwater: Either on their farms, or in real distilleries, Ruthenians produce both mead and various kinds of Spirit from tubers, wild honey or other farmed products. Such drinks have, primarily, medical use or help people withstand winter's harshness, but there are also those who indulge in them for personal pleasure. One such drink, known to all and feared by most, is the so-called Deadwater, usually produced by the Tainted and common only among outlaws, raiders and Cossacks. Deadwater is made by adding ashes of the Dead or the Tainted

to the spirit until it acquires its renowned dark and opaque color. Deadwater doesn't carry the Plague, and while many find its taste disgusting, some maintain it can open the mind of those who drink it and even lend courage in battle. Characters with the Liquid Courage Edge can activate this Edge ten times with a third of a gallon of Deadwater.

Salt of Sarysu: The salts extracted from the "Sacred Mountain" seem to have miraculous effects on the Morituri. They are not a cure against the contagion, but a half-pound compress (1 dose) allows the Morituro to add +1 to his daily Vigor roll—necessary to withstand the progress of the illness. Moreover, at the moment of death the character treated with these salts can draw an extra card to determine if he will survive the Plague and become a Tainted. The use of more than one dose has no effect.

ANIMALS

ANIMAL	COST	NOTE
Sled dog	150	See Savage Worlds Bestiary; ignores snow-covered terrain
Wild horse	200	See Bestiary
Hunting Cheetah	500	See Bestiary

ASSORTED OBJECTS

OBJECT	COST	WEIGH	NOTES
Deadwater	1/3G10	2	See notes
Caftan	40+	-	to be considered as winter clothing
Salt of Sarysu	100	0,5	See notes

NEW VEHICLES

Circassian Barge: This is a barge about fifty feet long and flat-bottomed to sail easily in shallow waters. It is equipped with one mast, oar housings, and poles and ropes so that it can be drawn from the river bank.

Kalderash Wagon: It is a spacious, covered wagon, used to carry large quantities of people, goods or tools. It is often drawn by two tame aurochs.

Koch: This is a sailing ship with one or two masts. Its special leather-covered hull can withstand ice-cold waters and icebergs. If necessary, a Koch can even be used as a sledge by fitting its sides with special skids. Ten men or beasts are necessary to draw a Koch on ice, and it moves according to their Pace. Because

of its hull's peculiar structure, a Koch has Armor +8 against damage caused by any floating ice.

ke-Boat: These narrow, light, leather boats are commonly used by the river pirates of Novgorod, but also by trappers and explorers. Their distinctive feature is that they can be carried by the owner on his shoulders easily on long treks between rivers or on stretches of packed ice. The boat weighs only forty pounds.

VEHICLES

TYPE	ACC/TS	TOUGHNESS	CREW	COST	NOTE
Snake-boat	1 / 2	7 (1)	1 or 2	250	See Notes
Circassian Barge	2/6	12(2)	3/15	10.000	
Kalderash Wagon See Drawing	9 (2)	1+15	400		4 wheels, drawn by 2+ horses
Koch	2/6	16 (3)	6+40	50.000	Corazza Pesante; vedi note
Little sled	See Drawing	7 (1)	1+2	200*	drawn by 1 horse or 4 dogs
Sled	See Drawing	9 (2)	1+4	400*	drawn by 2 horses or 8 dogs

*Cost doesn't include drawing

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his chapter contains the history of Macabre Ruthenia, a general description of the country and a mention of its main Fiefs. For each

region are given salient history facts and the current social and political situation. Hints, legends and rumors for each of the countries involved are in Chapter 5, the section dedicated to the Game Master.

RUTHENIA'S MACABRE HISTORY

THE WRATH OF GOD'S RUTHENIA

The Plague reached Ruthenia in 1350, approximately when the Hordes of the Dead had already been wreaking havoc through the rest of Europe for many years. There were three main routes through which the contagion was spread, and in all three cases, the Dead were fewer in number and less ferocious than in the Mediterranean harbors and Western cities.

* To the west, the most ferocious packs were stopped by Hungarian and Polish armies. Both the contagion and the Dead spread gradually towards the east, but the regions they reached were increasingly wilder and more barren, with high mountains and thick forests, less-used communication routes, and a hard and indomitable population. All this slowed down the spreading of this awful illness noticeably.

* To the south, the Dead brought with them havoc and slaughter to the area

between the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Maeotian Sea. All the cities along their coasts and main rivers swiftly fell prey to Pandemonia and attacks, turning into Cities of Sorrow, and thus generating Hordes that headed to the north, destroying all the villages and smaller towns they found along the way.

* At the same time, more Dead were coming up from the east, and while their numbers were fewer, they were often more dangerous. For a long time, the great rivers managed to act as an effective barrier against the advance of the Plague from the east...at least when they were not frozen solid.

Slow but unstoppable, the Plague ended up infesting those regions, too. By the end of 1350, the Horde reached Moscow, killing priests, noblemen and rulers, and the next year it fell on Novgorod and Pleskov, which also fell to the onslaught of the Dead, even if they never turned into Cities of Sorrow.

DARKEST AGE RUTHENIA

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the limitless plains of Ruthenia were invaded by fleeing nomads, war bands looking for booty, shepherds heading for safer pastures, survivors of the fall of southern cities, clans of migrating peoples and all sorts of tribes, all looking for shelter and a safer place than the one from which they were coming. The Ruthenians often accused the Tartars of bringing the Plague with them or of causing it, as Infectors. Such accusations were not without foundation because many desperate bands of raiders coming from the east were not above using both the Dead and Atrament as a



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VOLGA RIVER

Rostov

Nizhny Novgorod

Kazan

OKA RIVER

Samara

VOLGA RIVER

RIVER

Sarysu

Saraj

Astrakhan

TARTARY

CASPIAN SEA



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means to conquer a besieged city or kill their enemies. Such accusations made the Ruthenians from Moscow and the Volga cities take up arms against the Tartars, which led to a climate of continued warfare throughout the region.

Little by little, however, all these populations mingled with each other. New Fiefs, alliances, royal dynasties and war leaders were born, which would have never come into being without the Plague. Among all the peoples who contributed to this new and unforeseen development of the region, the Khazars were the most important and unpredictable. This people—up to then almost forgotten by history—resurfaced from the depths of Tartary and started to wander through Ruthenia, by then fully hit by the Plague, bringing new life to river trades and relationships between peoples who now only wanted to stay locked up behind the walls of their cities. The Khazars also brought to Ruthenia a great wealth of riches and wonderful things from the heart of Tartary, together with texts written in their mysterious writing (the future Tartar alphabet) and in even more mysterious ideograms: those were the first documents ever written in the Enochian language.

While cities, villages and nomads alike were busy facing the invasion of the Dead, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was hit by increasingly larger and more ferocious Hordes of the Dead and suffered a series of Pandemonia in its main cities until it collapsed, and hundreds of new Packs poured out of it, heading toward Old Poland and the east.

Meanwhile, the fleeing Tartars were bringing growingly frightening news

from beyond the Volga River: tales of the Dead gathering up, of awful Pandemonia and endless devastation. In 1389, the largest Horde ever seen appeared on the eastern bank of the Volga River by the city of Kazan. The Khazars and the other peoples running from it said it was what was left of the Golden Horde, and the name stuck. The Golden Horde invaded and destroyed all the territories east of the Volga River. In the span of a few years, it finished devastating what was left of the kingdoms and khanates situated east and south of Ruthenia, all swallowed up by hordes of the Dead spreading on the plains and hills as far as the eye could see. Tamerlane came on the scene just when the Horde was on the verge of invading the territories west of the Volga River.

THE RECONQUEST IN RUTHENIA

Despite other historians maintaining these events took place at least two decades later, according to Muscovite chroniclers, Ruthenia's Reconquest started with the arrival of Tamerlane on the eastern bank of the Volga.

Coming from the same depths of Tartary from which the Golden Horde had originated, this unstoppable warlord attacked the hordes of the Dead countless times, carrying on a decades-long campaign of reconquest of the land.

Tamerlane unified under his rule all the surviving Tartar tribes. He then attacked the Horde just before it crossed the Volga River and caused Ruthenia's collapse. Tamerlane waged a decades-long war against the Dead, conquering and losing cities, provinces and territories in an endless fight against an equally endless Horde. Everywhere he went, he left behind

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a pyramid of severed heads rose, and the Miasma rising from the pyres he left behind could be seen many miles away.

In the end, however, not even the great Tamerlane was able to defeat the Plague. Worn-out by decades of campaigns in which he had lost hundreds of thousands of men, he was left to carry on a war he could not win with only one last elite battalion. Even his personal guard was defeated and finally, his last companions as well.

According to legend, Tamerlane survived his final defeat and found himself alone on a plain strewn with butchered bodies, the last living member of a cursed empire that had fallen even before it could be born. There are those who say he is still alive... and riding through the plains of Tartary as he waits for his chance to destroy the Khans of the Horde. Of course, this cannot be true. What is true, however, is that if Tamerlane had not stopped and drastically weakened the Horde, hundreds of thousands of the Dead would have invaded Ruthenia and totally destroyed it before marching on toward the west, finding no obstacle to stop them and prevent them from destroying Europe, too.

Thanks to the efforts of this legendary war leader, however, Moscow, Novgorod, Kazan and all the main cities in the region had both the time and the opportunity to entrench themselves, and since then the course of the Volga River has become a stable, effective border.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, the small principalities of the Moscow area— isolated as they were in a Wilderness of empty, abandoned plains traveled only by nomads and survivors—managed to bring about the reconquest of their borders and

reclaim their land, soon becoming strong and fierce again.

At the same time, Pleskov, Novgorod and Smolensk, while divided into independent reigns, recovered the strength they had lost during the Darkest Age and became the core of as many expanding Fiefs. The little town of Archangelopolis expanded to the point of becoming the starting point for all maritime expeditions on the Arctic Ocean. Meanwhile, to the south and along the Volga River, Kazan, Samara and Astrakhan turned into strong, well-defended khanates, while Matrega became a cosmopolitan city, frequented by merchants and philosophers. The most characteristic feature of the region, however, was the vast land in between the Fiefs: thousands of miles of Wilderness where only migrating tribes, nomads and wanderers would travel. Strays were uncommon in these areas and even more Packs, Chimeras and Abominations. It is also true that many military chiefs, princes and warlords ruling on these lands never considered Necromancy or Infection as execrable, and their use of the Plague against their foes often caused minor Pandemonia among travelers, hostile tribes or enemy villages.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY RUTHENIA

In the west, Lithuania was becoming a vast Wilderness sprinkled with almost totally independent Duchies and a few cities of the Hanseatic League, and from the beginning of the new century, all the other Fiefs in Ruthenia continued to prosper and grow. The northern cities carried on commercial relationships with those on the Neva Bay and the Hanseatic League cities, to the general benefit of all involved, and Ivan III, Great Prince of Muscovy, finally annexed all the small principalities of the area to his

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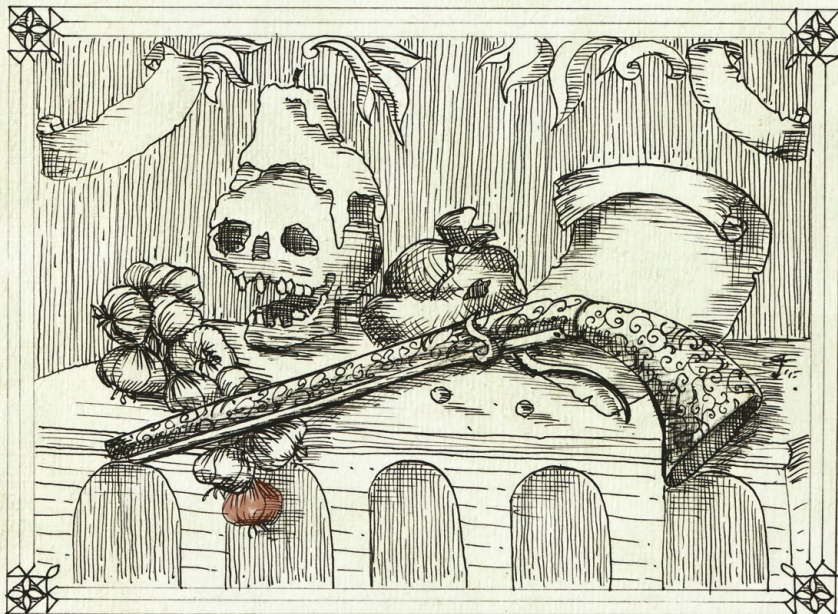
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own, creating one large Fief under his rule, thus significantly expanding the small Fief inherited from his forefathers. The southern Fiefs, all along the eastern trading routes—as well as the harbors trading in spices and jewels with the Sultanate of Sevastopol—also became prosperous and safe again.

That was when the Golden Horde came back. Just as it happened a century earlier, new waves of refugees came to Ruthenia from the east, bearing the news that the Golden Horde had reappeared and was marching toward the border again. The nomads mentioned the names of the nine lords of the Horde and of their “Great Father”, Erlik Khan, saying that just the sight of him could bring death or madness to those unlucky enough to face him. Fear, anguish and horror were coming from the east once more.

RUTHENIA IN THE YEARS OF THE UNIVERSAL COUNCIL

These regions are so faraway to the east, no delegate from Ruthenia has yet taken part in the Universal Council, even if Ruthenian princes have knowledge of what is going on in the west via the merchants running the Mediterranean and Atlantic routes, and the rumors coming from Pleskov and Matrega. Of course, the wise men and politicians of Ruthenia have always seen the Black Sultan of Jerusalem as ominous, but both his existence and his eventual death are of little importance to people who have been fighting against the Golden Horde for decades, a menace compared to which the so-much-feared Tormentors and Viziers in the service of the Sultan appear just as instruments of a bizarre polity.



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There is no unifying force like the Universal Council in Ruthenia, where princes, merchants, emirs and khans still fight against each other at the slightest opportunity or, at best, ignore each other or draw up commercial agreements.

While princes and khans are still set in their old ways, though, in the last few decades the common people have experienced a great change. Left to their own devices for so long, the Ruthenian people have increasingly grown conscious of their strength and independence. Knights, the Princes' honor guards, harquebusiers and northern explorers often are in the spotlight much more than a humble commoner, but farmers have long understood (and made it clear to their rulers) that Ruthenia cannot exist without its children and that they are salt of the earth and the greater defense against the Dead.

Now, more than ever, humble Ruthenian commoners and farmers walk with their

heads held high on the barren plains, the thick woods and in the shadow of the princes' palaces. His axe hanging from his belt, a Ruthenian farmer is now respected and honored by poets and rulers alike, even when carrying out humble chores such as taking bags of seeds to the market or pulling his cart toward the nearest village.

While still paying their taxes and serving the princes and the main cities, many villages are now de facto run and defended by the community, with local farmers sharing all facets of life and collectively making the most important decisions.

Neither the revolutions breaking out in the country, nor the princes' ambitions, however, can be as lethal as Erlik Khan and his endless legions of the Dead.

Facing and surviving the Golden Horde is still the main goal for all the peoples in the region, a task in the face of which all other disputes and fights tend to vanish into thin air.

The Qalandaryya

It is well known there cannot be any accord or permanent peace between Ruthenia and Tartary. However, there are rumors about a secret sect—known as the Qalandaryya—which seems to have been trying for decades to unify the region and establish closer contacts with Western Europe, maneuvering princes, rulers and kings to that end. According to those who think this secret society really exists, the Qalandaryya is a secret government based on the Abrahamic philosophy, whose aim is to overcome any differences among Jews, Mohammedan, and Christians, and to control all riches flowing from Tartary through Ruthenia, and towards the Mediterranean and Central Europe, as well as to find the secret Enochian texts and the mysterious Asian lost cities. The Qalandaryya seems to be under the control of extremely wealthy and shrewd Khazar merchants, and to have contacts even with faraway Granada, seat of the mysterious Sheik Gomelez, one of the Qalandaryya's chiefs. Besides being a sort of Mafia made of secretive business men and bankers, the Qalandaryya is also said to be a network of philosophers, preachers, intellectuals and poets scattered throughout the region, who work as emissaries and spies as well as being well-primed dervish warriors.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF RUTHENIA

More than its Western counterpart, Eastern Europe is made up of limitless woods and plains, scattered with small Fiefs, which are usually walled towns comprising a few thousand inhabitants, fenced villages and fortified farms. Even in the largest Fiefs, such as the Great Principality of Muscovy, the areas outside the main cities are still vast wild lands, crossed by few dirt roads and broken up only by small farming estates and isolated villages and farms.

In the northernmost part of the region, for example, the area surrounding Archangelopolis is dominated by a cold and inhospitable tundra, frozen in winter and marshy during the summer.

South of the tundra lies the expanse of the great northern forest—the taiga—where only hunters, trappers and woodcutters dare to wander.

The central part of Ruthenia, however, is a steppe plateau scattered with thin trees. It is a land of dry meadows, alluvial soil and marshes, with many sandy areas and woods. Great rivers run through this

plateau, and they are the main routes of communication.

Corn, legumes, hemp and flax are grown around the fortified villages and farms. The dense woods offer a variety of wild fruits, as well as all kinds of herbs and wild honey. The most common animals are small oxen, pigs bred in the woods, geese and poultry. Horses are rare and quite costly, and are used for ploughing, while carts are drawn by hand. Cats and dogs abound, however, and help protect the homestead against rats, any sort of beasts and Stray Dead.

All cities are usually built around the *Kremlin*, a central keep where the Princes live with their men-at-arms. The *Terem*—that is, the royal family's residence—is always in a central position, surrounded by the houses of the noblemen and the Knights of the Druzhina, the main churches and an inner circle of fortified walls, whose doors are always guarded and usually locked at sunset.

The actual city—the *Posad*—spreads beyond these inner walls, inhabited mostly by merchants and artisans, and surrounded by another wall. Whenever possible, these two burghs are built on a small hill, at the confluence of two rivers or between two branches of the same river to take advantage of any natural

The Banja

All the cities, but also villages and the most isolated farms, have a *Banja*, a place that is a bathhouse, a Turkish bath and a meeting place all in one. Banjas are always isolated from the other buildings; they are public and free, so the vapors flowing from the roof are the only sign the building is in use. In a Banja, it is possible to have a steam bath, tend to one's wounds and refresh oneself at any time, day or night. Since it is always possible to find water, fire and sterilized tools, these bathhouses are also used as sanatoriums, barbershops and places where to carry out emergency surgery.

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protection against raiders and the Dead. The side of the city looking towards dry land is further strengthened with watchtowers, moats and barricades, and it is usually connected to the rest of the Fief by wooden bridges and dirt roads that seldom extend for more than a mile. If Tainted and Nomads are allowed inside the Fief, they usually have to camp outside the walls, and they are kept under watch, day and night.

Groups of nomads and herds escorted by shepherds cross the steppe, wandering from Fief to Fief looking for new pastures, but even their presence is just a small cluster of tents and animals amidst the barren vastness of this region.

RUTHENIA AT A WOLF'S PACE

Stretching from the Duchies of Lithuania to the Volga border, the Ruthenian plain is a territory with very few roads, where farmers fear famine as much as they fear the Hordes of the Dead or bands of raiders. Their lords protect them from such tangible ills plaguing the region, but life is still quite hard and only the strongest survive.

Apart from the walls of large cities and fortresses, most buildings—such as bridges, farm fences, village stockades and watchtowers—are made of wood. Since metals are scarce all over the region, with the exception of Pleskov, Matrega and the cities along the Volga River, planks and poles are bound together with ropes or carved to fit together with very complex techniques. Bands, tribes and families—nomadic, or fleeing from something or on a raid—always wander across this plain.

It is quite easy to see from afar caravans, herds and bands of raiders on Ruthenia's vast plains, and it is also almost always possible to avoid them. When you come within sight of a friendly community, such as Yenisch, Kalderash, Cossacks or a tribe of Tartar shepherds, you can stop at their encampment, trade with them or travel with them for some time. To Ruthenia's nomads, each encounter is valuable because it is a source of information, brings trade and allows new alliances, marriages or friendships to develop. The relationship between nomads and inhabitants of cities and villages is always cordial, too, unless one of the groups involved has unpleasant intentions. Such exchanges are the lifeblood of Ruthenian economy and are, therefore, always appreciated, whatever the faith, race or traditions of the peoples involved.

Most of the region consists of dense woods, which is where some of the most feared Ruthenian creatures hide: the malevolent Yagas, monstrous cannibal witches, who, according to legend, kidnap unwary travelers and lock them up in their huts made of wood and bones, in the heart of the forest. The Yagas are pale old hags. Their number is not certain: there may be three or seven but certainly not more than a dozen. Their lady is Baba Yaga, the oldest, most decrepit of them all, who is even said to have a symbiotic relationship with an Abomination as large as a house and made of human body parts joined together.

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RUTHENIA SEEN FROM ITS BARGES' DECKS

The Volga and all other Ruthenian great rivers are the swiftest way to travel across the country. Barges, pontoons and canoes constantly cross their waters, and entire populations (such as Circassians, Novgorod's Pirates, and Samara's raiders) make them their homes.

Ironically, however, this system is far from the safest. Navigation is next to impossible in winter because of the ice and the low level of the water, while spring thaw floods make it quite dangerous. Moreover, pirates and raiders are always waiting in ambush, and only the most expert and skilled adventurers may hope to travel a long way on a river without the help of mercenaries, Circassians or professional body guards. Also, there are the Vodyanoi, Abominations with huge jaws and flaccid skin that love to lurk in the rivers. They grasp the smallest boats and overturn them or even crawl on the bridge of the larger ones to drag their victims to the river bottom and devour them.

When this does not happen and the season is right, however, traveling on the bridge of a Ruthenian barge or a Circassian pontoon is a very peaceful experience, which gives the traveler plenty of time to admire the limitless beauty of the Great Mother Ruthenia.

RUTHENIA'S NEW KINGDOMS

MUSCOVY

The Great Principality of Muscovy is the largest, most central and prosperous Ruthenian principality. It is also the best known in the West and has become a sort of icon, defining the peoples and lands of that region in the eyes of the Westerners. Its inhabitants are true frontiersmen and women, who live by the Volga border that separates Ruthenia from the unknown lands of Tartary. Fierce, indomitable and fearless, these men work hard and are ready to fight for their land and their Princes. Their women are proud and beautiful; they know how to manage their farms and are as skilled with a needle as with an axe to fell trees and chop wood. At nine years of age, the children already know how to use a spear to destroy the Dead and, at thirteen, are often called upon to fight alongside the adults.

Farmers living in isolated farms are supportive of each other and very attached to their land. They are honest and open, as warm towards guests and friends as they are ready to die protecting their honor and fighting their foes. Citizens are industrious workers, skilled artisans and hard-working merchants. Being dubbed as 'thieves' or 'dishonest' is a greater dishonor than being accused of murder.

Thanks to the combative and determined nature of his subjects, the Great Prince of Muscovy has been able to expand the small Fief he inherited during the Darkest Age from the city of Moscow and its surrounding land alone to its present size. Today, Muscovy borders the Volga River to

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the north and east, with the Oka River to the south and the Principality of Smolensk to the west. The present Fief is the product of the annexation of the smaller principalities once scattered between the Volga and Oka rivers, principalities that now all bow to the authority of Muscovy, the 'Great Principality'.

Ivan III the Great is the present Great Prince of Muscovy. During the last fifty years, he has been continuing the Reconquest of the region and the unification of the principalities, fully intent on continuing to rule this Third Rome, now that the other two—Rome and Constantinople—have become Cities of Sorrow.

One of Moscow's main characteristics is in fact its role as a Holy City, since the Patriarch of Constantinople and many Orthodox priests found shelter there, making Moscow the new core of their faith. The Great Prince and his politics owe much to their support, and at present Muscovite Obedience is the greatest and most famous Christian church east of Avignon and north of Damascus.

Unlike its southern and western counterparts, however, the Patriarchy of Moscow, Ruthenia and the Eastern Churches does not have at its disposal an army or fighting religious orders, and its Presbyters, Hegumenos and Archimandrites only have religious duties. However, the present Patriarch, Macarius, has founded a new order of mystics, intellectuals and scholars—the Hieromonks—who worship the so-called Merovlites, which in Western Europe are the 'Saints'. Hieromonks study the Manna, the saints' mortal remains that produce it and those people who at present might be eligible for sainthood. They devote their

lives to researching and protecting these people and their miraculous bodies.

In spite of his often aggressive and authoritarian politics towards the other Princes of Muscovy, Ivan III has built good relationships with Novgorod, Pleskov, Kazan and the Volga cities, and he plans on spending whatever time he has left further strengthening his family's position. In his city, many ambassadors come from all over the known world: from the Empire, the Italian *Signorie*, the Teutonic Principalities, and the great caliphates and sultanates of the Mediterranean. It is, therefore, possible to meet many adventurers in Moscow and travelers or emissaries from the courts of all the New Kingdoms. One of the main threats to a pacific succession to the throne and the stability of the principality is 'Vanya' *Groznyj*, grandson to the Great Prince, who is so devious and ambitious that he is plotting against his own family to secure the throne for himself.

Lacking his grandfather's wisdom but full of his ancestors' warlike spirit, Vanya is only sixteen years old, but he is already plotting to secure the throne, which he wants to occupy bearing the title of 'New Caesar' and Emperor of Russia.

While politically unified under one rule, the Muscovite Principalities are still independent from a military point of view. Each Prince still has authority over his Druzhina, his 'personal guard', which includes the noblest, most trusted and skilled knights in the Principality.

The most-feared military corps, however, are the 'Black Mastiffs' under the orders of the Prince of Muscovy, an elite body of most trusted fighters and assassins, who

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blindly obey their Prince's orders and have greater power than the Druzhinnik. These men, called by the commoners 'Satan's Soldiers' (because of the fear they inspire and their harshness), wear black clothes, carry steel swords and are always accompanied by black ferocious mastiffs and horses.

The army of Moscow is made up mostly of Soldiers and Druzhinnik, but there are also Bogatyrs, knights errant who offer their services to noblemen and commoners in trouble.

NOVGOROD

After surviving many raids, divisions, Pandemonia and awful infestations of the Dead, the Land of Novgorod is now a large Fief ruled by 'His Majesty Novgorod the Great', the city after which the whole region is named. The Fief is ruled by a *Posadnik*, the city Governor, elected by the Boyars (the richest merchants and noble-born citizens). The other main office in the Fief is the *Tysjackij*—the Chiliarch, or 'Warlord'—who is elected by the noblemen and landowners outside the capital. His jurisdiction covers the countryside and borders; he leads the army and the knights, and defends the common people against the Dead and any invaders.

There are no definite maps of the Land of Novgorod, but its territory is slightly less extended than Muscovy's. Unlike the Great Principality, however, the Land of Novgorod is less unified and controlled, and many of the provinces within its 'borders' are actually stretches of Wilderness. The areas surrounding Lake Ilmen, the Volkhov River and Lake Ladoga are the core of this region, which extends

up to the Ingria border and the Neva Bay. In addition, there is the southern region surrounding Staraya Russa and some outposts in Karelia along the Dvina River, far to the north and even on both sides of the Ural Mountains.

Farming and breeding provide very little income for the Fief, where the land is divided mostly among some forty families of rich Boyars. On the other hand, merchants and artisans prosper from trapping, fishing and salting fish, salt pans, iron mines and the exploitation of all the resources of the wild lands (pitch, fish glue, honey, lard, etc.), exporting hundreds of wagonloads of goods to Nyenskans and Pleskov every year.

Novgorod is also renowned because of the activity of its *ushkuiniki*, the River Pirates. They are organized into proper guilds and companies, and with their flat-bottomed, light, snake-like boats they launch expeditions from all the Fief's harbor cities, similar to those of their Varangian forefathers: exploring, sacking and attacking foreign boats and villages.



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The *ushkuiniki* sail mostly on lakes and inland rivers, and their light snake-boats can easily be carried by hand across dry land. Their expeditions—which are more and more frequent—reach as far as cities on the Volga to the south and as north as Karelia. Up until now, only the Circassians have managed to keep them at bay. The numerous complaints against the pirates' activities fall on deaf ears as far as the Governor and the Chiliarch are concerned, because the *ushkuiniki* are independent of official military power, and their raids are 'private' ventures. As a matter of fact, in their homeland, these pirates are seen as brave warriors, heroic explorers and fearless merchants, and held in great regard by the noblemen and commoners alike. At times, it is the Boyars themselves who lead their expeditions.

Novgorod is a rich, busy city, lively and colorful, although situated at the extreme border of Europe. Its market is always crowded; its artisans—divided into neighborhoods—work hard all year long and are very successful. There are no great guilds or corporations there—typical of the West—but just small, informal brotherhoods and associations who help their members and compete with each other. The Tainted are tolerated but cannot live inside the walls of the city. The same applies to foreign merchants, travelers and adventurers from all over the world. The official church is subject to the Patriarchy of Moscow. Immediately outside the city walls, there is a small Chapel dedicated to Saint Lazarus, where Christian Tainted from every Obedience stop to worship.

The commercial importance of this city, together with attempts to avoid commercial routes going through Pleskov and the

Hanseatic League, induced many western businessman—Italian bankers, merchants from Geneva, Granada and Aragon—to open shops there. This means that there are many Westerners—adventurers and action men included—in the city, and that the Florentine language and Florins are quite widespread.

PLESKOV

Situated west of the Land of Novgorod, at the border with the Lithuanian Duchies and Smolensk, the small Fief of Pleskovy has no expansionistic aims. It is a fertile and advanced land, where fields, farms, construction yards, factories and trade routes are far more advanced than in the bordering Fiefs. This proud people has developed a strong community awareness, and even the humblest peasant does not fear the noble-born and the powerful.

Besides being well run by the people's assemblies and benefitting from its trade with Novgorod, Smolensk and Moscow, this fief is prosperous, mostly because it is part of the Hanseatic League—a confederation of merchant cities—of which it is one of the easternmost outposts. Therefore, in Pleskov, it is possible to find all sorts of western goods as well as black powder, firearms, special devices and contraptions, and alchemic substances. Its artists, painters, jewelers and builders are deemed to be Ruthenia's best. Its role as a bridge between the East and the West has not always been beneficial to Pleskov, which has been invaded many times and suffered the outbreak of at least two dozen Pandemonia, in the Fifteenth Century alone. This is why, today, Pleskov is surrounded by five concentric circles of walls and is considered virtually

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impregnable. The capital city and all of Pleskovy are defended mainly by the Streltsies, a body of men-at-arms trained in the use of wheel harquebuses and bardiches. They fight the Dead, raiders and common criminals, but they are also charged with keeping under control any fires and accidents in the foundries and alchemic laboratories of the city.

There are few internal struggles in this Fief. One of them stems from the heretic Strigolniki, a religious and political sect that demands vociferously for the members of the Church of Moscow to be driven away from the city and for a laic and popular revolution.

ARCHANGELOPOLIS

Founded by the people of Novgorod at the mouth of the Dvina River, during the Darkest Age the Monastery of the Archangel Michael became a 'sanctuary' where all the outlaws, fugitives and outcasts of Ruthenia could ask for shelter and save themselves from persecution, warranted or not.

Decades later, a small but flourishing village grew around the Monastery, and it kept growing until it merged with nearby communities, such as Kholmogory—the 'Corpses' Hill'—and the river villages on the Dvina banks.

Today, Archangelopolis is a small, independent amalgam of Fiefs and sea and river outposts. Its people are called Pomors, i.e., 'sailors'. It was only the Pomors who explored the White Sea and founded merchant colonies and commercial hubs beyond the Ural Mountains as well as on nameless islands and in peninsulas on the freezing eastern seas.

They sail on *kochs*, special sailing ships with one or two masts, whose leather-covered hulls can withstand freezing waters and floating ice. With these flat-bottomed boats, which can be turned into sleds if necessary, the Pomors are venturing farther and farther away. They have reached countries and commercial hubs as far as the extremely distant Sea Urchin Bay, on the great sea on the other side of the world, where some exiles from Archangelopolis founded a legendary city that trades in exotic goods with Cathay and Cipangu.

Besides venturing on long sea voyages, the Pomors are whale hunters, fishermen and reindeer herders. Today, most of these activities are run by the Stroganov, extremely powerful and rich merchants who were once poor Pomor farmers and have grown to be one of the most powerful Ruthenian dynasties. Some of the extreme wealth and fame these people are accumulating through their colonies, whale hunting, salting fish and their trading with the Sea Urchin Bay, spills over into the citizenship of Archangelopolis, ensuring general affluence.

The other great center of power in this fief is the Monastery of Saint Michael. Today, it is an independent religious center run by the Starets, Orthodox wandering and charismatic mystics, who are said to possess great powers and have a great influence on the populace. The sanctuary still offers shelter to exiles and fugitives from the law. Its highest authority is the 'holy prophet' Seraphim of Radonezh, a grim and mysterious priest who is said to practice and spread orgiastic cults and shamanic teachings among his followers. Since both the Stroganov and the Starets

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are almost always Tainted, naturally, all the Tainted are integrated with and accepted by Archangelopolis' society and its colonies—a unique situation throughout Ruthenia.

INGRIA AND THE NEVA BAY

This region is still considered part of Ruthenia and is populated by Ruthenians, but it belongs to the Kalmar Union.

The Union has founded many fortresses in this area—thus improving the economy of many fishermen and sailors' villages—but it never tried to defy the authority of the nearby Pleskov and Novgorod. On the contrary, trade between them is flourishing and peaceful.

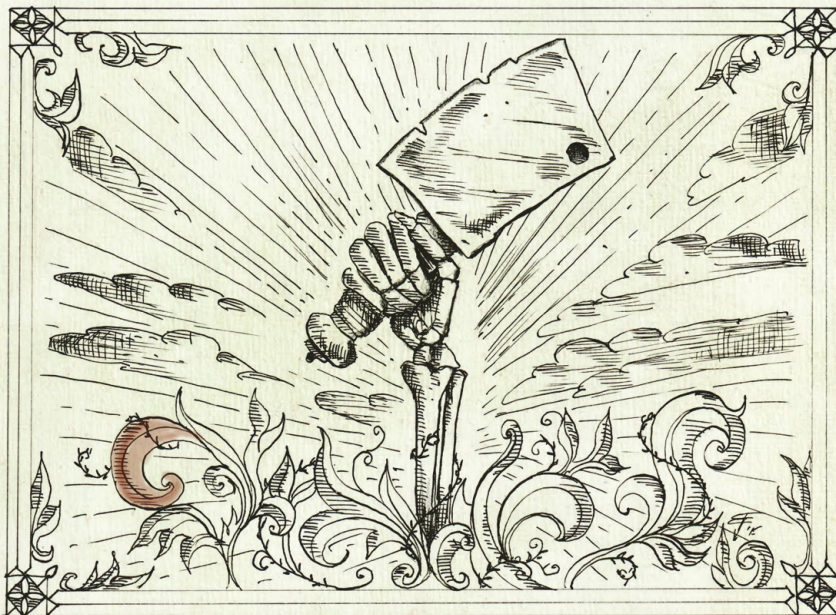
The region's main city is Nyenskans, on the mouth of the Neva River. It was built around a Kalmarian military fortress, in

the middle of the river's frozen marshes. As its construction was in progress, this citadel was often attacked by Packs and Hordes of the Dead. According to legend, the dismembered bodies of over ten thousand Dead were used to drain the marsh under the foundations and strengthen them. Because of this, small pods of miasmic water often surface around the walls, and the constant moans of the Dead are said to be heard through the cellars' walls.

But for this grim fortress on the Neva, all the other settlements along the bay are small fishing villages.

KAZAN

Laid waste more than once by the Golden Horde, Kazan has flourished again today, so much so it is considered the Tartars'



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capital, at least by those who live nearer to Ruthenia.

Kazan is a small city-state whose borders are just a little larger than its surrounding walls, and whose main interest is trade: all sorts of spices, wooden artefacts, objects of art and treasures converge here from all over Tartary to be forwarded to Ruthenia's great cities. The khan's castle, with its huge watchtower and the large mosque, overlooks the city.

Kazan is protected by a corps of 'Valiant Men', hardened fighters more similar to Ruthenian Bogatyrs than to common tartar raiders. The Khan is nurturing the not-so-secret ambition of conquering the East again and founding a Khanate worthy of its name, but his dream has no foundation in the real world, at least as long as the Golden Horde patrolled his borders. He must already consider himself lucky that his city has not been attacked by Erlik Khan and his legions.

The Cossacks usually gather in Kazan to offer their services to the Khan or find other people willing to hire them, but they do not fit into the organization of this Fief.

THE VOLGA RIVER HARBORS

Along the southern banks of the Volga River, there are many scattered independent principalities nowadays which make a living mostly from river trade. These settlements have all been built on islands or in the middle of artificial channels that are their main means of defense against the Golden Horde that is advancing toward the east.

Samara is known as a city of pirates and thieves, a dangerous port suited only for those groups who know what they are doing and have enough money to

bribe local powerful people. This is as far south as the Novgorod pirates venture when they manage to bypass Muscovite port cities; along the river banks, there are proper watchtowers from which the pirates can detect any boat and alert their comrades so that they can stop the travelers and exact a tribute from them. Only large, well-defended convoys, as well as Circassian boats, can pass undisturbed (provided they pay a fee, of course).

Sarysu is a Tartar military outpost. The local Khan sees that any refugees and travelers are ferried from one bank of the river to the other and gives a large escort to any wayfarers and merchants who want to travel upriver towards Samara. The price of obtaining an escort of Tartar raiders is more or less equal to the fee exacted by Samara's pirates, and on closer inspection, it is easy to see the two cities share an informal alliance in exacting money from any traveler.

Unlike Samara, however, *Sarysu* is the right place to hire Tartar mercenaries and warriors, or a guide to reach the heart of the eastern territories.

At the mouth of the Volga River, on the Caspian Sea, there is the small but fierce *Khanate of Astrakhan*, a prosperous city and cultural center along Ruthenia's southern borders, as well as one of the main harbors on the Caspian Sea and the Silk Road starting point.

While the city's defenses and the enforcing of the law are in the hands of the Khan and his emirs, it is the Khazars who control the bazaar and all business, to everyone's great profit. In the eyes of many, this city is also the eastern capital

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of the Qalandaryya, a secret society of Khazar origin that has branched out all over Europe.

MATREGA AND THE TAMAN PENINSULA

Between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, to the east of the Sultanate of Sevastopol, there is a small principality of mixed Ruthenian and Mediterranean people, whose capital is the small cosmopolitan city of Matrega, also called the 'Maeotian Pearl' or 'Ruthenia's Door'. During the Reconquest, an odd turn of historical events resulted in the local reigning princess, Bikhakhanim, marrying a rich Jewish merchant from the Kingdom of Sardinia—Simeone de Ghisolfi. Before the Giudicato of Genoa was reconquered, the De Ghisolfis and their trade allies left the Kingdoms of the West and traveled to this city. With the help of the French Paladins and the Hospitallers, they turned it into a strong and safe Fief. The capital of the principality is the rich city of Matrega, once called Phanagoria. Here, among the ruins of the ancient Greek colony, rose splendid churches dedicated to the Obedience, both of Avignon, Damascus, and Moscow, as well as majestic mosques, large synagogues and a sanctuary of the Iscariotes. Just as Novgorod is crowded with merchants and Moscow with ambassadors and emissaries from all over Europe, so Matrega is full of travelers, philosophers and men of the cloth. It is open to Tainted, heretics and believers belonging to any faith, and Italians, Frenchmen, Aragonians, Circassians, Khazars, Jews, Turks and Saracens are all frequent visitors. The De Ghisolfis have strong connections with the powerful Genoan bankers and

the main Tainted families of the West as well as with Suleiman and the powerful Stroganov family of Archangelopolis. Through Khozi Kokos, counselor to Ivan the III, the De Ghisolfis have a powerful ally in Moscow too. However, the present prince, Zacharias de Ghisolfi, is playing a dangerous game, because he is revealing his religious beliefs a little too openly, which are very close to the Strigolnik heresy, the Khazar philosophy and a sort of universal brotherhood.

Matrega's—and the whole principality's—real problem is the Maeotian Sea, that shallow and silty body of water also known as the Sea of Azov or Sudak. Although convenient as far as commerce and navigation are concerned, this partially marshy sea is infested with Drowned Ones and Screaming Eels, which is why very few dare to sail its waters.

THE DUCHIES OF LITHUANIA, SMOLENSK, AND THE BROTHERS OF THE SWORD

What was once a rich and powerful kingdom, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, between Old Poland and the Kingdom of Hungary to the west and the Ruthenian plains to the east, is now a declining land, overwhelmed by the Wilderness.

Apart from the cities belonging to the Hanseatic League, which are on the main road crossing the region, this land is made of independent Fiefs called Duchies, usually a fortified city and the land in its immediate vicinities. Each Fief is then surrounded by miles of Wilderness in every direction. Most of the old roads do not exist anymore, and Kiev, the old capital, is now a City

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of Sorrow, whose ruins are infested with savage, Dead-eating leucrottas.

All ducal families try to expand their influence and establish alliances with each other, but the sad truth is, these Fiefs barely manage to remain strong and safe, year after year. It is only the League cities and the lands of the Kalmar Union to the north that grow in prosperity.

The military organization of the Brothers of the Sword are the only bond the Duchies share; they escort travelers, patrol the roads, protect mail deliveries and communications. Among the 'western' chivalric orders, the Brothers are the only ones who ventured farther east, and they now protect a small net of fortified way stations, which double as mail stations and stables for their fine steeds.

The Principality of Smolensk is the starting point of the main trade route crossing Lithuania and extending to Lublin and Cracow. Set on the border between the Lithuanian Duchies and the Principality of Muscovy, this Fief is under the direct control of the Brothers of the Sword, who built fortresses and watchtowers there and control the Fief's capital and villages. Smolensk is also the capital of the Stenka na Stenku ('wall against wall') martial art, a weaponless fighting style, which is said to be used by Ruthenian farmers to kill even Fell Bears. Each year, in the summer, the city is filled with fighters, who fight each other to gain honor and rich prizes.

OTHER PRINCIPALITIES AND CITIES OF SORROW

The regions described up to this point are not all Ruthenian Fiefs. There are many more principalities and city-states scattered throughout these lands.

Most of them are just fortified citadels surrounded by small stretches of land, Fiefs hardly defended by a few Druzhinnik, whose lands are crossed by wayfarers, priests, monks, nomads, Skomorokhi, Kolduns, Starets and Bogatyr. Life in the cities is peaceful enough, in the shade of the Kremlin and the Churches faithful to the Patriarchy of Moscow. The few noblemen and Boyars live side by side with merchants and artisans, while in the countryside, isolated farms and fortified villages are the core of the Fief's economy.

Because of two centuries of attacks and Pandemonia, many cities and villages, once full of life, are now Cities of Sorrow. On these solitary regions and forlorn plains, Koschei the Immortal is said to be wandering, a creature halfway between legend and reality, an old man of indeterminate age, thin, greedy and with fearful eyes. He seems to have been wandering about since the Dies Irae, capturing young women for his vile purposes, but he is also said to have hidden an immense treasure somewhere in his dark abode.

NOMADS, GYPSIES, RAIDERS AND MERCENARIES

A variety of caravans, bands of horse riders, tribes of nomads can be found traveling through Ruthenia, more numerous and more frequently than in any other European region. Constantly roaming from one side of the region to the other with the turn of the seasons, Ruthenian nomads can easily (at least, in the eyes of the natives) be divided into specific groups. The main ones are:

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* **The Circassians:** a proud and brave people, whose women are renowned for their beauty and strength, just like the men are known to be loyal and brave fighters. After the Dead devastated their native lands, these tribes settled on the Volga River—both on its main course and its branches—becoming the best boatmen and river merchants in Ruthenia. They offer lower fees than Samara pirates or Sarysu legalized thieves, and they know how to handle both Novgorod pirates and river monsters. The Circassians are very close-knit, but they have no qualms about leaving home, following people they barely know on an adventure, either on an impulse to take the journey or because they are lured by the dream of finding a small cache of gold.

* **The Cossacks:** not a people as such, but military-like communities living and traveling with their families...the concept of mercenary companies carried to the extreme. They are seasoned warriors and mercenaries who roam the region looking for princes and Boyars to hire them, usually for one or two years, or even just for one venture. Once adventurers, rogues, farmers and serfs, these fighters have created their own mercenary companies and reinvented themselves, thus erasing their past.

* **The White Cossacks:** just one tenth of all Cossacks, and their community is formed by Tainted and their families. Rejected by all the Fiefs in the region, these outcasts have found the mercenary trade is the only way of making a living. However, due to the inherent danger of hiring these companies—and of belonging to them—their fees are usually half those asked by Untainted Cossacks.

Native to the Kingdom of Hungary, the Kalderash often cross Eastern Europe's invisible borders to trade in the Ruthenian cities and sell metal everyday objects and tools crafted with the utmost skill. Silversmiths, tinkers, repairmen, toy-makers, knife grinders, these nomads travel on incredible wagons, often drawn by aurochs and equipped with furnaces, which allow them to cater to Ruthenians' everyday needs. Apart from a few renowned artisans in Pleskov, Moscow and Astrakhan, the Kalderash are the best and most easily found Inventors in Ruthenia.

* **The Yenisch:** wandering white gypsies, perhaps native to Old Poland or the Teutonic Principalities. They travel on horse-drawn wagons and usually work as seasonal workers, street musicians, music instruments makers, jugglers, artists and acrobats. Unlike other notorious nomads, the Yenisch are known universally as being extremely honest and very romantic, and they are valued even by the Princes' courts because of their beautiful paintings and heartbreaking music.

* **The Tartars:** be they bands of mercenaries, merciless raiders, peaceful refugee families, or just travelers, the Tartars are a dark-skinned people—one among the numerous populations of the East—who came to Ruthenia seeking fortune and to escape the Golden Horde. All adult males are usually shepherds and warriors while the women take care of their camps and look after the children and herds. Such roles, however, have become less defined in these years of changes.

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TARTARY BORDERS

Beyond the Volga River, on Central Asia's boundless plains, there's only one terrible law, the one laid down by Erlik, Great Khan of the Golden Horde.

At the head of his army of nine smaller hordes, Erlik is the awful monster lying in wait just beyond the borders of the lands inhabited by men, so much so that beyond Ruthenia's borders, all maps are barren and empty, but for one, terrible warning: Hic est Erlik Khan... here is Erlik Khan. To the Tartars, he is the God of Death, and all other populations see him more or less in the same role.

His nine Spawns are known as Karaoglanlar, and each of them closely resembles a huge raider chief, even if they are quite different from each other. As they wander back and forth across Tartary, the Dead of these awful nine Hordes get partially covered with gold-like dust, making it easy to recognize them. The scholars and Plague Doctors of these lands think the Nine are all Tyrants, meaning that Erlik is a Progenitor...but who can know for sure?

Instead of indiscriminately killing off any community or group of nomads they come across, the Dead of the Golden Horde tend to strike small villages or fleeing groups of people in a series of single, well-aimed attacks. Unfortunately, this leads the besieged nomad chiefs and khans to select a certain number of prisoners or slaves to be given to the Dead to satisfy their hunger and make them go away.

The Karaoglanlar accept such offers willingly, which is why the Horde has been active and prosperous for years. It is certainly waiting for the day it will launch an overwhelming surprise attack.

The most frightening legends are those about Kasyrgan, the buried city where, among the ruins of a lost antediluvian empire, Erlik reigns on his black throne, surrounded by skeletons of dragons and giants. There, the God of Death shows his true face—a hideous muzzle with fangs as long as a warrior's sword—to the legions of his victims. It is a sight that makes a human mind waver, soon followed by the heart.

The Golden Horde, however, is not the only danger encountered in Tartary. City-states governed by merciless khans, cruel bands of raiders, hungry wild beasts and terrifying Fell Beasts, Abominations hiding among the ruins of the capitals of the past and the rugged, primitive Kurgan make it a wild and extremely dangerous land.

War without peace

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War without peace



This is a chapter specifically written for the Game Master, offering a series of ideas, legends, rumors and suggestions for adventure, divided by region and main themes, following the same order in Chapter 4.

Each idea can be expanded and used as an individual adventure, or it can be reduced to an encounter within an existing adventure, or it can become a simple rumor to enrich the description and the atmosphere of the Heroes' wanderings across Ruthenia.

GETTING TO RUTHENIA

Heroes from the New Kingdoms of the West could end up in Ruthenia in many ways and for all sorts of reasons:

In Moscow with the ambassadors. Moscow is a strong growing principality, but at times it is like a pot on the boil, ready to explode. Many are the plots brewing in the shadow of Great Prince Ivan III's throne, and they involve both members of his family and the grim Black Mastiffs. At the same time, western ambassadors, artists, inventors and adventurers throng his court, trying to deal with the cold and merciless politics of the region. Moscow is a place where even an unknown cadet can become a celebrated hero, but the risk of being stabbed in the back is always present.

In Novgorod with the merchants. Resourceful and adventurous western merchants are always interested in

reaching Novgorod to start a commercial venture there. Here, it is possible to bypass any middlemen and conduct very profitable business, buying up goods from the northern lands. Those same middlemen do not look too kindly upon this maneuver, though. The ruthless merchant Maksim Grigoryevich has sent some Cossacks to sabotage the shipments and goods belonging to the Heroes' patron, and it is necessary to investigate the matter.

In Matrega with philosophers and heretics. Matrega, also called Ruthenia's Door, is a cosmopolitan city, open to any kind of culture and religion, as well as wayfarers, bankers, scholars, philosophers and adventurers. Characters and heroes of western stock could end up here for any reason and perhaps get involved in some adventure, such as exploring the Maeotian Sea or dealing with some plot that has to do with the Strigolnik heresy, Zacharias de Ghisolfi's thorny philosophy, the proliferating of secret cults or other religious troubles.

Duchesses in danger. Ruthenia seems to breed a great number of noblewomen seeking help. The sensual Duchess Marina Seminova rules over a small Fief south of Moscow and desperately needs help against the plundering along her borders and the Boyars' insurrections. In her youth, the Duchess traveled through the West, and she has recently sent many letters to her old friends scattered all over the Mediterranean countries, asking for counsel and allies.

The angel at the eastern window. The wandering pirate Largo Sevillano is leaving New Venice with his small sailing

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ship, the Pandora, and he is heading for Matrega. He wants to see those lands, still unknown to him, but also his old friend Anzela, a Staret who lives in that area. And Largo is always amenable to having some company in his travels.

On the trail of the Qalandaryya. Heroes' Protector is investigating the mysterious sect known as the Qalandaryya, whose main seat is said to be in the remote Astrakhan. It will be a long and dangerous journey, not to mention no one has ever challenged the Khazars in the heart of their shadow domain... but then the Heroes are the toughest, most seasoned adventurers in the New Kingdoms, are they not?

Bishop hunting. The Pope King excommunicated the Prince-Bishop

Tristrant de Renart, charging him with heresy, sympathizing with the Moscow Obedience and embezzling Empire money. That very night, Tristrant left his Palatine Cathedral with as much gold and letters of credit he could carry, trying to get as far as possible from Constantine II's long reach. He is said to be heading for Archangelopolis, to settle at the borders of the known world, but even there he will not be safe from Empire agents because of the huge bounty on his head.

On the trail of the Holy Wheel. The Holy Wheel—the dreadful Tainted secret society aiming for the extermination of all the Untainted—seemed to be on the verge of being wiped out. However, one of its Deacons is now heading for Erlik Khan's court, to make an alliance with



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the Lord of the Horde. Whatever these heretics may want of the God of Death, or are willing to offer him, they must be stopped before they reach the Horde.

Genghis Khan's treasure. Genghis Khan's treasure is most likely the largest pile of gold and gems any man ever hoarded throughout the whole history of the world. Nobody knows where this legendary warlord was buried, but his burial site must probably be somewhere in the limitless stretches of Tartary, between the Kingdom of Priest John and Cathay, well protected by deadly traps and swarms of the Dead. It seems that a merchant woman of Old Venice, Hilaire von Aschenbach, owns the map to the burial site and the gold, but who will be brave enough to cross the borders of the known world and embark on this incredible treasure hunt?

THE ADVENTURER WHO CAME FROM THE COLD

Just like a player can be a Hero from the New Kingdoms of the West in Ruthenia, it is possible to be a Staret, Cossack, Circassian or Hieromonk traveling among the Italian Signorie or at the borders of the Empire. Here are a few ideas:

On a mission on behalf of Ecaterina. Ecaterina Stroganov belongs to the powerful Stroganov merchant family of Archangelopolis and is mostly in charge of organizing any mission heading east, beyond the Arctic Sea, and keeping in touch with western bankers and merchants. She often sends her representatives to the court of Milica Karnstein, in Caserta, or to the palaces of the Iustinianies of France and Sardinia. Her envoys are always well paid

and travel in luxury, and her embassies accept even the most exotic guests, provided they are loyal to their patroness.

Amalfi's sun. With its many commercial warehouses and Ruthenian delegations, Amalfi is one of the most important cities for the merchants from Novgorod and Pleskov. The journey from Ruthenia to the middle of the Mediterranean area is long and dangerous; therefore, those who are sent there tend to spend many years traveling throughout Italy and the Mediterranean area as they carry out all sorts of assignments on their patrons' behalf.

Travels to art and culture centers. Ruthenian inventors, artists, men of the cloth, artisans and alchemists often feel they live at the very borders of the known world and look at the large arts and crafts shops of the West with interest: Italian laboratories, the art schools in France and Granada, the houses of learning of the Mediterranean caliphates, the Teutonic philosophers' monasteries.

This is why Ruthenian princes and patrons often send scholars, artists and men of the cloth to the New Kingdoms of the West to learn the techniques and secrets of the western masters and bring them home years later. It is a fact, though, that many among such travelers like the new environment so much they never return home.

Mercenaries. The Cossacks in the service of the Ruthenian princes have discovered they are as brave and skilled fighters as the German Landsknecht, the Italian Compagnie di Ventura or the Sultan of Sevastopol's Janissaries. Therefore, some communities of these fearless and lively fighters are now looking to be hired in Old Poland, the Kingdom of Hungary and the

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Mediterranean countries. Some Brothers of the Sword and Smolensk wrestling champions often travel west, too, to teach their techniques to the highest bidder.

The worship of Relics. Starets and Hieromonks have great faith in worshipping Relics, the saints of the past and the so-called Merovlites. This is why many of them travel to the Holy Land and the most important Christian cities, looking for holy texts and Relics to evaluate, buy and take back home. In spite of the Imperial and Hungarian churches being quite different, these men of the cloth often get free passage and shelter at local monasteries and abbeys, where they have fruitful exchanges with other monks and priests.

The Bogatyr's daughter. Nikita the Elder is a wise and old Bogatyr, who is still known and loved throughout Ruthenia because of the many deeds he accomplished in his youth. Even now, he is still listened to and obeyed as a legendary hero of the past. Only one shadow troubles Nikita's peaceful old age: years ago, his youngest daughter, Olga, was kidnapped by the Turks and sold into slavery in Algiers. This is all Nikita managed to discover from some slave merchants, but he could never search for his daughter. Now, all his other daughters are married and settled, and the old Bogatyr wants to have a last adventure and journey to the other end of the world in search of Olga. Who will accompany him?

The Universal Council. While the Principalities of Ruthenia did not officially take part in the first meetings of the Universal Council, many among them now think it is time to make their presence felt to prevent the eastern Fiefs

from getting cut out of any important agreement and alliance. Delegations are being sent from Moscow, Smolensk, Novgorod and Astrakhan to the seat of the Council to ensure their own representatives are accepted in it.

INTRIGUES IN MOSCOW

Moscow is the largest Ruthenian Fief. Its borders are safe from raiders and Strays, but there are many hidden domestic threats and plots.

The Princes' rebellion. Not everybody likes the rigid control Moscow exerts on the Fief. Many old reigning families from as many principalities are frustrated by the rule of Ivan III, enforced by his Black Mastiffs. The Prince of Rostov is at the head of the most rebellious faction, and he has long been holding secret meetings in his city. The Great Prince and his Black Mastiffs are well aware of this problem and are just waiting for the right moment to strike. And the rebels are doing exactly the same.

Ivan the Terrible. Nephew to Ivan III and with a well-defined place in the Muscovite line of succession, Ivan "the Terrible" is a young, hotheaded and ambitious prince, who would go to any length to win the Muscovite throne as soon as possible. Though conceited and clever, Ivan is just a boy, but he has many hidden supporters of his ambitions. To the Black Mastiffs, he is a means of expanding their political power, while the Hungarian Strigolniki have offered their alliance to him in exchange for a new openness towards the Tainted, and the Uprite Church as well as many noblemen of the kingdom

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see him as the best means of hoarding riches and power. Ivan the Great is well aware of this situation, but he has not yet made up his mind about how to deal with his nephew.

Prince Gorka. An envoy of Ladislao Kan of Hungary, Prince Gorka lives on a beautiful estate just outside Moscow. This extremely rich, mysterious nobleman personally supervises all the negotiations and communications between the two kingdoms. The Great Prince Ivan III holds him in great esteem, despite the populace being quite afraid of this grim Tainted, who is a sworn enemy of the Patriarch of Moscow. Gorka is Ladislao Kan's secret hand in the region, and he is plotting to bring about an oligarchic restoration by exploiting Ivan "the Terrible" and the Black Mastiffs or even to stage a coup.

The Third Rome. After Constantinople fell, Moscow became the heart of the Orthodox faith and one of the world's main centers of Christian Obedience. For decades now, Moscow's Patriarchs have been working hard to promote the "Third Rome" as a holy city, and Ivan the Great has been supporting them in this effort because he is conscious of the fundamental role of religion in ruling the populace. However, the Muscovite supremacy is being undermined by the spreading of the Staret, the first Upirite communities, the Strigolnik heresy and Zacharias of Matrega's heretic philosophy. All the men of the cloth and the Hieromonks loyal to the Patriarchy are required to provide information about the enemies of the Church and act in any possible way against heretics and

Tainted. Because of this, the Patriarch, Macarius is a sworn enemy of Khozi Kokos, the Great Prince's advisor, and of Ivan the Terrible, secretly supported by the Upirite Church.

Saints and Relics. The order of the Hieromonks has been recently created to investigate the phenomenon of the Merovlites—or Saints—that is, individuals who emit an "odor of Sanctity", and whose bodies generate Manna, even while they are still alive. It would seem Ruthenia is particularly blessed as far as this phenomenon is concerned: many are the commoners, Starets and Skomorokhs with this extraordinary ability. The Hieromonks travel from one end of the country to the other, and even beyond its borders, to find these people and verify their nature. Many are just charlatans, but those who can actually produce Manna are usually taken to the Monastery of Andronicus in Moscow, where the order has its seat. This holy place hosts the largest library of holy texts in Ruthenia, as well as laboratories for the Hieromonks and one of the largest collections of Manna-containing Relics in the world. The one that stands out the most is the Mandylion, an extremely ancient sacred image. Some say, however, that there are also dungeons in the depths of the Monastery and rooms for "special" experiments, mass graves, necropolises and crematoriums, and that not all the Saints get—or stay—there of their own free will.

Khozi Kokos. One of Ivan III's most trusted advisors, Khozi Kokos, is a rich Khazar business man, a Jew who follows

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the ideas of Zacharias of Matrega; he's also a Tainted, suspected of being one of the leaders of the Qalandaryya, and a philosopher preaching peace and friendship among all the peoples. All these things make most of the strong Muscovite powers hate him. In spite of his rather extreme personality and role, Kokos is a knowledgeable counselor, quite loyal to his king and very skilled in managing the Principality. This is why Ivan III would entrust him with his own life and the keys to his Fief. Perhaps, this was Kokos' aim from the very beginning.

The Odd Couple. Through the years, Ivan III had many western architects, inventors and artists go to Moscow to build palaces, create great works of art, and teach arts and sciences to the locals. The most renowned among them is Aristotele Fioravanti, a great architect, inventor and scientist of Italian origins, while the most gifted and controversial is the suspicious Mehmet Sani, of Turkish extraction. In spite of their extremely different personalities, the centenarian Fioravanti and the grim and introverted Sani are close friends and have recently opened a laboratory together, thanks to the generous patronage of the Great Prince. This factory is openly influenced by the achievements of the Florentine Leonardo Da Vinci and the great tradition of Turkish alchemists and engineers. This laboratory is now producing many a prodigy, most of all, steam tools and contraptions, as well as new alchemic substances.

The quest for Tamerlane. Recently some chroniclers and scholars of the past, together with a small group of noblemen

and merchants, have shed light on Tamerlane's deeds against the Golden Horde at the time of the Reconquest. In the eyes of many, this ancient warlord is now a hero, and there are those who say he is still "alive", either in the faraway Samarkand or in some Tartar city. To them, this immortal hero might be the key to the final defeat of the Golden Horde, and there are now many voices asking to send a secret delegation to those lands to gather information about Tamerlane, or even to finally find him.

Satan's Soldiers. The Black Mastiffs are the most feared and notorious military corps in Ruthenia. The so-called "Satan's Soldiers" are actually a sort of political police and spies and hitmen, a battalion that specializes in destroying the Dead and persecuting Infectors, heretics and all the enemies of Muscovy. In spite of their dark renown, it is mostly thanks to the Black Mastiffs that the Great Principality is now a strong, safe and protected place, and many among them are just highly skilled and efficient soldiers. At present, the Black Mastiffs are busy hunting down Strigolniki and Kolduns, who try to "corrupt the Muscovites' spirit", and suppressing the noblemen's secret insurrections. They often undertake missions and expeditions outside the borders of the Fief, when they can be seen keeping company with other kinds of travelers and adventurers, even some they would persecute in normal circumstances.

Niznji Novgorod. Situated at the confluence of the Volga and Oka rivers, it has recently become one of Muscovy's most important cities because it is both

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a river harbor and an observatory of what happens beyond the Volga River. The Stroganov family controls most of its trades, and the river guard patrols prevent incursions by the Pirates of Novgorod. The Great Prince had a skilled Italian architect, “Mastro Pietro”, build impressive fortifications on the hill above the city, and today its Kremlin—equipped with cannons brought here from Pleskov—is one of the most powerful and better defended in Ruthenia. Ivan III also allowed an astronomer and inventor from Damascus to create an “Observatory” here, on the city’s highest tower to study the stars (and the movements of the Horde). Thanks to the Stroganov family, as well as the presence of merchants, inventors, learned men and artists, this city is now the cultural and scientific capital of Muscovy.

NOVGOROD’S MARKET

The Land of Novgorod is one of the most prosperous, open and colorful in Ruthenia. Its heart is the beautiful market that stretches along the streets and squares of its five cantons. This is the best place in which to listen to rumors or investigate the dangers threatening the region.

The Market Bank. Novgorod is split in two by the Volkhov River; both halves are surrounded by walls and joined by a large bridge. The city doors open at dawn and close at sunset. Certainly, the favorite destination for merchants and travelers is the Market Bank, connected to the river harbor and the warehouses. Every day, artisans, merchants and farmers come here to sell their wares, look for customers or to be hired. However, the most

important business transactions (large orders of furs, honey, wax, and tar) never take place on in the streets and squares, but in the palaces of the merchants involved. Here, “commercial espionage” is a quite common—almost mandatory—practice; all big local and foreign merchants always search for somebody who can be their eyes, copy waybills and account books under the cover of night, and sneak into the palaces of the various trading companies to eavesdrop.

The market is also where you can find pilgrims, prophets and adventurers willing to tell of their incredible adventures and their journeys to the Holy Land, the awesome vastness of Tartary, or along the Silk Road and the long rivers crossing the region.

The Skulls Assembly. The city assembly is routinely held at the Market Bank, one of the most central and popular places in the city. The court where it is held is structured so that it can easily accommodate the intervening Boyars’ high-backed chairs and the stands regularly set up there. The ground there is a mixture of stones, bones, human and horses’ skulls, all mixed with soil. Those are the remains of all the Dead, mounts, Nightmares and raiders that repeatedly attacked the city, forever trapped in the paving to remind everybody of the dangers always lurking outside the city gates and that the Fief is built on its warriors’ strength and past victories.

The Latin Court. Set on the Market Bank, the Latin Court takes up a whole city district. It hosts hundreds of western—mostly Italian, French and German—travelers, merchants, delegates and

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adventurers. Both the Florin and the Florentine languages are widespread here, and a “good boy from our countries” looking for hire will always find some kind of job.

The king of the Skomoroki. Novgorod is considered the Skomoroki’s capital, and these mischievous charlatans and jugglers enliven its streets and squares every day. Once a year, however, during the celebration known as “Maslenica” (a sort of Mardi Gras), a long festival is held in the city, which attracts Skomoroki, Kalderash, and Yenisch from all over the area. This festival culminates in huge binges, games of skill, gambling, betting, hard drinking, extraordinary shows and, finally, the election of the King of the Skomoroki, who will gain the patronage of the city Governor, as well as rich prizes.

The Zar Votolomon. Novgorod is also renowned for its numerous Banjas and their tidiness. A Banja is a cross between a steam bath, a tavern, a sanatorium, an inn and a gambling house; it is a place where one can drink, smoke aromatic herbs, eat, have a relaxing massage, chat and play dozens of gambling games. One of the most famous—and exclusive—among such places is the Zar Votolomon, frequented almost exclusively by river pirates and their supporters. This is the ideal place for an adventurer to eavesdrop and get hired.

The beast in the Volkhov. Novgorod fishermen, pirates and sailors are all ready to face any danger and adventure, even thousands of miles away from home. And yet, in the very heart of their own land, in the waters of the Volkhov River, a terrible monster is said to have

its lair. This “beast” is a mysterious and unknown creature. According to some, it is a just a sturgeon, but over twenty paces long, or a dreadful Screaming Eel or even a river dragon. Whatever its nature, in recent years this monster has been sighted many times—but never caught.

The Chiliarch’s shadow. While Novgorod’s Governor rules the city and the nearby countryside, as well as all the trading, the Chiliarch protects the citizens, has the streets patrolled and supervises tax collection from Boyars and commoners alike. The present Chiliarch is a stand-offish, troubled man, and it is rumored he may somehow be blackmailed by the Boyars, who are thus exacting favors that reflect badly on the Chiliarch’s relationship with the noblemen of the region.

The lost outpost. Through some of the Chiliarch’s agents, Novgorod has control over several outposts scattered throughout the freezing northern lands and even in Tartary, up to the eastern side of the Ural Mountains. Such outposts are extremely small mining or trading settlements, fortified villages defended by a small group of armed men, but each of them has a purpose and some importance. There have not been any news or ore shipments from one of such outposts for quite a while, and it has now become a priority to send somebody there to see what’s going on. It is feared by many that something awful may have befallen the whole village, that it may have been attacked by the Wolf of the steppes, the Kurgans or even one of the Horde’s Khans.

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WITHIN PLESKOV'S WALLS

At present, Pleskov is one of the most impregnable and better-fortified cities in Ruthenia, besides being an industrious center belonging to the Hanseatic League. Even within its walls, though, it is possible to find some adventure.

The League's borders. Pleskov belongs to the Hanseatic League and is one of the last, large, federate cities to the north-east. This is why it is such an important trading center for furs, amber, salted fish, black powder, weapons and assorted contraptions and devices, which from there travel on to Novgorod and Moscow. As in Novgorod, rivalries and clashes of interests between powerful merchants often generate hidden conflicts and far-from-conventional operations. Pleskov's Burgomaster and his Streltsies do not tolerate a fracas within the city limits, though, which means any dirty work has to be carried out outside the city walls, and with the utmost discretion.

The Strigolnik heresy. There are many creeds in Pleskov, brought and spread there by Ruthenian and Hanseatic merchants and travelers. At present, the most subversive and disquieting is the Strigolniki's faith, seen as a heresy by the Patriarch of Moscow. The Strigolniki are farmers, craftsmen and bourgeois who reject the opulence and privileges of the clergy, practicing a form of Christianity free from any hierarchy, a reformed church and any insurrection of the poor against the rich and their abuses.

The clashes resulting from the most clamorous actions of the sect are becoming more and more serious, but

even the highest echelons of the clergy look favorably on the Strigolniki as a means of acquiring more power and freeing themselves from the authority of the Patriarch of Moscow. At the same time, support, help and advice are secretly sent to the Strigolniki from Matrega by the followers of Zacharias de Ghisolfi, whose aims are still unknown. Recently, however, the Burgomaster declared that any threat to the peace caused by the heretics will be suffocated in blood, and the city has become a powder keg ready to explode.

The Wolf of Pleskov. Unfortunately, even five sets of walls are not enough to keep the Plague out of Pleskov. For years now, a dark, unknown evil has been hitting the city every few months, and nobody, not even the Streltsies' whole garrison, has been able to put a stop to it. This unknown but very real phenomenon is called "the Wolf of Pleskov" because some of the torn, Plague-infected victims' bodies bear the marks of a wolf's fangs...albeit a wolf with jaws as large as those of a horse. The "Wolf" strikes at night, more or less once every month, either dragging away an unsuspecting victim, a soldier on duty or killing and devouring them on the spot. All the remains that have been found are infected with an odd form of the Plague, which clearly means "the Wolf" must be some kind of intelligent and malevolent Plague Spawn hiding in the city. Some think that "the Wolf" may also be striking outside the city walls and that the disappearance of dozens of travelers throughout the region should be laid at the door of this clever and elusive foe.

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The lost laboratory. Pleskov is full of factories, alchemic laboratories and foundries, and in the surrounding countryside there are many watermills feeding power to their machinery. Some decades ago, a laboratory in the city produced clockwork mechanisms and spring-loaded chests. During a dreadful Pandemonium, however, a fire destroyed the whole neighborhood, and new walls and a new neighborhood emerged on the ruins. Some maintain part of the basement of that laboratory still exists, sealed off under the ruins and the new buildings. Only God knows what may be lurking down there.

In the cold northern light. Some northern legends say the God of Winter created a marvelous gem to guide men and show them his kindness through the darkest nights. This myth is an allegory referring to the North Star, but there are those who believe that a real gem, called “Polar Diamond” or “Bright Apple”, may be hidden among the Frost Spires in a shining cave at the northernmost boundaries of the world. In order to find this crystal, the alchemist Tyros Prahe is willing to finance an expedition to those lands, beyond the kingdom of the mysterious Frost Queen. Besides being extremely valuable, in fact, that gem also seems to possess some special alchemic properties.

The Queen of Spades. A few months ago a mysterious foreign noblewoman arrived in Pleskov. Known as the Queen of Spades, her favorite pastime is playing cards in any gambling house in the city or at private parties. Since she appears to be extremely skilled and lucky, it is

the opinion of many that she must have made a pact with the devil, and by now very few challenge her. The Queen might be interested in playing a game with the Heroes, with such stakes that they cannot afford to lose.

THE HARBOR OF ARCHANGELOPOLIS

Archangelopolis is the last real city one reaches before facing the limitless vastness of northern Tartary, Siberia and the lands of the Finns and the Karels. These barren, unpopulated lands and the vast Arctic Sea are the adobe of wild animals and primeval beasts. The harbor of Archangelopolis is the starting point for the most dangerous, toughest expeditions that offer many an opportunity to the most determined heroes.

Leviathans, Behemoths and Black Reindeers. When it comes to exploring the Ruthenian hinterland, the Pomors are the best guides to lead you in search of the remains of antediluvian behemoths. They are hunters who can best even the dreadful Black Reindeers, recognize and fight the Morozkoes and the White Dead and know how to hunt the great arctic whales, which are leviathans through and through. Whoever is looking for an exciting experience and is ready to face the rigors of these merciless lands can seek his fortune taking part in a Pomor expedition. And hope he will return home alive.

The unknown East. All the courses followed by the Pomors always leave from and return to Archangelopolis. Among them, the most interesting are those following the frozen coast of

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Siberia to the most far flung outposts and then crossing the mysterious eastern ocean to the almost legendary Sea Urchin Bay. All explorations along these routes are financed by the Stroganovs, who always look for scouts and adventurers to send on ventures at the very limits of the known world. At the harbor of Archangelopolis, right in front of the Stroganov Palace, it is always possible to find a merchant who hires people to send to the other end of Asia on the next sailing koch.

The renegades' monastery. Rebuilt and expanded across the years, the Monastery of the Archangel Michael is one of the most important centers in Archangelopolis and certainly its most famous symbol. At present, the monastery is under the control of the

Starets and specifically of the most renowned and powerful among them, Seraphim of Radonezh, who imposes tithes on all the surrounding villages. Seraphim still allows the monastery to welcome outcasts and wanted people inside its walls, but he then turns them—whether they are willing or not—into servants and minions to be used during the mysterious and disquieting rituals performed in the monastery. Seraphim is now the revered leader of dozens of Starets, hundreds of servants and a few thousand faithful, while Archangelopolis' political authorities, the Moscow clergy, and even the Stroganovs themselves look at the present situation with growing concern. What's really happening inside the monastery? Who, and what, really is the unsettling Seraphim? What are the



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plans of Black King of the Starets? Many people would pay pure gold coins to get an answer to all these questions.

The Morozkoes and the White Horde. During the Darkest Age, a dreadful Horde, different from Erlik Khan's Golden Horde but no less frightening, laid waste the northern lands of Ruthenia. The Dead cannot usually stand very low temperatures, which paralyze or freeze them until they can get back to a milder climate. There is, however, a peculiar kind of Spawn, the so-called White Dead or Frozen Dead (they are called Draugar in the territories of the Kalmar Union, and Morozkoes in Ruthenia) that can withstand snowstorms and very low temperatures. The legendary White Horde was made up of thousands of Frozen Dead, who attacked and devastated many villages, catching them totally off-guard. The White Horde is now just a grim legend, but there are still some Morozkoes—White Dead who lay in wait in the snow or wander in the night in search of human heat to feed from—especially in the regions under the control of Archangelopolis.

The Corpses Hill. While under Archangelopolis' rule, the small village of Cholmogory is a place where it is possible to meet people from all over the northern lands, such as Karels, Finns and Savirs. The village itself is named after the location where a great battle between the legendary White Horde and an alliance of northern peoples took place. From there, it is possible to leave on exploring missions ranging throughout Ruthenia's northern territories, toward Siberia, for example,

to look for the bones of the antediluvian behemoths that once wandered through this area. Cholmogory is also renowned for its extremely skilled craftsmen, who carve bones and ivory into beautiful, even if often macabre, objects. There are rumors that some Tainted craftsmen may at times go looking for the frozen remains of the White Horde, to carve beautiful, but dangerous objects from the black bones of the Dead. Such unsettling masterpieces are secretly bought by merchants in the service of the Stroganovs and then resold to rich collectors scattered all over the world, such as the sophisticated Upirites of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The gold of the Stroganovs. Tainted for the most part, the Stroganov family owns many treasures, goods, lands and palaces to rival the major Ruthenian principalities. The Stroganovs also run a commercial enterprise with branches throughout the region and headquarters elsewhere in the world. The main members of the family are very close-knit and work together for the mutual success. Ecaterina Stroganova is in charge of shipments to the East and all contacts with the Western New Kingdoms. Her sister Elena manages the family's main estates and the men-at-arms of the Stroganovs private guard. Young Anna is very interested in inventions, contraptions and automata, and she has been working for years on the project of a Philosopher's Android similar to the one created by the Teutonic Spagyrite Monks. Old Viktor, their first cousin, is in charge of all diplomatic relationships with Ruthenian princes as well as managing the family's income.

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The Stroganovs have many enemies and openly support the Tainted's cause, despite keeping a distance from the grim Hungarian Upirite Church. A Tainted in trouble, an honest adventurer or a scholar with some new theory or invention to offer will always find a place and some special assignment at the Stroganovs' court.

The black whale. The dreadful rumors about the Black Whale, the Sea Monster, are well known to all the Pomors: it is a huge leviathan—whose ten-foot-thick back is bristling with harpoons—that attacks any ship crossing its path. A grim, crazy and maimed Tainted sea captain from Archangelopolis has been hunting this monster for years. He hires any sea scum to man his ship, paying them in gold, just to be able to carry on his mad war against the sea monster.

THE FORTRESS ON THE NEVA

Nyenskans, the "Fortress on the Neva", is a key stronghold of the Kalmar Union, and the main center for contacts and trading with the Ruthenian principalities. Many are the dangers hiding in these cold lands:

Crime and eternal punishment. Because of the condition of the fortress of Nyenskans, the unhealthy, frozen marshes surrounding it, its isolation and the disquieting noises coming from underground, no soldiers are willing to be assigned to it. This is why the garrison's soldiers are notoriously the worst scum dredged from all Kalmar armies, and being assigned to it is seen as a punishment—so much so that its permanent garrison is known as the "Battalion of Torment". Besides the frequent, unpleasant incidents

in the city caused by these violent and untrustworthy soldiers, Nyenskans is also known for its smuggling activities (carried on by the soldiers themselves) and the high number of desertions in the garrison. When a deserter runs away, the other guards are severely punished, and the cruelest of the officers are sent to track him down, with the promise of a special prize if they bring back the fugitive's head. At times, such escapes are set up by the officers themselves to fatten their meagre salary with the prize for the head of some unfortunate soldier.

Rubles in the Neva. The Posad—the lower part of Nyenskans—is crossed by a channel that flows from the last part of the Neva's course. Travelers and merchants always throw some rubles into the channel before leaving the city as a request to God that they never have to see this abysmal, grim place again. When the water is not too cold, local street urchins dive into the channel to retrieve the money. At times, however, some of them disappear, never to be seen again.

Notes from Underground. Nyenskans literally rises on the remains of thousands of Dead, whose bones have been thrown into the marshes, together with gravel, sand and rocks to form a dry embankment on which to build the city. Many foreigners are persuaded that the moans and scratching, which are said to be heard through the basements' walls and from under the floors, are just legend, but any citizen will tell you there is some truth in these rumors. At times, while some excavation or building work is in progress, heaps of bones, deformed Carcasses and Opprobriums, which are

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still able to move, come to the surface and immediately start crawling toward the nearest living beings.

Miasma and Fell Beasts. Because of the thousands of Dead buried in them, the marshes at the mouth of the Neva river are soaked with Atrament and often generate puddles of Miasma, whose effluvia contaminate animals and parasites in the area. These dead waters are, therefore, home to Screaming Eels and other Fell Beasts, which, from there, spread through the area as far as the Neva Bay, a scourge endangering the fishermen from the nearby villages.

The Gray Fires. The Gray Fires are a peculiar phenomenon that can be found in the marshes around Nyenskans, where ghostly, fitful lights, which seem to possess some sort of malevolent—ephemeral, even—intelligence, rise from the puddles of Miasma. The Gray Fires look like greasy glows or orbs filled with shiny vapors and can move towards any wayfarer, exploding next to them, and thus infecting them. Though mysterious in their nature, such Fires are quite real, and the Plague Doctors are trying to find an explanation for this phenomenon.

The Royal Thanatology Academy. Nyenskans is a well-renowned, privileged place in which to study the Dead and the Plague. There are many reasons for this: an existing agreement between Kalmarian and Ruthenian Plague Doctors to use this city as common ground in which to exchange views, the presence of the Gray Fires and other Plague-related phenomena in the marshes surrounding the city and the extreme ease with which the fortress guards are willing to “find” both recent and ancient

Dead to sell to the researchers. The Royal Thanatology Academy is at present one of the few sources of pride for this city, and it draws scholars to Nyenskans from all Eastern and Northern Europe. The residing Plague Doctors are often in need of explorers, guides or even “body snatchers” because the fortress guards are becoming increasingly insolent and greedy. Of course, the guards do not like it at all.

The Caverns of Ice. Years ago, Dimitrij Vonotar was one of the best masters at the Thanatology Academy of Nyenskans, but his studies soon sent him down a slippery slope that led him rapidly to Necromancy and Vivisection. When his most horrible experiments were discovered, Vonotar was expelled from the Academy and sentenced to death, but he bribed the fortress guards and managed to escape. He then found shelter with the Sanghor, ice barbarians who live in the northernmost lands. He somehow managed to gain their respect and obedience, and he now lives in the “Caverns of Ice”, where he progresses his dreadful research work. There is still a price on his head, and it is quite high.

The Battlepits of Nyenskans. The very heart of the Fortress of Nyenskans is perhaps the most corrupt and dangerous place in the whole region. The old castle dungeons have been converted to a series of fighting rings where the Fortress Commander Olaf Kalugen organizes bloody, illicit matches between men-at-arms from the Battalion of Torment, fighters and adventurers from all over the region, and even Dead and Abominations. This outlandish pastime is secretly appreciated by many princes and noblemen, who both take part in it and attend such events with pleasure.

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KAZAN'S GRAND BAZAAR

Kazan's bazaar is where the goods from all the lands on this side of the Urals converge to be then forwarded to Ruthenia's main markets, mostly Moscow, Novgorod, Pleskov, and Nyenskans. The "Door to Tartary" is therefore a key transit and adventure location for the heroes.

The Door to Tartary. Very few Christian or western "Latins" can be found in Kazan, where it is quite common to find envoys from Suleiman the Magnificent and merchants from many eastern caliphates and emirates. Tartars are the most significant foreign presence in the city, followed by Ruthenian merchants and delegates. Other Easterners, such as Cossacks, Circassians and even Kurgans are far from scarce. Kazan is the ideal starting place for expeditions toward the east and Tartary. Both the guides and the security details that can be hired here are—together with those in Sarysu—the best the region has to offer.

The Crochenaze Brothers. A band of robbers and rascals active in the area around Kazan and along Muscovy borders has its lair in Kazan. The robbers feel safe here because they pay the khan's men to be left alone and are also careful not to bother the guards or damage the khan's interests. The band is led by three brothers of unknown origin, Iraklij, Vasilij and Arkadij Crochenaze. A tall huge giant, Iraklij, leads the band in battle wielding a big Kurgan sword; although a little slow-witted, he is an unstoppable fighting machine. Vasilij is the mastermind of the band, the one who hires and organizes the rogues in the service of the three brothers and

bribes the guards. The third brother, Arkadij, is a young and dour Koldun who puts his obscure arts and his unsettling reputation in the service of the band. The Crochenaze band is a source of trouble for merchants and travelers alike, many of which hire caravan guards expressly because of it.

The Tribute. Many wonder how the Khan of Kazan manages to keep the Golden Horde away from the walls of his city, and more than a few have by now guessed the reason. The khan pays a quarterly tribute in victims to Matyr Khan, one of the Horde leaders. The tribute is delivered to the Dead in a prearranged location, out of sight of the citizens...despite them being well aware of what's going on. The tribute amounts to one hundred victims, collected during the previous months in the prisons of the city. They are usually criminals, vagrants, unwary travelers, enemies captured on the battle field, and slaves bought specifically for this. What would happen if a friend of our heroes was captured and fated to be part of the tribute or if they got hired to free one of the prisoners? And what would happen if they succeeded and deprived Matyr Khan of his victims?

The Cossack Districts. Kazan is the gathering place for those Cossacks who cannot find anyone one to hire them or who need a relatively quiet place in which to winter. These rowdy bands and their families occupy a whole district of the city, an island connected to the bank by a long wooden bridge. Since they come here to spend their money and are armed to the teeth, the khan respects and

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tolerates them. The Cossack Districts are open to the Tainted, and Taras Bulba and his White Cossacks usually come here to winter and to seek mercenary jobs. Besides them, it is possible to find Yenisch, Kalderash, Circassians and Skomorokhs in the Districts because here they can be reasonably certain they will not be kidnapped to become part of the Tribute. This gives them a feeling of security that makes nights in the Districts the most cheerful and carefree in the whole town.

The Dervishes' grave. Just outside the walls of Kazan lies the grave of a Marabout, a Saracen Saint who came here a century ago to preach in these faraway lands. Drawn by the old preacher's fame of kindness and wisdom, a community of dervishes has long settled around this structure, creating a sort of *ribat* (a fortified monastery). Among other activities, the dervishes always have an interest in Islamic Relics and getting to know more about those Enochian artifacts that can sometimes be found in the heart of Tartary or in some Khazar market.

Blue Tattoos. There are a few Kurgans who live in Kazan. Many of them are renegades or outlaws; others are simply wily and self-serving to the point of adapting to city life to get hired or to carry out mysterious tasks on behalf of their Skeleton-Men. A Tainted Kurgan, an unsociable and stand-offish woman with strips of flesh missing from all over her body and half her skull exposed, runs a small shop. Here "Mother-Skeleton" does tattooing, inserts metal or bone piercings to those who require

them, offers her illicit services as a Plague Doctor or a Necromancer, and more. Mother-Skeleton is an unsettling person who does not want any kind of trouble, but if you treat her with respect and pay her enough, she will provide you with precious information about the Kurgan territories and the secrets of the tribes, or she can give you beautiful tattoos. Some of these also act as a pass among the raiders, while others—that can be carried out only on a Tainted's body—can even *move*.

It is also said that she knows the secret art of helping a Morituro through his agony and make him turn into a Tainted.

ON MOTHER VOLGA AND OTHER RIVERS

Sailing along the Volga River, its tributaries and the other rivers in Ruthenia is one of the most common ways to travel and experience adventures in the region. These are some of the things that might happen to you:

Attacked by the Vodyanoi. Locked under the ice throughout the winter, the Vodyanoi—river monsters—wake up with the oncoming of spring and, as the ice thaws, hunger makes them more resourceful and aggressive than usual. Sailors have to be careful because the Vodyanoi could be lurking behind a bend in the river, ready to overrun their boats, overturning them.

The thaw. In the weeks following the spring melt, the sheer strength and violence of the Ruthenian rivers may be even more dangerous than the Vodyanoi. Thick and heavy ice floes swiftly dragged

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downstream by the current often ram into boats and create dangerous eddies and waves. Moreover, the thaw also causes the rivers to swell and overflow, flooding the surrounding areas. All the sailors in the region are well aware that in the first few weeks of spring it is better to steer away from rivers and creeks and their banks and that navigating the river rapids is impossible. On the other hand, at this time of the year, travelers in a hurry who have good boats and refined sailing skills can travel downriver much more swiftly than usual, covering two or three times the distance they would normally cover in the same amount of time.

The river cenobiums. The Tainted are almost never welcomed in Ruthenia, and the same goes for the Strigonian Obedience and the Upirite faith—the Kingdom of Hungary and Eastern European Tainted’s official religion. According to an ancient law in force in the region, however, any small river island is to be considered a no-man’s land, where the Tainted can find shelter and live freely. Taking advantage of this tradition, many Upirite monks from Hungary, as well as recently converted ones, have founded small cenobiums and sanctuaries open to any Tainted without a home and livelihood. Nowadays, the river cenobiums are shelters for travelers and places of worship respected even by river pirates. Although the Upirite faith is rather extreme, the presence of so many Tainted in the vicinity is a danger, and the Untainted are not always welcome on these islands.

The Wave of the Dead. All sailors familiar with the Volga River fear the Wave of the Dead. Once a year, during the thaw, all

the frozen tributaries to the Volga lose their icy covering and the Dead, up until now trapped under the ice, are free to float downstream with the current. Due to a strange phenomenon originating downstream of Kazan, the Dead freed by the spring melt end up amassing in a stretch of the river that remains obstructed till the very last moment and then released at the same time, free to float down the torrential stream towards the mouth of the river. This huge flood wave dragging dozens of Dead through the southern stretch on the river down to Astrakhan, is called the Wave of the Dead. Traditionally, the river becomes officially navigable only after the Wave has gone by.

The monsters’ mother. As if the Vodyanoi were not enough, one of the darkest legends in the region tells about Baba Roga, the Vodyanoi’s Mother. Dead Hunters and Plague Doctors know only too well that the Vodyanoi are Abominations similar to the Drowned Ones and therefore do not have a “mother” and have not been born naturally. This is not enough, however, to alter the legends told about Baba Roga, a formless monster, as big as a barge, which surfaces from the river bottom to overthrow any boat she finds, using her deformed arms, and grab the unlucky boatmen. The few who survived such attacks speak of long, algae-like hair, large and watery eyes and a huge mouth filled with long, sharp teeth.

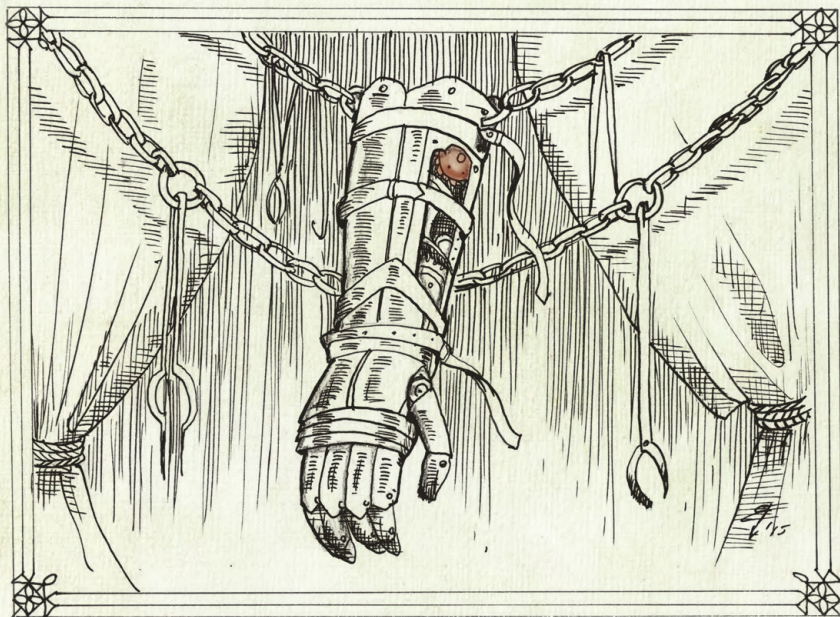
The river agreement. It is an open secret that the River Pirates of Novgorod, the Circassians, the Samara raiders and Sarysu garrison have an unofficial

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agreement when it comes to managing the river traffic and demanding fees and tolls of the sailors and travelers who must journey from one end of Ruthenia to the other. The Circassians are usually the cheapest and most reliable boatmen, and any unwary traveler entrusting himself to somebody else might be attacked by the pirates upriver or by raiders plying the river downstream. What is known to only a few is that there is a secret signal which, once displayed, will allow the boatman to pass undisturbed by any possible foe. This signal is a red-and-green banner carrying a special symbol, associated to a secret word that means "Dead". Displaying it means you are on a life-or-death mission, have a *Morituro*, a dead to avenge or to grieve for onboard or are running away from the law. To

abuse this signal, however, is seen as a highly dishonorable act, so much so that doing it authorizes all other sailors to throw the perpetrators in the river and take possession of their boats.

The Lady of Samara. At present, the ruler of Samara is Princess Halima Khatun, who is said to be of Western stock and also to be a descendant of Prester John. This noble warrior and adventurer has taken her throne by marrying the old Khan after a series of incredible betrayals and adventures worthy of a two-bit rogue. The city is prospering under her rule, and the riders' pockets and bellies are quite full. While having a Seraglio full of male concubines and in spite of many a nobleman and chief of the area asking for her hand in marriage, Halima has no intention of yielding to any of



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those requests, at least for the time being. In fact, she is often in need of foreigners and adventurers to keep the town chiefs in line.

The Yellow City. While Kazan is the Door to Tartary and a bazaar city, Sarysu, the Yellow City, is a fortified Tartar settlement on the Volga River. Far smaller than Kazan, its economy is based mainly on specific commercial activities: the slave trade, ferrying travelers, escorting boatmen on the river, tanning leather and furs, sulphur laboratories. The city itself and the river running by it are both named after such laboratories that empty their production waste in the river waters. Because of these laboratories and tanneries, the air in the city is filled with unpleasant smells, and a yellow fog often hovers over it. The laboratories do not take any measures to contain this waste in any way and pour fumes and slag directly into the heart of the city. Sarysu's alchemists are among the most famous and skilled in Ruthenia and Tartary, and many of their secrets are linked to sulphur and its uses.

Expeditions to Tartary. Guides and security details willing to escort travelers to Tartary can be found both in Kazan and Sarysu, but there is an important difference: Kazan's guides and bodyguards are reliable, efficient and used to dealing with rich merchants...and they ask a steep price for their services. What you can find in Sarysu is just a second choice: raiders and wagoners are cheaper but less reliable there; they know the region quite well but would betray their employers without a second thought should things go wrong. Of course, no Tartar worthy of

his name would ever renege on his given word, but the real trick is paying the utmost attention to what they promise to do. Each word must be carefully chosen, and the bargaining can go on for days.

The Khans' lost capital. Between Sarysu and the Fief of Astrakhan, right along its border, there is the mythical Saraj, the lost Golden City of the Khans. Before the Plague, it boasted hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, the Silk Road ended there, and it was the capital of the largest Khanate in human history. Destroyed and laid waste by Erlik Khan, Saraj has seen its inhabitants become part of his dreadful Golden Horde still rampant in the east. Now the city's marble palaces and its towering mosques are slowly sinking into the mud of the marshes, and its vast treasures are lost forever between banks thick with vegetation and infested with snakes, and the Dead. Saraj teems with Dead, Fell Beasts and Abominations, and at present, nobody has the means or desire to reconquer and reclaim it. In spite of all this, the bravest adventurers may decide to go there hoping to lay their hands on one of the many treasures Saraj still hides in its depths.

The Sacred Mountain. The sacred "mountain" of Bogdo, a low red hill dotted with caves and grottoes, rises a few dozen miles from Sarysu. It is regarded as sacred by local populations and travelers alike because—for some unknown reason—the Dead never go there. According to the nomads, a god lives on the top of the mountain and protects it, but alchemists think the hill is covered with special salts that have the

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same effect as Manna, although in much larger quantities. Sarysu's alchemists extract those same salts from the salt pans that can be found surfacing in the lake at the foot of the mountain and use them to prepare remedies deemed quite useful against the Plague.

Per aspera ad Astrakhan. For a long time, a century ago, the region surrounding the mouth of the Volga River was devastated first by the Golden Horde, then by the ongoing campaigns Tamerlane led against it. Its villages were destroyed, the fields abandoned, and for decades its capital became a City of Sorrow. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Mahmud bin Kuchuk, a refugee prince without a land to call his own, reconquered the city and the surrounding territory, creating a Khanate that is still strong and prosperous even now. Today, Astrakhan controls reclaimed and fertile lands, large cattle herds, industrious villages, boats and sailing ships that ply across the Caspian Sea. It has ongoing diplomatic relationships with the Sultan of Sevastopol, the great Prince of Muscovy and the Grand Master of the Damascus Hospitallers. Astrakhan is now a prosperous city, renowned for its textile products, lapis lazuli and other treasures reaching it through the Silk Road, which starts from here. Any adventurer intending to head east along this caravan route can reach an agreement with some merchant and accompany him on his next expedition. He will not have to wait too long.

The real lords of Astrakhan. Those who suspect the Qalandaryya really exist maintain Astrakhan is its main seat,

which is essentially true. The Khazar control the whole Fief more or less openly: the bazaar and its trade, the Khan's palace and treasure, all the western trade, and the exchanges along the Silk Road. These activities are controlled more or less by Khazar ship owners, bankers and merchants, whose commercial activities extend to Serindia and Gibraltar even, both through direct control and secret alliances. The unknown, faceless leaders of this secret society are certainly here, along with the mystic guide of the Khazar people, the beautiful Princess Ateh, too. Led by the Qalandaryya, the Khazars are the real force behind the prosperity of the region, the Reconquest of Astrakhan and even Tamerlane's campaigns and the present stability of Ruthenia as a whole. Very few challenge their role, but everybody—their allies included—is wondering what their real purpose may be, and where the secret expeditions to Tartary they finance may be headed.

The last caravan to Kantipur. Andrew McLeod, a Scottish nobleman, is in Astrakhan to put together an expedition to the Far East, in search of a mythical city set on the highest mountains in the world. Following the lead of a map and ancient legends, McLeod will soon leave along the Silk Road, on a journey of many thousands of miles, and any willing adventurer can still join him and his beautiful daughter, Lilith.

MATREGA, RUTHENIA'S DOOR

This city—ruled by the De Ghisolfis—and its surrounding countryside are considered “Ruthenia's Door”, a

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cosmopolitan Fief open to the whole world, where it is possible to carve one's own way through many adventures. Just crossing its gates can lead to danger and trouble.

The city of the Sects. Matrega is known by many names. For example, it is also known as the "Philosophers' City". Not everyone is aware, though, that it is also the "City of the Sects", because an unknown number of occult orders and secret societies have their seats or representatives here. The Holy Wheel Deacons use it as their starting point to try and reach the Golden Horde; the Qalandaryya controls its bazaar and "Cimmerian Market", and keeps in touch with the School of Night and the Liegemen of Love; the Order of the Dragon and the Order of Saint George carry on a secret war here; the Officium Tenebrarum, the Golden Militia and the Holy Vehme monitor the proliferating of heretical cults and philosophies; the Rosicrucians come here to meet representatives of various oriental sects, to learn from them the secrets of meditation and mysticism. This incredible mixture of cults, philosophies and secret societies has now become a bubbling cauldron which can involve the heroes in many ways.

Zacharias' heresy. The city prince, Zacharias de Ghisolfi, is an enlightened ruler and a true prince-philosopher, and the prosperity of the whole Fief is undoubtedly due to him and his family. He is a personal friend of Suleiman the Magnificent, Princess Ateh, and many Western rulers, which makes him untouchable under many respects. Recently, however, Zacharias has been playing a dangerous game, supporting the Ruthenian heretical

movements and the villages' insurrections, declaring his friendship toward the Khazars and flaunting his affiliation to the Qalandaryya, as well as intending to create a kingdom of universal love and brotherhood for free thinkers, aesthetes and humanists. His faith, which he has been codifying for years now, is based on a "Higher God" and aims to erase any existing differences between Jews, pagans, Mohammedans, and Christians. There are many—his advisors and family members included—who think the world is not ready for such ideals yet. His enemies are looking forward to using Zacharias' own "folly" against him, creating trouble and conflicts within the city.

The Cimmerian Market. One of the city's main attractions is the Cimmerian Market, purposely held among the imposing ruins of the city's splendid past. Archeological finds from the Cimmerian burial mounds scattered throughout the region, the necropolises in the area around the city or other parts of the world are sold and bought here. Scholars studying the past gather in Matrega from all over the world to buy such finds and all sorts of ancient texts. The antiquarians frequenting the market are quite interested in pagan, universal and gypsy relics as well as in any "Enochian" find they can lay their hands on.

Many treasure hunters gather in the city, too, especially at the Market, to plan expeditions to submerged ruins, Cities of Sorrow and lost temples.

The Golden Grave. North of the Fief borders, there is a wild region scattered with the ruins of destroyed villages, Cities of Sorrow lost under the rule of Zacharias'

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predecessor and ancient Cimmerian burial mounds dating back thousands of years. One of these, the Golden Grave, has become the abode of the only Kurgan tribe living east of the Volga. These savages adorn themselves with the treasures they plundered inside the huge burial mound they now live in and attack whoever travels through the region, most of all those who try to “explore” other Cimmerian graves in search for treasures. It’s said their Skeleton-Men have infected the ancient mummies laid to rest in the graves, leaving them to wander about as a deterrent against treasure hunters.

Drake and Snake. Matrega is a cosmopolitan city, open to any traveler both from the East and the West. Among so many outlandish characters, the city’s most seasoned adventurers know Drake and Snake quite well, a pair of rascals involved in smuggling and frauds. Sir Philip Drake presents himself as a refined English gentleman, friendly, smart and charming, rather than a man of action. “Snake” is a woman of about twenty-five years of age, possibly of Irish stock, who is a skilled assassin and is as friendly as the snakes after which she is named. They are both affable rascals, and it is safer not to cross them, but if you need a special favor or information, they are the people to turn to.

The Frenchwomen’s House. It is the most famous house of ill repute in the city, directly managed by the girls who work there and by Sylvie, their madam. Oddly enough, this house is considered a refined place, suitable for philosophers and thinkers who meet there periodically. Besides the obvious pleasures, the

Frenchwomen’s House also offers all sorts of shows, cards and tarot games, and spiced drinks. One can listen to stories and news from all over the world.

The Maeotian Sea. This enclosed and partially marshy body of water is one of Matrega’s most important resources, but it is teeming with Screaming Eels and other Fell Beasts. Both the fishermen and the city ruler are constantly in search of a way to put a stop to the Spawn’s proliferation and would pay handsomely for any effective solution.

IN THE BROTHERS OF THE SWORD’S DOMAIN

What once was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is now split into a myriad of small walled cities in the depths of a dense and dark Wilderness. Opportunities for adventures are not scarce here, either.

Fairytales set in nightmarish lands.

All the Fiefs in this region look more or less the same: beautiful cities surrounded by high walls beyond which stretches a small ring of fertile lands and villages, surrounded in their turn by vast wild lands. At the center of each fortified city, there are fabulous palaces and castles, and life carries on quietly and happily in their shadow, with duchesses always looking for a good match, young dukes on their white horses wandering about their own Fief or towards neighboring ones in search of adventure; counts and barons, chamberlains and knights split the Fief’s resources among themselves, but leave the citizens enough freedom to farm their own fields and vegetable gardens. The guards patrol the roads and the borders, and only the most indomitable merchants and

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the Brothers of the Sword dare to travel regularly from one Fief to another. News travels slowly here, and as far as craftsmen and commoners are concerned, the world might very well end at the borders of their Fief. And beyond those borders...witches, dreadful monsters, snake-women, orcs and the Dead, to remind everybody that these fabulous domains are plunged into a nightmarish world. After decades of decadence in which they risked extinction, the Duchies are ready to expand now and always need heroes to help them forge alliances and cleanse at least part of the Wilderness of the Plague Spawn.

The League's Road. Apart from the northern route that connects Pleskov to Königsberg and Old Poland northern cities, a very important communication route between the cities of the Hanseatic League runs through the heart of the Duchies to reach Lublin and Cracow. This trade route is patrolled by the Brothers of the Sword, and it is an extremely important way by which goods and people reach Smolensk. This is one of the reasons very well-organized bands of outlaws—which only the Brothers of the Sword seem to be able to rout—lie in wait in the most wild stretches of the route.

The Brothers' secret. The Brothers of the Sword are the real unifying force in the Duchies and the Principality of Smolensk. They act almost like some sort of “federal forces” in the Fiefs, since they patrol the roads, maintain some sort mail service among the Fiefs, and offer security details to the merchants. The Duchies could not do without them...and the Brothers want things to remain as they are. Should the Duchies forge a common alliance, or should a dynasty decide to

unify the region, the Brothers' power would be greatly diminished. This is why, at times, incidents, disappearances, attacks by outlaws, and Cossack raids are somehow tolerated and even encouraged, if not created outright, by the Brothers themselves, who want to go on being essential to the Duchies' survival. Only a few among the officers know about the *measures* taken by the Grand Master to preserve the status quo, and it usually is the notorious Commander Isegrim, with his battalion, who takes care of such delicate matters.

The Lady of the Zaltys. The Zaltys nature and the cause of their presence in the Duchies of Lithuania are still a mystery: how come these Spawn are so numerous in this region, while almost unknown in the rest of the world? It is the opinion of some Plague Doctors in Nyenskans that they may descend from a still unknown Progenitor, the “Serpent Prince”, mentioned in many local legends. In any case, these creatures seem to concentrate mostly around the City of Sorrow of Chernigov, and a huge Zaltys is said to have its abode in the caves of an ancient monastery in the vicinity of the city.

The lost capital of the Ruthenians. In a time long gone, Kiev used to be the heart of a far-flung kingdom, from which all the present Ruthenian domains originated. After a series of troubles and wars, with the coming of the Plague, Kiev fell, never to rise again, and its ruins are today a sad reminder of how everything is but transient in this world. Kiev is still a City of Sorrow, but the worst danger lurking among its ruins are not the Dead. A pack of dreadful Leucrottas has

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settled inside the abandoned palaces and hunts down all the other Fell Beasts and the Opprobriums dragging themselves around among the ruins...as well as any unwary adventurer who gets too close to the city searching for treasures of the past.

Wall against wall. Ruthenian Wrestling tournaments are always one of the major attractions Smolensk has to offer. During the summer, different kinds of championships take place there. The most exalted among them, the one conferring the Champions' Golden Belt, is open only to the most expert athletes practicing the Stenka na Stenku. Other tournaments set champions of Ruthenian Wrestling against athletes practicing different fighting styles; of course, all matches are fought bare-handed and follow the usual rules. There are therefore many illicit arenas, where forbidden mortal combats take place, featuring the most wretched among the fighters and those champions banned for life from regular competitions, guilty of foul play. Right now, the uncontested champion of this underworld is Ivan "Chernobog", a captain of the Brothers of the Sword, who is a giant of Turkish descent, dark-skinned and with opaque eyes, who has not yet found an opponent who can match his strength and viciousness.

Yakov the Bombard. Osip Bosconov is the Quartermaster of the Brothers' fortress in Smolensk, and among other things, he manages their forges and foundries. A skilled inventor and planner, Bosconov also builds prostheses and augmented armor for the soldiers all powered by gunpowder. Recently, one of the strongest and bravest knights, Yakov, was

severely wounded and partially devoured by the Zaltys. He was brought back to the fortress where Bosconov treated him and saved his life. Yakov did not die, but he became a Tainted and many of his body parts were amputated. With the approval both of the Grand Master of the order and Yakov himself, Bosconov is now trying to fit him with a new kind of prosthesis and parts of augmented armor to give him the ability to walk and fight. Bosconov's experiments are going well, but because of the gunpowder-powered devices he has been fitted with, his comrades have given Yakov the nickname of "Gun Yakov". The end result of such disquieting experiments is still unknown.

IN THE NIGHTMARE REALM OF BABA YAGA

Beyond the borders of the main Fiefs, among fortified villages and small principalities, there lies the vastness of Ruthenian Wilderness: large woods, barren lands, unpopulated steppes, and freezing tundras inhabited by many dreadful legendary horrors. Some of the main dangers presented by those wild lands are depicted here, which the inhabitants of safer cities call "the realm of Baba Yaga".

Tracks on the Steppe. Chancing upon a Dead's tracks on the steppe is a sure sign of doom, especially if an Untainted happens to step on them. There is a grain of truth in this legend, because most shoes and boots worn by travelers on the steppes are made of leather, and the Atrament in the tracks may slowly contaminate them, spreading to the wearer's foot.

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The Domovoi. According to the most macabre legends told by the peasants living in the most isolated farms or outside the Fiefs' borders, burying a still active Dead under the house foundations keeps away all the other Dead wandering through the steppes. This is why when they decide to build a new dwelling, some families get hold of a Husk, break its teeth, arms and legs, and bury it under the house. They refer to that presence as a Domovoi, or the "house spirit", and they respectfully call it "Grandfather". The Domovoi's moans and scratching against the floor often cause nightmares to any guest who is unaware of this practice. At times, the Domovoi manages to free itself, and then things go from bad to worse.

Insurgent villages. Recently, several princes have been having problems with the inhabitants of villages and farms, who refuse to pay the taxes due to their rulers, chase the Druzhinnik away, and have decided to pool their lands' resources rather than having to answer to distant noblemen and greedy bishops. Rebellion is brewing in many places, but the real leader of this movement is a middle-aged woman known understatedly as Irina "the Killjoy". Her speeches incense the people, and she is quite good at making peasants and hunters agree to her directives, thus making them achieve great victories.

The Deathless. Koschei the Immortal is the most common bogeyman used to frighten mischievous children and too uninhibited maids into behaving well. He is a foul and evil old man who kidnaps the unwary and drags them to his lair, full of shadows and treasures. Whatever his real nature and his aims, Koschei is actually a tall and thin

demon who strides across the Fiefs' borders and on the boundless lands of the region, bringing doom to whomever has the misfortune of meeting him. It is said that the Kolduns are his followers, and Baba Yaga the only one who can hold her own against him. Recently, the Hieromonks have been trying to understand the powers and nature of the Immortal, and they will pay well for any verifiable information.

The monsters' mill. There are many stories about Ruthenian millers, according to which the owners of any mill by a river often make an unholy pact with the Vodyanoi to leave them alone. The grim miller our heroes meet on their travels might poison the food he offers or sells to them, and then throws their dead bodies into the river or in the caves under the mill to feed the monsters who have their lair there.

The night of the Kolduns. The Kolduns, the Wilderness Warlocks, do not gather in a real coven and are not divided by caste. Each is independent from the others. At most, he has contact with his mentor and a small group of his peers. Once a year, in the day of Korocun (the Winter Solstice), however, the Kolduns gather among the old Cimmerian burial mounds in the midst of the freezing tundra to talk about their arts and the Black God they worship. Since it is considered a very bad omen to have a Koldun suddenly appear during a wedding, many weddings are held hurriedly on the day of Korocun, when all the Kolduns are supposed to be elsewhere.

The dancing hut of Baba Yaga. "Her hut is made of bones, skulls and eyes; its supporting columns are human legs. Door and window handles are entwined human fingers and toes, and the latch is a

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sharp-toothed snout." What tales depict as a simple— albeit frightening—hut is in fact a huge Abomination created by Baba Yaga herself and with whom the Hag has a symbiotic relationship. The size of a single room, more or less square in shape, the Hut slithers on soft appendages—once real human limbs—while "doors" and "windows" are just orifices in the Abomination's flesh, through which the HagYagas' Queen feeds her Hut with her leftovers. This keeps her inside a sort of protective cocoon that heals her wounds and slows down her decay. Nobody ever returned from the Hut to describe the inside.

The Striziga. Many a delivery involving Tainted parents (or even just Tainted offspring) is said to end usually in an "unpleasant" way. The most awful and degenerated of these unlucky newborns at times end up abandoned in the snow or thrown into freezing and impetuous rivers. The Plague is hard to defeat, however, and the Dead always come back, sometimes in the shape premature or newborn bodies, deformed and hungry. Known as the Striziga, these awful monsters haunt their mothers' dreams or those of whoever hears them moaning in the woods, or scratching at a farm door. Besides their awful moans, in game terms, the Striziga are to be considered as Opprobriums.

The Vilas. According to many legends, these Wilderness bogeymen are young women who died before their weddings, or killed themselves, or mothers who lost their children or some other kind of soul in torment, but they are really Possessed who use their peculiar intelligence to attract their victims.

The dolls girl. A Tainted girl, defaced and with evil eyes, is known as the dolls girl, although her age is unknown. She crafts her awful dolls with cloth, leaves and leather, filling them with Atrament, or pieces of the Dead, adding hair or something else belonging to living people she wants to curse. Because of the way they have been created, these dolls come to life and hunt down the people to whom the hair belongs. In the game, these dolls can be represented as Opprobriums or Homunculi, while the girl is a Witch who can plunge her long pins into the dolls, brandishing them as weapons once they are coated with Atrament.

The Plague in the wind. Some Kolduns are accused of being able to infuse the wind with the Plague and sending it towards enemy villages or besieged towns. Such practice would require many Dead and the Miasma coming from them, but it is unclear if the Miasma remains compact until its destination, and if it is really possible to direct it. In any case, people believe this power to be real, and it is persecuted in the same way Infectors are.

The Bathhouse at Midnight. The Banja can be used freely by those who need to, but it is well known that in the middle of the night, Kolduns, Skomorokh and all sorts of rogues can be found there. It is actually a tradition for the Kolduns to hand down their knowledge in the Baths, at midnight. On those occasions, they equip the baths like a real Necromancer's laboratory, and any casual patron had better steer clear of such grim company.

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AMONG RUTHENIAN NOMADS

Fiefs, cities, villages, and farms are just one facet of Ruthenia. Many populations there lead a nomadic life, following their herds or traveling the trade routes. This is what might happen among these nomads:

The beautiful Circassian. One of the Circassians most renowned characteristics is their beauty, which is why many rulers of Ruthenia and Tartary used to choose Circassian wives, companions and concubines. Recently, however, some slavers from Samara have attacked boatmen's families and stolen many Circassian women, included the beautiful Sarai, whose enchanting green eyes have been celebrated in many a song. The surviving Circassians and even the Sultan, Suleiman, who has come to love Sarai through Yenisch poetry, offer a huge bounty for the kidnappers' heads and a reward to whomever will save the kidnapped Circassian women.

The river masters-at-arms. The Circassians also have a reputation as skilled swordsmen, renowned for their athletic bearing, great balance, furious attacks and acrobatic moves. Anyone who travels or lives with them for any length of time would do well to use that time to learn a few combat tricks. While very secretive about the fundamentals of their art, if well paid, the Circassians still can teach a few minor moves.

The dead weight. Very few non-Circassians know the tricks these seasoned boatmen use to find a way out of any situation. Their barges all have a secret false bottom in which to hide special—or smuggled—merchandise; they use their Deadwater to bribe river pirates and raiders, and river

navigation holds no secrets for them. To escape the Vodyanoi, the Circassians use the so-called “dead weight”, a live goat or ox hidden in the false bottom of their barges, which they can open to release the “dead weight” when the river monsters attack them. At times, the dead weight can be a captured and gagged enemy or a criminal. Tradition dictates that if the “dead weight” escapes the Vodyanoi or after three days on the river he has not yet been used as bait, he is pardoned and free to go. A Circassian living legend is Selim the Red, a notorious outlaw who has been arrested many times and condemned to be a dead weight on a barge, and has managed to survive more than a dozen trips and up to three attacks by the Vodyanoi.

The Kalderash trail. The Kalderash use to travel from the Kingdom of Hungary to the easternmost Ruthenian Fiefs. In Lithuania, the trail they follow is more to the south than the League Road and is therefore less frequented by both outlaws and knights. This does not mean it is safer, though, because many Dead, Vilas and Zaltys often lie in ambush along this road, ready to attack any careless traveler. The Kalderash themselves prefer to travel along this trail in large numbers, and accept other travelers in their midst, provided they are reliable and ready to lend a hand.

The Yenisch Mill. The renowned “Yenisch Mill” is at about a mile from the walls of Smolensk, and is a sort of fortified inn with annexed a large windmill, a Banja, a mail station, warehouses and distilleries. The mill belongs to a Yenisch family that settled here, and it is open to passing travelers all year round. The mill is also a well-known meeting place, frequented by

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noblemen and peasants alike who like music, art, good drinks, gambling and a more carefree way of life. The Tainted are welcomed here, too, just like any other friendly traveler with a few coins in his pocket. Sitting at the wooden tables of the smoky inn or outside in the courtyard, the patrons laugh, talk, listen to music, play tarot or drink Deadwater, mead and hippocras till morning.

Taras Bulba and his White Cossacks. The White Cossacks are Taras Bulba's creation. He became a Tainted at fifteen years of age, when the merchants he was escorting were attacked by some Packs from the West. He survived, but his new condition forced him to abandon his comrades, as it was the custom at the time. He later managed to gather all those Cossacks who, like him, had survived the Plague, as well as other Tainted, thus creating a small mercenary company. As years went by, the number of the White Cossacks grew to several hundred men, and Taras' two sons, Andrej and Osap, distinguished themselves in battle. Andrej was born Untainted, while Osap was Tainted... and yet, it was Andrej who betrayed his father and comrades during some raids in the Lithuanian Duchies. Andrej is now openly opposing his father and serves in the Duchies' army, while Osap has been captured and is being held prisoner by Taras' enemies. What will Taras—and the White Cossacks—do?

Dictionary of the Khazars. The Khazars were the first to codify the Tartar language and create its alphabet, based on their own ancient one. It is the Khazars who are promoting and perpetuating the study of the Enochian language, and the expeditions secretly organized by the

Qalandaryya have the purpose of finding texts written in this language among the ruins of Tartary. Actually, it was the first Enochian documents found by Khazar scholars that helped spread knowledge of this lost language in Asia and in the West. Some Khazar scholars have also put together an Enochian "dictionary", which is the most exhaustive existing compendium of this language and its mysteries. It is said that Princess Ateh, the Khazars' spiritual leader, has asked the scholars to split the content of this compendium into two volumes, unique in the whole world and complementary to each other, to prevent unworthy people from being able to learn its secrets. The "male" copy of the book has been sent to Sheik Gomelez of Granada, while Ateh herself is the keeper of the "female" copy.

HIC EST ERLIK KHAN - HERE IS ERLIK KHAN

The blurred border between Ruthenia and Tartary is seen by most people as the border of the known world, beyond which there are only raiders, savages and Erlik Khan's Hordes. It is a place full of terrible dangers:

The Kurgan Skeleton-Men. The Kurgan worship their forefathers and even the Dead carry out unspeakable rituals with the Spawn in the secrecy of their burial mounds and honor the Tainted as almost divine creatures. The Skeleton-Men are the tribe shamans and its main caste: they are Tainted priests who guide and control the Kurgan in every aspect of their life, other than in battles and raids.

The Skeleton-Men are in charge of all rituals and cults, and they are skilled

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Necromancers and Vivisectors, despite only having very primitive tools and methods at their disposal. Many among them take pleasure in creating Abominations and Chimeras, which become the tribe totems or prodigies to admire and feed. The Skeleton-Men are so-called from their practice of carving out their own flesh to become “walking skeletons”.

The Steppenwolf. As if the Horde and the Kurgan were not enough, there are raiders too. The eastern borders of the Khanate of Astrakhan are beleaguered by the warriors of Djaka Khan, the Blue Wolf, who is a direct descendant of Nogai Khan and, therefore, of the legendary Genghis Khan. Political, military and religious leader Djaka has spread among his followers the cult of Heaven of his forefathers and is considered the embodiment on earth of the spirit of the Wolf. Still in his prime and with his followers growing in numbers month by month, Djaka aims to destroy the Golden Horde and finally rule over the lands of his forefathers, freed once for all from the Dead. In order to strengthen his army, however, Djaka Khan must first defeat more earthly foes, which is why he attacks any caravan crossing the territories of Tartary and Astrakhan and the lands of the Kurgan.

The road to Kasyrgan. Nobody knows what Erlik Khan has in mind or what his intentions are. When he is not riding at the head of his Horde, the Lord of Death dwells in the darkness of Kasyrgan, in the heart of Tartary, a city that is said to have been founded by the Nephilim and that today is inhabited by all sorts of horrors. Wherever it may be, no sane man would ever think

of going there. And yet, according to the Khazars, it would be possible to find many Enochian texts and antediluvian secrets in its recesses, as well as artefacts and relics from the past, and—perhaps—the key to find the kingdom of Prester John and the origins of the Plague.

The voice of the Seeresses. The Karakizlar are Striges originated directly from Erlik Khan's Ambrosia, and they are also known as the Nine, or the Black Seeresses, or the Voice of the Dead. Very few have ever seen them, but the legends say that from their dark recesses the Seeresses can possess the Dead and see through their eyes, hear through their ears, speak with their gravelly voice, and even take control of their limbs. Even if the Seeresses are in the service of Erlik Khan, some stories tell of how they helped travelers and nomads in dire straits. Nobody knows why they would do that, but the Carcass our heroes are going to meet at a crossroads might well be their next oracle.

The black pools. Many Tartar regions are scattered with natural bitumen pools: foul-smelling pits, at times as wide as marshes, full of black sludge. In the past, not to contaminate the earth or waste wood on pyres, the Tartars used to throw the Dead and the Morituri into these pools, where they would get stuck forever. Recently, however, the demand for the “black blood of the Earth” has been growing from alchemists and inventors because of its properties as a spagyric, and because of the heat it generates when burning. However, bitumen merchants have to be quite careful when exploiting these pools because the Dead and the Opprobriums of the past keep resurfacing from them.

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Tamerlane's secret. Born in the “Green City”, south of Samarkand, before the Dies Irae, Temur Bek, called “the Lame”, was the main opponent of the Golden Horde throughout the Darkest Age and the Reconquest. After fighting countless battles and losing all his men many times, Tamerlane kept fighting his battle forever.

Alone. Relentlessly. Deeply altered in body and spirit.

Through endless campaigns, this warlord kept fighting while everybody around him burned and died, and almost without realizing it, he turned first into a Tainted and then in a sort of Strix, even though such terms mean nothing to him.

Tamerlane simply refused to stop, to be defeated...even to die.

Bites and scratches did not trouble him, and his body became so hard and lean that it bested even the Plague. Soon, Tamerlane stopped being hungry, sleepy, thirsty, or in pain, but he was still alive, and more implacable than ever. His descendants are the Giaours, and his great-grandson Ali Sultan rules the small Kingdom of Samarkand, while Tamerlane himself spends his days in solitude in his palace of the Green City.

At times, however, Tamerlane secretly leaves his palace and wanders beyond the borders of Samarkand, as far as Ruthenia, looking for Dead to dismember and servants of Erlik Khan to destroy.



Journeys and encounters in Ruthenia

Chapter Six

Journens and encounters in Ruthenia



Traveling is always a dangerous activity in Ultima Forsan world, and Ruthenia makes no exception.

When the Heroes leave on a journey, you have to follow the usual rules that apply to any travel in Savage Worlds Deluxe: draw an Action Card for each day. If it is a face card or higher, there is some kind of accident or encounter.

Hearts - NPC: Roll on the NPC table.

Clubs - Obstacle: Roll on the Obstacle table.

Spades - Enemies: Roll on the Enemies table.

Diamonds - Fortune: Roll on the Fortune table.

Joker - Special: A special encounter, which may be directly related to the ongoing adventure or may be a double encounter. In this case, draw two more cards and combine their suits (considering them as if they were two face cards).

♥ ♠ HEARTS - NPC (D6)

IN A FIEF:

The people encountered may be a traveling group or they can be in a small structure, such as a farm, a manor farm or an encampment. They can provide information about the surrounding area, or do business with the Heroes.

1 - Merchants (1d6): They probably carry with them a stock of goods for sale. They

can be Khazars, Tartars, or even refined city merchants.

2 - Armed Men (1d6): Men at arms, Druzhinnik patrols, Bogatyr on a mission, Dead hunters, mercenaries, Cossacks, Black Mastiffs, Streltsies.

3 - Workers (2d6): Farmers, breeders, woodcutters, fishermen.

4 - Men of the Cloth (1d6): Monks, pilgrims, Hieromonks, Starets, high ranking clergy with their escort.

5 - Nomads (2d6): Yenisch or Skomorok jugglers and artists, a caravan of Kalderash wagons, Tartar nomad shepherds, refugees.

6 - Special (1): A nobleman, a Druzhinnik knight, a valiant Bogatyr, or a Hieromonk, a Kalderash inventor or a witch, with their small retinue or escort.

IN THE WILDERNESS:

It is highly improbable you will meet travelers or small settlements in the Wilderness. If you draw a Hearts card, you must immediately draw another. If the second one is Hearts, then the Heroes really meet some NPCs. Use the "In a Fief" table. If the card belongs to another suit, then the Heroes encounter some Enemies, and you must roll on the "Enemies" table instead.

NORTHERN SEAS/ MAEOTIAN OR CASPIAN SEA:

1-2 - Kalmarian sailing ship/Merchant ship from Venice, or Hospitallers' ship: The ship carries goods from one harbor to another. There may be some interesting passengers onboard: make a roll on the NPC "In a Fief" table.

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Journens and encounters in Ruthenia

3-4 - Pomorian Kochs/Fishing Boats from Matrega or Sevastopol: One or more fishermen or whalers' boats.

5 - War Galleon or Galley: The ship is hunting pirates, or simply carrying troops. It may come from a recent fight.

5- Unusual Vessel: Knights Hospitaller or Overseas Knights far from their usual routes, or ships from Cathay or Cipangu.

RIVERS:

1-2 - Circassians: 1d6 barges, loaded with families and goods.

5 - Fishermen: A small village, or 1d6 boats.

6. - Travelers: Make a roll on the NPC "In a Fief" table to determine the travelers identity.

♣ ♠ CLUBS - OBSTACLES (D6)

IN A FIEF OR IN THE WILDERNESS:

1 - Delay: A river burst its banks, a bridge collapsed, a snow-covered plain is impossible to cross: a Survival roll may allow the Heroes to bypass the obstacle without any delay, or the journey's duration will be lengthened by one day.

2 - Landslide or flood: Luck is against the Heroes, who risk being swept away. They



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Journeys and encounters in Ruthenia

must make an Agility roll or suffer 2d6 damage! Ignore this outcome if the group is traveling on a plain.

3 – 6 Adverse Weather: Depending on the region, and the season, the Heroes must face Heat or Cold, as described in the *Savage Worlds Deluxe* Dangers section.

AT SEA:

1 – Dead Calm: You can only row, (if the ship has oars).

2 – Adverse Winds: For this day, the Boating roll suffers a -2 penalty.

3 – Storm: For this day, the Boating roll suffers a -4 penalty.

4-6 – Adverse Weather: Depending on the region, and the season, the Heroes must face Heat or Cold, as described in the *Savage Worlds Deluxe* Dangers section.

RIVERS:

1 – A flood!: A sudden flood puts the boat to the test. A Boating or Survival roll (-2) will allow you to realize the danger and pull the boat to safety. If the boat is overturned it is necessary to make a Boating roll (-4) or it will suffer 2d6+1 damage.

2-3 – Unfavorable currents: For this day, the Boating roll suffers a -2 penalty.

4-6 – Adverse Weather: Depending on the region, and the season, the Heroes must face Heat or Cold, as described in the *Savage Worlds Deluxe* Dangers section.



♠ SPADES - ENEMIES (D6)

IN A FIEF:

1 – Brigands (2d6): If they are 8 or more, one of them is a Veteran Wild Card.

2 – Kurgan Warriors (2d6): If they are 6 or more, one of them is a Chief Wild Card.

3 – Tartar Raiders (2d6): If they are 8 or more, one of them is a Chief Wild Card.

4 – Hungry Beasts: A boar, a bear, or 1d6+2 wolves (see *Savage Worlds Deluxe*).

5 – Pack (3d4): Husks or Carrions. Frozen if the weather is cold.

6 – Strays (1d6): Possessed or Furies.

IN THE WILDERNESS

1. – Brigands (2d6): If they are 8 or more, one of them is a Veteran, Wild Card.

2. – Pack (3d6): Husks, or Frozen Dead in a harsh climate. The dice can Ace!

3 – The Horde!: A vanguard of the Golden Horde, made up of 2d6+20 Husks of the Horde, plus 1d6 Possessed of the Horde, led by a Tyrant. The d6 may Ace! The Horde may be sighted in advance making a Notice roll (-2) 100 yards away.

4 – Beasts or Fell Beasts: roll a d6 again:

- 1: A boar
- 2: A bear
- 3: 1d6+2 wolves
- 4: 1d6+1 leucrottas
- 5: 3d6 aurochs
- 6: Devil Swine

5 – Fell Beast: roll a d6 again:

- 1: Flock of Fell Crows
- 2: Swarm of Fell Rats
- 3: Devilish Boar
- 4: Wolfish Cat (1d4)
- 5: Cerberus (1d6)
- 6: Fell Bear

6 – Abominations: roll a d6 again:

- 1: Hecatonchires
- 2: Wormridden (1d6)
- 3: Chimera: A Possessed with 3 more Special Abilities

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4: Karakizlar with 1d6 servants, alive or Dead

5: Yaga. Roll again. If you get 6, it is Baba Yaga herself!

6: Zaltys (1d6)

ON THE SEA:

1-4 - Corsairs or Pirates: A galleon or koch ran by sea marauders.

5 - Enemies: A warship belonging to a faction clearly hostile toward the Heroes.

6 - Horror: Roll a d6 again:

1-4 - Adrift Ship: Make a roll on the NPC "On the Sea" table; the crew, however, has turned into a pack of (2d6+6) Dead!

5 - Same as above, but there are 1d6 survivors barricaded in the hold!

6 - A puff of Atrament floats above the waves...it is Linbakar, the Black Whale! See Bestiary.

RIVERS:

2 - River Pirates: 2d6 snake-boats, carrying a man each. Use the Brigands

profiles, with Boating d6. If they are 8 or more, one of them is a Wild Card.

3 - Pack (3d6): Husks or Furies on the river bank.

4 - The Horde! A vanguard of the Golden Horde, made up of 2d6+20 Husks of the Horde, plus 1d6 Possessed of the Horde, led by a Tyrant. The d6 may Ace! The Horde may be sighted in advance making a Notice roll (-2) 100 yards away.

5 - Vilas (1d4): See Bestiary.

6 - Vodyanoi (2d6): See Bestiary. If they are at least 12, Baba Roga is with them!

DIAMONDS - FORTUNE (D6)

1-3- Luck: The Heroes find a building or a wreck containing something that might be useful to them. Make a roll on the Ultima Forsan: Basic Handbook "Ruins Treasures" table, and repeat the roll until you get at least one result.

4-5 - Food: Game, schools of fish, or other similar things. Making a Survival roll, the Heroes can find food for one day without slowing down their journey.

6 - City of Sorrow: The Heroes get in sight of an abandoned settlement. On the open sea, ignore this result.



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Journeys and encounters in Ruthenia



The Khazars' incredible tales

Chapter Seven

The Khazars' incredible tales



*generator of tales
and very tall
stories*

The Khazars love telling more or less plausible stories they heard while traveling in faraway lands, told by other travelers or maybe just made up by some drunkard. They love both listening to and telling such stories, most of all during a long journey, or between one business transaction and the next.

This generator allows you to concoct a more-or-less plausible story quickly to entertain the Heroes, or pique their curiosity during the cold Ruthenian nights or even as a starting point for their future adventures.

All you have to do to use this generator is draw four cards and look at the tables. Of course, you can also use the tables as a starting point and change one or more results.

If the drawn card is Hearts, that part of the story is true! At least up to a certain point...

Should you draw the Black Joker, ignore the other cards: the story is true, all of it, and it concerns one of the secrets of a monster or of a Character of your choice.

Should you draw the Red Joker, ignore the other cards: the story just told contains a piece of information useful for the present adventure of the Heroes.

FIRST CARD: WHERE

- 2:** "In the deepest recesses of Tartary..."
- 3:** "On the Silk Road..."
- 4:** "In an old hut in the middle of the forest..."
- 5:** "On the coast of the Maeotian Sea..."
- 6:** "In the Lithuanian Wilderness..."
- 7:** "Along the Great Mother Volga..."
- 8:** "In the winding alleys of Samara..."
- 9:** "In Kazan, between the Kasbah and the bazaar..."
- 10:** "In the cursed fortress of Nyenskans..."
- J:** "On the Market Bank of Novgorod..."
- Q:** "In the clockworkers district of Pleskov..."
- K:** "On the freezing piers of Archangelopolis..."
- A:** "In Moscow, right by the Kremlin..."

SECOND CARD: WHO

- 2:** "...there is a Tainted orphan..."
- 3:** "...lives an old washerwoman..."
- 4:** "...lives an old widower who has three daughters..."
- 5:** "...lives the daughter of a Tartar shepherd..."
- 6:** "...there is a young trapper..."
- 7:** "...lives a Tainted baker..."
- 8:** "...there is a Pomor family..."
- 9:** "...lives a crazy Hieromonk..."
- 10:** "...there is a Cathay warrior..."
- J:** "...there is a young, brave Brother of the Sword..."
- Q:** "...there is a young and beautiful Kalderash woman..."

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K: "...lives a merchant from the New Kingdoms of the West..."

A: "...lives a renegade Janissary, all dressed in black..."

THIRD CARD: HOW

2: "...who lacks one hand..."

3: "...with long, fire-red braids..."

4: "...whose skin is as black as Atrament..."

5: "...who is said to be a witch/sorcerer..."

6: "...who is said to be a Saint..."

7: "...who is as cross-eyed as Death herself..."

8: "...who can speak ten or more languages..."

9: "...who owns a chest full of ancient books..."

10: "...who loves black cats and spends the day talking to them..."

J: "...who lives like a pig, and looks just like you..."



Q: "...who has a marked limp..."

K: "...incredibly tall..."

A: "...with gold teeth..."

FOURTH CARD: WHAT

2: "...who discovered Koshei the Immortal's hideout, but won't say where it is!"

3: "...whose tears are Manna!"

4: "...who died from a Vila's bite and came back to life without turning into a Living Dead!"

5: "...who is in fact Baba Yaga herself in disguise!"

6: "...who met Tamerlane and played chess with him for three days and three nights!"

7: "...who found part of Genghis Khan's treasure!"

8: "...who can train the Dead and have them sing and dance!"

9: "...who produces a miraculous Acquamorte, which can cure the Plague!"

10: "...who was Baba Yaga's guest, in her Hut, and drank a herb tea there!"

J: "...who tricked Koschei the Immortal with a riddle!"

Q: "...who was swallowed whole by Baba Roga, and managed to survive!"

K: "...who knows the way to Erlik Khan's lost city!"

A: "...who is as good as invisible to the Dead!"

The new Bestiary

Chapter Seven

The new Bestiary



his bestiary has been divided into separate sections to better present each different type of creature:

- * *Animals*
- * *Fell Beasts*
- * *Dead*
- * *Abominations*
- * *Humans*
- * *NPC and Unique*

ANIMALS

ARCTIC WHALE

These huge sea leviathans are one of the Pomors' main resources. A captured whale may be worth up to 3,000 Florins.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d4, Intimidation d4, Notice d6, Swimming d6

Pace: 0; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 14

Special Abilities:

- * **Aquatic:** Swimming Pace 7.
- * **Tail Lash:** Str+d6.
- * **Huge:** Attackers add +4 to their Attack rolls when attacking a whale.
- * **Size +7:** A whale can be over 50' in length.

AUROCH

These huge, primordial bovines still wander in large herds through the northern woods. They are a much-coveted prey because of their meat and all the other raw materials they can provide and because of their strength and aggressiveness. The Kalderash often use them as draft animals for their wagons.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit 10, Strength d12+1, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 10

* **Horns:** Str+d6.

* **Gore:** If it can move at least 6" before attacking, an auroch adds +4 to its damage total.

* **Size +2:** Aurochs are large creatures.

* **Trample:** A charging herd of aurochs is deadly dangerous. Anyone on its path must make a successful Agility roll (-2) or suffer 2d6+2 damage. Three consecutive rolls are required to get to safety. *pa sono più piccoli dei cavalli occidentali.*

HYRCANIAN TIGER

These huge tigers are increasingly widespread in Tartary and along the lower course of the Volga River, while other species of snow tigers can be found throughout Siberia. Both species easily blend with their own environment, and have no qualms about attacking men. On the other hand, local princes and Khans pay tiger skins the equivalent of their weight in gold.

Attributes: Agility d10, Strength d12, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Stealth d8, Notice d8

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The new Bestiary

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

* **Pounce:** Tigers often pounce on their prey to best bring their mass and claws to bear. A tiger can pounce 1d6" and gain +4 to its attack and damage. Its parry is reduced by -2 until its next action when performing this maneuver however.

* **Improved Frenzy:** Tigers may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.

* **Camouflage:** In their habitat, tigers add +2 to Stealth rolls.

* **Bite or claw:** Str+d6.

* **Size +1:** Male tigers can weigh over 500 pounds.

* **Low Light Vision:** Tigers ignore penalties for Dim and Dark Lighting.

HUNTING CHEETAH

In the southern regions of Ruthenia and Tartary, Khans and Princes often indulge in a peculiar kind of hunting which involves the use of trained cheetahs. These swift and agile felines can also, if necessary, be used to hunt down runaway slaves or other human prey.

Attributes: Agility d12, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8

Pace: 12; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities:

* **Pounce:** Cheetahs often pounce on their prey to best bring their claws to bear. A Cheetah can pounce 1d6" and gain +2 to its attack and damage.

Its parry is reduced by -2 until its next action when performing this maneuver, however.

* **Improved Frenzy:** Cheetahs may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.

* **Camouflage:** In their habitat, cheetahs add +2 to Stealth rolls.

* **Bite or claw:** Str+d6.

* **Fleet-Footed:** Cheetahs roll a d10 when running.

* **Low Light Vision:** Cheetahs ignore penalties for Dim and Dark Lighting.

STEPPE HORSE

They are smaller and sturdier than western horses. Slower on long distances, they can manage without problems rough terrains, dry steppes and snow-covered moors.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

* **Kick:** Str.

* **Steady-Footed:** Steppe horses negotiate difficult, snowy or dry terrains as they would normal trails.

* **Fleet-Footed:** These horses roll a d8 when running.

* **Size +1:** Steppe horses are smaller than western horses.

FELL BEASTS

BLACK REINDEER

The mysterious Black Reindeers of the tundra are wild and fearsome beasts, infected with the Plague and able to kill and hurl any hunter rash enough to follow their trail a long distance away. If left alone, however, Black Reindeers do not attack men; on the contrary, they usually attack any Stray Dead, dismembering them with their wide antlers and their powerful hooves.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+1, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11

Special Abilities:

* **Mongrel Fell Beast:** While infected with the Plague, Black Reindeers have none of Fell Beasts' Special Abilities

* **Gore:** If it can move at least 6" before attacking, a Black Reindeer adds +4 to its damage total.

* **Antlers:** Str+d8. These huge antlers are considered a lucky charm, and can be sold for 500 Florins.

* **Size +3:** Devil Swine are large creatures.

LEUCROTTA

Leucrotta or Crocotta is what jackals and hyenas are called when infected with the Plague and turned into Fell Beasts. These horrific animals attack either alone or in a pack, in the daylight or at night, and at times can produce human-like sounds and moans to trap their victims. They are so strong and degenerate, they usually feed

off Opprobriums, Carcasses, Husks and other Dead they can catch, although they obviously go for "fresh meat" whenever they can. Many Cities of Sorrow, such as Kiev, are infested with them.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities:

* **Go for the Throat:** With a raise on its Attack roll, a Leucrotta hits the target's most weakly armored location.

* **Fell Beast:** Leucrottas share all Fell Beasts' Special Abilities (see *Ultima Forsan*)

* **Size -1:** Leucrottas are relatively small creatures.

DEAD

GOLDEN HORDE DEAD

These Furies and Husks forming the Golden Horde are the same as their corresponding Western Spawn, but a thick layer of dust covers their skin and clothing, sticks to the Atrament seeping from their flesh and makes them look "golden". According to legend, that dust is made of real gold, but it is generally thought it is just the kind of tan sand Tartar deserts are made of. Like most Tartar and Ruthenian Dead, those forming the Golden Horde are Erlik Khan's Spawn, and they share the following traits that differ from those in the basic handbook:

* **Gear:** When led by a Tyrant, Furies and Husks of the Horde wield rusted daggers, sabres and axes (Str+d6).

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* **Sand and Atrament:** The layer of sand covering the Golden Horde Dead gives them +1 Toughness.

HUSK, FROZEN DEAD

The Frozen—or White—Dead (also called Morozko in Ruthenia, and Draugar in the Kalmar Union), are Husks that can withstand the frigid cold of the northern lands and lie in wait in the snow or attack travelers at night. Once, they gathered a fearful White Horde and infested northern Ruthenia, but now such Spawns are almost always isolated Strays.

They share the same characteristics as regular Husks, but on snowy terrains they can be seen only from 10 yards (5") away through a successful Notice roll. A failure means you are Surprised (See *Savage World Deluxe*).

N KARAKIZLAR

The Nine Karakizlar are Erlik Khan's direct Spawn. Their powers are similar to the Yagas', even if the Karakizlar look like young witches, instead of deformed hags. These black Seeresses are Striges, generated directly by Erlik Khan's Ambrosia, and their powers are so great that it seems they can see and hear through the eyes and ears of all Erlik's Spawn scattered throughout Tartary, and even talk through the Dead's mouth.

Karakizlar: Have the same characteristics as a Yaga, lacking only the Elderly and Ugly Hindrances; they also have two more Edges: Charismatic and Very Attractive, which is why the Nine Karakizlar have Charisma +2 and

Page 6. They also have the following Special Ability:

* **Control over Erlik's Spawn:** The Karakizlar can use this Control over the Spawn on the Golden Horde Dead at any distance. Concentrating, they can also use their senses and communicate through their voices or gestures (for example, writing something with Atrament).

POSSESSED, HORDE RAIDER

Forming the main body of the Horde, these Possessed can wield sabres in battle, as well as obey their Khan's simplest orders. Some of them ride fierce Nightmares.

* **Gear:** Saber (Str+d6) or scimitar (Str+d8), old metal corselet (+1 Armor).

* **Sand and Atrament:** The layer of sand covering the Golden Horde Dead gives them +1 Toughness.

N YAGA

The feared Ruthenian Yagas are powerful Striges who look like old hags, are usually cruel and skilled in the arts of Witchcraft and Necromancy. They often eat human flesh.

They live deep in the woods or in isolated huts in the steppes. For the right price, they can at times help the Heroes, but more often they are wily and degenerate monsters that must be destroyed.

Their powers make use of Necromancy (Smarts) Arcane Skill, which allows them to access Alchemists and Witches powers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d12, Strength d4, Vigor d8

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Skills: Fighting d8, Knowledge (Plague) d10, Intimidation d8, Necromancy d12, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Taunt d8

Charisma -6; **Pace** 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 8

Hindrances: Elderly, Ugly, Outsider, Mean

Edges: Arcane Background (Necromancy), Beyond the Threshold, Confound the Spawn

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4) or other weapon.

Powers: At least four Novice Alchemist or Witch rank powers, and two Seasoned rank powers.

Special Abilities:

* **Control over the Spawn:** The Yagas can exert some sort of mind control over the other Plague Spawn. At no cost, they can impose their will, on sight, on any creature infected with the Plague and with (A) or (D) Smarts, using them as actual puppets under their control. They can also give simple orders, which the creatures execute as well as they can for a limited amount of time, even if visual contact is broken in the meantime.

Should two (or more) creatures with this ability wish to control a nearby Spawn, an opposed Spirit roll is required.

* **Fiend:** Yagas have all the Special Abilities of the Dead, except Blind Hunger and Brain Death.

kingdom, these antediluvian remains of now extinct beasts look like huge four-footed skeletons covered with Atrament and rotting flesh.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4 (D), Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d12, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 15

Special Abilities:

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d10.

* **Hardy:** If a Kasyrgan Dragon is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a wound

* **Weakness (Nerve Cluster):** Clusters of flesh and nervous tissue surface in between the clots of Atrament these dragons are covered with, but a Character who wants to look for it can find the largest nerve cluster only by making a successful Notice (-4) or Knowledge (Plague) -2 roll. A called shot attack roll at this cluster is made at -2, but inflicts +4 damage.

* **Improved Frenzy:** Kasyrgan Dragon may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.

* **Large:** Adversaries add +2 to any Attack roll against this creature.

* **Dead:** This creature has all the Special Abilities of the Dead, except their Weakness (Head), due to its skull being empty, with no brain in it.

* **Fleet-Footed:** This creature rolls a d8 instead of d6 when running.

* **Size +5:** Dragons are massive creatures.

ABOMINATIONS

KASYRGAN DRAGON

Brought back to a sort of life by Erlik Khan to protect his underground

VILA

For some mysterious reason, these Dead are all women. Similar to the Possessed,

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they still have some shreds of memory and ability to discern, albeit distorted, and their behavior is not always wildly aggressive. In many ways, they resemble Ultima Forsan: Macabre Italy Bogeymen. Whether their behaviour is due to the effect of the water or some trauma suffered at the moment of death, the fact is that these creatures dwell exclusively in rivers and streams. Hidden under the surface, they wait for their prey to get near them or at times attract it with sounds like screams of pain or fear, or soft songs. Another peculiarity of their behavior is that they never attack groups with women and children in their midst, but surface from the water to observe them. In such cases, if attacked, the Vilas will swim away.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities:

* **Go for the Throat:** When fighting without weapons, Vilas instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, a Vila hits the target's most weakly armored location.

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d8.

* **Hardy:** If a Vila is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a wound.

* **Improved Frenzy:** Vilas may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.

* **Dead:** This creature has all the Special Abilities of the Dead, except Blind Hunger and Brain Death.

* **Fear (-1):** Like all Dead, Vilas look horrible, but their steady eyes and impassive faces suggest a shred of consciousness that can shake even the strongest heart. Anyone seeing them for the first time must make a Fear check (-1).

VODYANOI

Q These awful river Abominations have green flaccid skin, elongated limbs and a swollen belly. Their jaws are huge, and the flesh of the face has thickened to the point of breaking the bones, turning the Vodyanoi's mouth into a muscular, swollen sack that can expand at will, like that of some amphibians. They are wily enough to be able to work out primitive tricks and strategies—building makeshift dams, for example, or grouping to attack larger barges—against people traveling on the rivers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Swimming d4

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d6.

* **Aquatic:** Vodyanoi have a Swimming Pace of 6.

* **Hypertrophic Jaws:** When they get a raise on a Fighting roll, besides inflicting damage, the Vodyanoi grab the opponent (if of human size) as if successful in Grappling, and block the body part they have hit.

* **Dead:** This creature has all the Special Abilities of the Dead.

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ZALTYS

Some horrific legends known throughout Lithuania and the Principality of Smolensk are about snake-women called Zaltys, Spawn that slither on the ground or pounce on wayfarers from the trees or from a pond. Zaltys are known to shed their skin periodically.

The truth behind those legends is that these Dead (that are not necessarily women) have hypertrophic legs whose bones have long since fractured and are now similar to swollen tentacles of pulsing flesh.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Swimming d4, Notice d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d6.

* **Aquatic:** Zaltys have a Swimming Pace of 4.

* **Wall Walker:** Because of their particular shape, like snakes, Zaltys can climb almost any vertical surface.

* **Dead:** These creatures have all the Special Abilities of the Dead.

MEN AND WOMEN OF MACABRE RUTHENIA

You can use these profiles to create human NPCs, Wild Cards included.

BLACK MASTIFF

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Riding d6, Shooting d4, Stealth d4, Streetwise d6

Charisma -; **Pace** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Edges: Strong Willed

Gear: Long Sword (Str+d8), Black Leather Tabard (Armor +1, covers torso, arms, and legs), Pot Helm (50% vs. head shot, Armor +3). Black Horse and black mastiff (see Savage Worlds Deluxe).

BLACK MASTIFF, VETERAN

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Riding d8, Shooting d4, Stealth d4, Streetwise d8,

Charisma -; **Pace** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Edges: Levelheaded, Strong Willed

Gear: Long Sword (Str+d8), Black Leather Tabard (Armor +1, covers torso, arms, and legs), Pot Helm (50% vs. head shot, Armor +3). Black horse and black mastiff (see Savage Worlds Deluxe).

COSSACK WARRIOR

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d4, Survival d4,

Charisma -; **Pace** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Edges: Trademark Weapon (one weapon of choice)

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Gear: Flintlock Pistol (range: 5/10/20; **damage:** 2d6+1), Spear (Str+d6, Parry +1, Reach 1), Circassian Dagger (Str+d4+1), Shashka (Str+d6+1; Parry -1) and Whip (d6 damage; see notes); Leather Circassian (+1 Armor, covers torso, arms and legs)

COSSACK WARRIOR, COMMANDER

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Survival d4

Charisma -; **Pace** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Edges: Command, Trademark Weapon (one weapon of choice)

Gear: Flintlock pistol (range: 5/10/20; **damage:** 2d6+1), Spear (Str+d6, Parry +1, Reach 1), Circassian Dagger (Str+d4+1), Shashka (FStr+d6+1; Parry -1) and Whip (d6 damage; see notes); Leather Circassian (+1 Armor, covers torso, arms and legs)

DRUZHINA KNIGHT

These ordained knights are loyal to their Prince till they die and very skilled in battle.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d6, Riding d10

Charisma -; **Pace** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Edges: Brave, Command, Counterattack, Druzhinnik

Gear: Warhorse, Chain Hauberk (covers torso, arms and legs), Steel Helmet (enclosed), Long Sword (Str+d8), Lance (Str+d8, 2 hands, AP 2 when charging, Reach 2) and Topor (Str+d6); Medium Shield carrying their prince or warlord's coat of arms.

KURGAN, WARRIOR

These grim, rawboned warriors still obey prehistoric laws and worship the Dead. Fearful foes in battle, they use their steel weapons to behead their prey.



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

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Survival d4, Tracking d4

Charisma -2; Pace 6; Parry: 5; Toughness: 7 (1)

Hindrances: Outsider

Edges: Brave, Kurgan

Gear: Axe-cleaver (Str+d8, -1 Parry, +1 damage if used 2 hands), armor of furs, bones and trophies (+1 Armor, covers torso and arms).

KURGAN, CHIEF WARRIOR

The strongest, fiercest and most skilled Kurgan of each Tribe. This powerful warrior's body is covered with tattoos, and he wears bone armor.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d12, Intimidation d8, Notice d4, Survival d4, Throwing d6, Tracking d4

Charisma -2; Pace 6; Parry: 7; Toughness: 9 (2)

Hindrances: Outsider

Edges: Brave, Command, Improved Sweep, Kurgan

Gear: Great Axe (Str+d8 10 -1 Parry, AP 1, 2 hands), Reinforced armor of furs, bones and trophies (+2 Armor, covers torso and arms), Pot Helm (Armor +3, 50% vs. head shot).

KURGAN, SKELETON-MAN

The Skeleton-Men are the religious and social leaders of the Kurgan, and, if

possible, they are even grimmer than the other tribesmen. They are always Tainted. Some of them are Warlocks, others are Necromancers through and through.

Race: Tainted

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

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d4, Persuasion d8, Survival d4

Arcane Skills: Necromancy d6 or Witchcraft d6

Charisma -2 Pace 6; Parry: 5; Toughness: 6 (1)

Hindrances: Outsider

Edges: Arcane Background (Necromancy or Witchcraft), Brave, Kurgan

Powers: Two powers of Novice rank.

Gear: Axe (Str+d6), knife (Str+d4), armor of furs, bones and trophies (+1 Armor, covers torso and arms).

Special Abilities: If the Skeleton-Man is a Necromancer, he also has the following Special Abilities:

*** Creating Abominations:** Through their dark arts, Necromancers and Vivisectors can create a variety of dreadful Spawn. The only limits are those of their perverse imagination and the availability of raw matter. This does not mean every "experiment" is a success, but having time and bodies at his disposal, a Necromancer can try a Necromancy roll every month, to create an artificial Chimera or Abomination. In the case of critical failure, the Spawn thus created is totally out of control and immediately turns on its creator.

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* **Baffle the Dead:** Most Necromancers have the Baffle the Dead Edge.

TARTAR RAIDER

These raiders have been hardened by decades of wars and the threat of the Golden Horde. Some of them are also Felons in the service of the Khans or use the Infection against their enemies. In any case, they all are merciless and fierce warriors, skillful with scimitars and bows, and mounted on wild steppes horses.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6, Survival d6, Stealth d6, Tracking d4

Charisma -; **Pace** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Hindrances: Usually Greedy, and often Mean.

Gear: Leather Armor, assorted weapons, among which scimitar (Str+d8) and bow (range: 12/24/48; damage: 2d6); Steppes Horse.

TARTAR RAIDER, CHIEF

To become the Chief of a band of raiders one must be the strongest, bravest, and most merciless of them all. Nobody dares give lip to the Chief, or disobey his orders.

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

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Taunt d8, Throwing d8, Tracking d6

Charisma: -; **Parry:** 7; **Pace:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: Greedy, Mean.

Edges: Command, Elan, Strong Willed

Gear: Leather Armor, Pot Helm, assorted weapons, among which scimitar (Str+d8) and bow (range: 12/24/48; **damage:** 2d6); **Steppes Horse.**

NPC AND UNIQUE CREATURES

BABA ROGA

The “Mother of the Vodyanoi” is a dreadful and huge Abomination that lurks behind some lonely river bend or in a large lake. Long, dark, hair-like algae hang from its body, it has large, watery eyes and huge jaws bristling with long, twisted fangs.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+1, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Swimming d6

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 13

Special Abilities:

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d8.

* **Aquatic:** Baba Roga has a Swimming Pace of 6.

* **Hypertrophic Jaws:** When it gets a raise on a Fighting roll, besides inflicting damage, Baba Roga grabs the opponent (if of human size) as if successful in Grappling and blocks the body part it has hit.

* **Dead:** This creature has all the Special Abilities of the Dead.

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* **Fear -2:** Baba Roga is a dreadful creature.

* **Size +4:** Baba Roga has grown disproportionately, swollen with Atrement and rot.

BABA YAGA'S "DANCING HUT":

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d8, Notice d4, Swimming d4

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14

Special Abilities:

* **Claws:** Str+d8.

* **Hardy:** If the Hut is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a wound.


* **Absorbing:** If it gets a raise on a Fighting attack roll against an opponent of human size, the Hut absorbs its victim through one of the "openings" in its "walls". Once inside, the victim suffers 2d6 damage each round (the Armor doesn't matter) from being chewed, ground and corroded by gastric juices, and must draw a card. Unless it is a face card, the inflicted wounds infect the victim with the Plague. To escape the "Hut", the victim can try an opposed Strength roll (good luck!) to defeat it or use a sharp weapon to cut through its "walls"; the character successfully escapes if he inflicts at least one Wound. Inside, the "Hut" has Parry 4 and Toughness 10.

* **Dead:** This creature has all the Special Abilities of the Dead. Unfortunately, however, it doesn't have a head!

* **Fear (-1):** The "Hut" is a grotesque and horrific Abomination. Size +4. It is a "Hut", after all.

BABA YAGA, THE HAG

The "Old Woman" is a bent hag, old beyond belief and is considered the Yagas' Queen. Besides her powers as a Strix and her evil cunning, this horrific Spawn has decaying and mutated parts of the body. She also has a symbiotic relationship with her "Dancing Hut", a huge and monstrous Abomination that wanders slowly and ploddingly through the woods and is more than happy to absorb its victims before sharing them with its mistress.

 **Baba Yaga:** Baba Yaga uses the Yagas' characteristics, adding the Harder to Kill and Strong Willed Edges. Moreover, according to legends, the "Old Woman" is a mutated and deformed being: every time somebody meets her, you can roll a Special Ability on the Chimeras table of Ultima Forsan.

ERLIK KHAN, PROGENITOR

All the Tartar populations fear Erlik Khan, whom they see as the God of Death himself. And Erlik Khan more than earned such reputation. Besides controlling the Nine Khans of the Horde, the Nine Karakizlar and the Horde itself, Erlik rules over the antediluvian underground city of Kasyrgan, among its ruins and the mummified remains of the mysterious Nephilim.

His underground kingdom is a buried world populated with horrors, never explored by common men because nobody can set foot inside it without first facing its lord.

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Besides Erlik Khan and his immediate servants, in Kasyrgan also lie the bodies of some antediluvian “dragons”, mere skeletons that Erlik has called back to life for his own pleasure, and to better defend the gates to his kingdom. These deformed Carcasses, more than fifteen feet long, are unusually swift and their fangs are still sharp, and quite dangerous.

Attributes: Agility d12, Smarts d10, Spirit d12, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d12, Healing d12, Intimidation d12, Knowledge (Battle) d12, Knowledge (Occult) d12, Knowledge (Plague) d12, Notice d12, Persuasion d12, Stealth d12, Taunt d12, Throwing d10

Charisma -4; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 11; **Toughness:** 13 (3)

Hindrances: Greedy, Overconfident, Stubborn, Ugly, Vengeful

Edges: Command, Command Presence, Fervor, Harder to Kill, Improved Block, Improved Dodge, Improved Extraction, Improved First Strike, Improved Frenzy, Improved Level-headed, Improved Sweep, Improved Trademark Weapon (scimitar), Strong Willed

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), Small Shield (Parry +1), Full Plate Armor (+3 Armor), Pot Helm (Armor +3, 50% vs. head shot). Both the helm and the armor are of excellent make, weigh 25% less than usual and are richly inlaid with gold and precious stones, at a value up to ten times the usual cost for such items. Moreover, Erlik Khan also wears plenty of jewels of all kinds, even facial jewelry, for a total value of 50,000 Florins.

Special Abilities:

* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d4.

* **Confounding Tainted Spawn:** Erlik Khan may use the Baffle the Dead Edge on any Tainted in the range of 10". It is a free action.

* **Control over the Spawn:** Just like Tyrants, Erlik Khan can exert a form of mind control over other Plague Spawn. At no cost, he can force his will, on sight, on any creature infected with the Plague and with (A) or (D) Smarts, using them as out-and-out puppets on his orders. He can also give simple orders, which the creatures will obey at their best for a limited amount of time, even if visual contact is broken in the meanwhile.

Should two (or more) creatures with this ability wish to control a nearby Spawn, an opposed Spirit roll is required.

* **Weakness (Head):** Damage to the head adds +2 to the standard +4 damage applied to all creatures.

* **Fiend:** Erlik Khan has all the Special Abilities of the common Dead, except Blind Hunger and Brain Death.

* **Undead:** +2 Toughness, +2 to recover from being Shaken, called shots do no extra damage, except to the head (see Weakness). Arrows, spears and other piercing weapons inflict only half damage, except to the head. Immune to poison and diseases.

* **Fear -4:** Erlik Khan's eyes instill sheer terror, and whoever encounters him must succeed in a Fear check at -4.

* **Fearless:** All the Dead are immune to Fear, Intimidation and all similar effects.

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* **Rapid Regeneration:** Erlik Khan can make a Natural Healing roll per round, unless he has been maimed or wounded by fire, acids or Manna. If Incapacitated, he can be killed for good by destroying his head.

KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS

This bogeyman, feared by children and peasants alike, looks like a timeless old man with glaring, evil eyes. He is said to stride through border lands and the Wilderness, kidnapping any beautiful girl he meets, and carrying them to his grim lair. Whatever the truth, his appearance always heralds doom.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d12, Strength d12, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d12, Intimidation d12, Knowledge (Plague) d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Stealth d12, Taunt d8

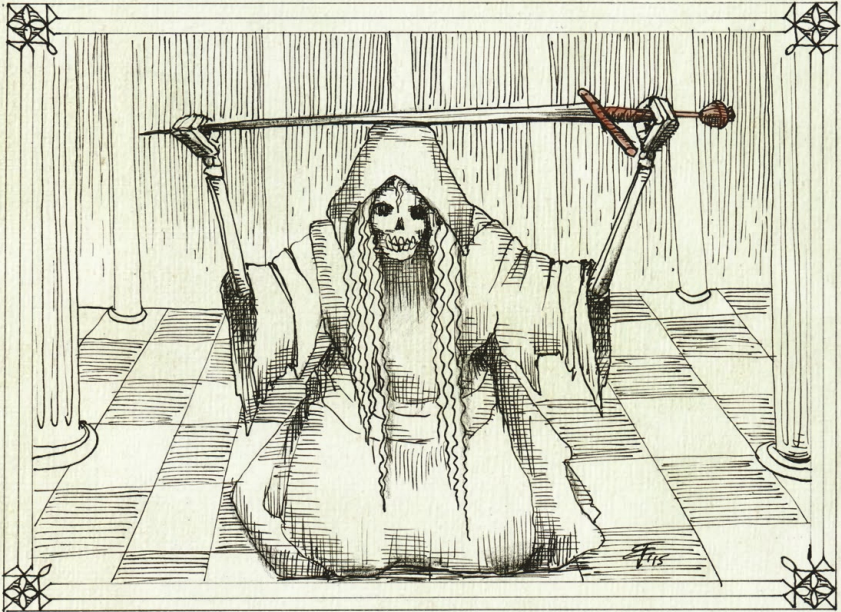
Charisma: -4; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 10; **Toughness:** 12

Gear: Long Sword (Str+d8), golden crown (+3 Armor, 50% vs. head shot; value, 5,000). Inside his mysterious hideout, Koschei has accumulated chests full of coins for a total value of 50,000 Florins.

Hindrances: Arrogant, Elderly, Mean, Ugly

Edges: Harder to Kill, Improved Block, Improved Frenzy, Strong Willed, Tough as Nails, Trademark Weapon (Scimitar)

Special Abilities:



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* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d4.

* **Control over the Spawn:** Just like Tyrants, Koschei can exert a form of mind control over other Plague Spawn. At no cost, he can impose his will, on sight, on any creature infected with the Plague and with (A) or (D) Smarts, using them as out-and-out puppets at his orders. He can also give simple orders, which the creatures will obey at their best for a limited amount of time, even if visual contact is broken in the meantime.

Should two (or more) creatures with this ability wish to control a nearby Spawn, an opposed Spirit roll is required.

* **Weakness (Lewd):** Koschei cannot resist the allure of beauty. He never uses attacks inflicting damage against female opponents with Charisma +1 or above; instead, he tries to immobilize them by Grappling and drags them to his lair. Should he meet a woman with Charisma +5 or above, he will do his utmost to conquer her through flattery, and offering her immortality and treasures. Should he fail, he will resort to violence.

* **Weakness (Superstition):** Koschei is persuaded (wrongly so) that his soul resides inside a Fell Hare (just like a Wolfish Cat, but with Pace 10) locked inside an iron chest hidden in his lair. If he sees the hare getting killed he gets so disheartened he loses the Harder to Kill and Strong Willed Edges, as well as the Rapid Regeneration Special Ability.

* **Great Jinx:** All the legends depicting Koschei as a death omen have made him a symbol of doom even in the hearts of non-superstitious people. Characters who encounter him lose 1 Obol and suffer -2 on their next Trait roll.

* **Immortal:** Koschei has all the Special Abilities of the Dead, except Blind Hunger, Brain Death, and Weakness (Head).

* **Fear (-2):** Koschei's evil eyes can literally stop the heart of a living being.

* **Resistance to Damage:** No wound penalties.

* **Rapid Regeneration:** Koschei can make a Natural Healing roll each Round, unless wounded by fire. He can even regenerate amputated body parts, head included. See Weakness (Superstition).

LINBAKAR, THE BLACK

WHALE

inbakar "leather-head", the legendary Black Whale, is a real source of terror for Pomors and the Baltic Sea fishermen. This huge monster is over a hundred feet long, as fierce as the worst Abomination and almost invulnerable because of its swollen and leathery body. It feeds off other cetaceans and sea giants, but it is not above attacking and destroying fishing boats and other ships.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+5, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Swimming d6

Pace: 0; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 17

Special Abilities:

* **Aquatic:** Swimming Pace 8.

* **Armor +2:** Its black skin is thick and encrusted.

* **Tail Lash:** Str+d6 (Heavy Weapon). This kind of attack does not transmit the Plague.

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* **Huge:** Opponents add +4 to any Attack roll against the Black Whale.

* **Mutated Jaws:** Str+d12 (Heavy Weapon). This kind of attack transmits the Plague. If the Black Whale gets a raise on its attack roll, it swallows the victim (and even a small boat, such as a launch). Whoever gets swallowed has one round to cut through the whale's body with an attack inflicting at least one Wound (the inside of the mouth has Parry 2 and Toughness 12), or drag himself out of the jaws with a successful opposed Strength roll. The victim gets infected if the drawn card is clubs.

* **Fell Beast:** The Black Whale has all the Special Abilities of Fell Beasts.

* **Fear -2:** The Black Whale infuses terror and despair in the heart of all sailors.

* **Size +8:** The Black Whale is 130 feet long.

TAMERLANE

This being, who once came as a savior in a dark age, is now a sort of bones-and-leather mummy, almost impervious to blades and any sort of blow. He dresses only in silk cloaks, and his servants wrap him up in camphorated bandages, but he can still wield his blades with deadly and inhuman skill. His voice sounds like a rusty, creaking, sarcophagus hinge, but very few still hear him speak. His aim still is to destroy the Golden Horde and its Lords before his body finally gives in to the Last Death.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d12, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d12+2, Knowledge (Battle) d12, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Riding d12, Shooting d8, Throwing d8

Charisma -; **Pace 6;** **Parry: 12;** **Toughness: 12**

Hindrances: Outsider (to Untainted and Tainted)

Edges: Command, Elan, Improved Block, Improved Counterattack, Improved Frenzy, Improved First Strike, Knight, Leader of Men.

Gear: Long Sword (Str+d8), Small Shield.

Special Abilities:

* **Foul:** Tamerlane has all the Special Abilities of the Dead, except Blind Hunger and Brain Death.

* **Mummified Skin:** It raises Tamerlane's Toughness to 12.

TARAS BULBA

This tormented and valiant Tainted is the Ataman (Commander) of the White Cossacks. He is renowned for his vehemence in battle and for his ability in leading his men. This tormented and valiant Tainted is the Ataman (Commander) of the White Cossacks. He is renowned for his vehemence in battle and for his ability in leading his men.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d12, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d6, Riding d10, Shooting d12

Charisma -; **Pace 6;** **Parry: 8;** **Toughness: 7 (1)**

Edges: Command, Counterattack, Leader of Men, Levelheaded, Quick Draw, Trademark Weapon (Shashka), Trademark Weapon (Circassian Dagger), Trademark Weapon (Whip)

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Gear: Circassian (+1 Armor), two flintlock pistols and 20 shots, two Circassian daggers, shashka and whip. Elegant caftan, fur headgear, horse.

THREE GOLDEN HORDE KHANS: KARASH KHAN, MATYR KHAN, AND SHYNGAY KHAN

Karash Khan, Matyr Khan e Shyngay Khan

KKARASH KHAN, TYRANT

This Tyrant is one of the Golden Horde Khans, direct Spawn of Erlik Khan. Karash Khan is notorious for attacking caravans and fortified oases at nighttime, and the Dead in his Horde seem to be able to see even in pitch black darkness.

Use all the Tyrants' characteristics, but add:

Edges: Command

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), Small Shield (Parry +1), Chain Hauberk (long coat) (+2 Armor), Pot Helm (+3 Armor, 50% vs. head shot).

Special Abilities:

* **Low Light Vision:** Karash Khan, and all the Dead he commands, ignore penalties for Dim and Dark Lighting.

MMATYR KHAN, TYRANT

This Tyrant is one of the Golden Horde Khans, direct Spawn of Erlik Khan. He leads the largest, most feared Horde, and his raiders are the strongest and most skilled in battle.

Use all the Tyrants' characteristics, but add:

Edges: Command, Command Presence, Fervor

Gear: Scimitar (Str+d8), Small Shield (Parry +1), Chain Hauberk (long coat) (+2 Armor), Pot Helm (+3 Armor, 50% vs. head shot).

SSHYNGAY KHAN, TYRANT

This Tyrant is one of the Golden Horde Khans, direct Spawn of Erlik Khan. He looks monstrous and beastly and is huge and deformed. All the Dead in his Horde are somehow deformed, with jaws bristling with sharp, boar-like fangs.

Use all the Tyrants' characteristics, but add:

Gear: None

* **Special Abilities:**

* **Fangs and Claws:** Str+d8.

* **Improved Frenzy:** Shyngay Khan may make two Fighting attacks each action at no penalty.

* **Deformed Horde:** Whoever faces this horde for the first time must make a successful Fear check.

* **Fear:** Shyngay Khan's deformed and beastly looks require a Fear check.

* **Size +2:** Shyngay Khan is much larger than a man or a regular Dead.

Ultima Forsan

Agility



Boating — Shooting —
 Fighting — Stealth —
 Lockpicking — Swimming —
 Riding — Throwing —

Smarts



Gambling — Notice —
 Healing — Repair —
 Investigation — Streetwise —
 Knowl. — Survival —
 Knowl. — Taunt —
 Knowl. — Tracking —

Strength



Climbing —

Spirit



Intimidation — Persuasion —

Chigor



Name _____
 Race _____

Wild Arcane



Charisma Parry



Pace Toughness

Background

Languages

Permanent Injuries

Hindrances

Edges

V

X

XV

Seasoned

XXV

XXX

XXXV

Veteran

XLV

L

LV

Heroic

LXV

LXX

LXXV

Legendary

XC

C

CX

Weapon Range Damage Wt. Notes

Power Cost Range Damage/Effect

Gear

Armor

Head

Arms

Torso

Legs



Total weight — Florins —

Weight limit — Encumbrance Penalty —

Fatigue -I -II INC -III -II -I Wounds

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