

DEFENDERS OF THE UNION



Imagine that the USSR never broke apart

Imagine that the USSR wasn't the dreadful mess that it turned out to be

Imagine it was a shining workers paradise

But every paradise has its snakes

And someone must root out those snakes

That someone is you

A 24 Hour RPG for the November 2005 'Ronnies'
By Malcolm Craig

Using the words 'Soviet' and 'Gun'

Typeset using Airacobra, Garamond and Soviet fonts

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INTRODUCTION

"While the State exists, there can be no freedom. When there is freedom there will be no State."

V I Lenin

'Defenders of the Union' is set sometime in the future or perhaps in the past, in a Soviet Union that never existed. It is a Soviet Union as seen through the eyes of its dreamers, its poets, its writers and filmmakers. Where the masses live in clean, whitewashed apartment blocks, where they labour in modern factories, where the USSR is a shining light in a world of brutal capitalistic oppression.

But no paradise is perfect and rot has set in at the core of the USSR. Malcontents, traitors, speculators and enemies of the people seek to bring down the edifice of socialist perfection. They claim all is not well, they spread dissent and treachery. And they must be ruthlessly stamped out.

However, are the enemies of the people really the liars that the Supreme Soviet would have us believe? Are their tales of the camps where millions are killed through neglect, overwork and execution mere exaggerations of the truth, or do they represent something more sinister?

In amongst the white apartment blocks, there are bloodstains on the ground. Out in the wastes of Siberia, corpses litter the snow. On far off steppes, savage little wars are fought for freedom. From the Revolution, through the wars, the gun has always been emblematic of the USSR. Even in these peaceful, happy times, a man carrying a gun, alighting from the Moscow monorail can bring fear to the most loyal kolkhoz.

On to the scene step members of the Peoples Armed Investigatory Committee, the feared gunmen of the Supreme Soviet. Clad in their forbidding padded greatcoats, carrying the great pistols that are their badges of power and authority, they descend on communities to root out enemies and ensure correct thought.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

GULAG: The central administrative department of the Soviet system responsible for the maintenance of prisons and forced labour camps. Can also be used to refer to the prisons and camps themselves.

Kolkhoz: A small collective farm.

Makhorka: A shaggy, rough cigarette made from slices of compressed tobacco wrapped in whatever paper comes to hand.

Peoples Armed Investigatory Committee: An organisation set up by the Supreme Soviet to investigate treason, untoward goings on, corruption and potential enemies of the people.

Politburo: The executive and policy making body of the Communist Party of the USSR.

Red Army: The ground military of the USSR, a substantial force numbering well into the millions.

Soviet: Elected councils or bodies that can exist at the local, regional or nation levels, the ultimate version of which is the Supreme Soviet.

Sovkhoz: A large, State run collective farm.

Supreme Soviet: A bicameral legislative body that is officially the highest organ of State power in the USSR.

Travelling Soviet: A group of 2 or more representatives of the PAIC, entrusted to travel around the State, investigating treason, enemies of the people and corruption.

Urka: A professional criminal. Officially, they do not exist in the USSR.

WHAT IS DEFENDERS OF THE UNION ABOUT?

"It is true that liberty is precious; so precious that it must be carefully rationed."

V I Lenin

'Defenders of the Union' is a role-playing game in which you play the part of a member of the feared secret police of a future USSR, a man or women sent (along with their colleagues) to root out dissent and treason within a community. Direct orders from the Supreme Soviet instruct you to use any and all methods and means to root out enemies of the people and restore harmony and correct thought.

However, all is not as black and white as it may seem. Perhaps your character secretly sympathises with the anti-authoritarian views of some of the antagonists? Perhaps he leans towards the reforming side of the Party? Perhaps she has dark secrets that may bubble to the surface under pressure? Then again, she could be as hard-line as they come, a fanatical adherent to the tenets of the Party, determined to obliterate those who do not show sufficient belief.

'Defenders of the Union' is all about these moral and political choices. As the characters get more deeply involved in a situation, how will they react, what will they do? Will they go with the majority, despite their beliefs? Will they attempt to reform or moderate? Will they act without conscience or morality? They have the power to be judge, jury and executioner; how far will they take that power? Will they forcefully argue the rights and wrongs of ideology, or will they simply reach for the pistols which are their badges of authority and primary tools of correction?

THE WORKERS PARADISE

Comrade Malenkov ground the makborka beneath his boot and glanced up at the buzzing, whirring helicopter as it came in to land. He had been in this cold wasteland two days now and already he hated it. As the door swung open, two figures alighted from the vehicle and strode with all semblance of purpose towards him.

“Comrade Chistyakov. Comrade Vatutin. I bid you welcome to Kolyma.”

The nodded and did not speak, the shock of the sub-zero temperatures was obviously getting to them, despite their thick coats and fur caps. The Travelling Soviet was now assembled and ready to go about its business.

“It is my understanding that Mining Camp 52 is home to saboteurs and enemies of the people. We have been instructed to investigate matters and bring these malcontents to book. I trust you have all the necessary equipment?”

Both figures nodded again and pulled back their coats to reveal pistols at their belts. One was a massive, black affair, obviously a powerful and intimidating weapon. The other was slim and silvery, a bit shony for Malenkov's taste. He should really keep an eye on that one, just to be sure. There was an air of disloyalty about her.

“Come, Comrades. I have a truck waiting. Let us waste no time.”

From the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean, the pristine red and white monorails and broad highways tie together the paradise that is the Soviet Union. In Moscow, Kiev, Valdivostok and thousands of other cities, towns and villages, millions of workers live in a proletarian ideal.

Sleek Aeroflot scramjets cross the vast expanses of land in slender hours, while silvery MiGs patrol the borders. From the huge sovkhos state farms and little kolkhoz collectives, wheat and corn pour into the cities. Gleaming hydrofoils and ekranoplans ply the lakes, rivers and seas, opening up huge hinterlands for the use of valiant hero workers.

Despite all of this, there are rumblings of unrest. Whilst life may be perfectly tolerable, it can be stultifyingly dull and boring. Listening to the same lectures and exhortations day after day, attending the same meetings over and over again. Eventually, people become restless.

In the underbelly of the Soviet State, there are those who plot and scheme. Some a simple urka, professional criminals whose existence is not even officially recognised by the State. Others are political malcontents, counter-revolutionaries and agitators. These are some of the people that the Travelling Soviets of the Peoples Armed Investigative Committee seek out.

Moscow

The first city of the USSR, a splendid metropolis on the banks of the River Moskva. A utopian paradise, it is home to millions of happy Soviets living in the gargantuan housing estates which ring the mighty city. Here the ancient symbols of the Revolution are preserved: Red Square, Lenin's tomb, kept for all eternity with pride and devotion.

Moscow is home to the Politburo and meeting place of the Supreme Soviet. It is here that all key decisions are made, edicts handed down, production targets set and correct thought debated.

Siberia

Siberia is a huge, cold wasteland, a vast wintry space, even now only sparsely populated. Dotted across its tundra and mountains are scattered camps of the gulag, mines, towns, villages and the occasional riverside port. It's also the ideal place to hide secret installations that must be kept away from prying eyes.

THE CREED OF THE PARTY

“From each according to his means, to each according to his needs”. So goes the basic tenet of the Soviet State.

In the workers paradise that is the USSR, everything is provided by the State, nothing is owned. If someone needs a house, a toaster or a computer, then the state will provide. In return, the State expects that each and every man and woman will work as best they can, according to their skills, abilities and talents.

Marxism-Leninism is still, after all these years, the official doctrine of the USSR, despite the general failure to incite world-wide proletarian revolution. One of the key precepts of this doctrine is that decisions should be arrived at after discussion but once that decision has been arrived at, it may not be reversed. Hard-liners in the party adhere to this absolutely, even if it means taking action which could be viewed by some as morally repugnant.

Decisions are made from the very top to the very bottom of the State, usually by councils known as Soviets (hence the name, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). These councils adhere to Marxist-Leninist doctrine to a greater or lesser extent. It's when they start making decisions that don't tie in with overall State policy that the gunmen of the PAIC get sent in to root out treachery.

CHARACTERS

"One man with a gun can control 100 without one."

V I Lenin

As previously stated, all of the characters in a group are representatives of the Peoples Armed Investigatory Committee (PAIC), a 'Travelling Soviet' as it's known. They are not-so-secret policemen who travel from place to place, rooting out so-called enemies of the people and making sure that towns, villages, camps, ships, suburbs and military establishments all tow the proper party line. But not everyone does tow the party line, even those within the PAIC.

Name

Pick a name for your character. It should be something you'll be comfortable with and happy to use throughout the game. Below are a few common Soviet names, to help you get started. Don't think of this as an exhaustive list, merely a few suggestions.

Male first names: Aleksandr, Andrei, Anatoly, Boris, Dimitri, Filipp, Grigori, Ivan, Konstantin, Maxim, Mikhail, Nicolai, Pavel, Pyotr, Sergei, Vasily, Viktor, Vladimir, Yegor, Yevgeni.

Female first names: Alina, Anna, Dariya, Dina, Galina, Irina, Klara, Larisa, Lidiya, Mariya, Oksana, Olga, Polina, Svetlana, Tatiyana, Valentina. Valeriya, Yekaterina, Yelena, Zinaida

Surnames: Berezovsky, Borisenko, Chistiakov, Chukov, Gorbachev, Kazakov, Malikov, Mikoyan, Nikitin, Popov, Radimov, Rodimtsev, Rohklin, Shalimov, Sherikov, Timoshenko, Volsky, Yakovlev, Yezhov, Zhdanov

Ideology

The Ideology of your character is extremely important. It will have a major impact on the way the character views the world, how they react to situations and how others might perceive them.

There are four basic ideologies, so choose one:

Hard-line

The hard-line ideology strictly follows the creed of the Party, obeying it in every way, not moving one in inch. Absolutely loyalty and ruthless efficiency are demanded. Hard-liners believe that all personal freedom of thoughts and action should be subsumed into the greater whole of the State.

Moderate

Moderates are viewed with disdain by their hard-line brethren. While they still believe in the goals and aims of the Party, they are neither as dogmatic nor as harsh as hard-liners. They believe that a limited amount of personal freedom is good and beneficial to the people.

Reformer

Reformers rarely admit to their leanings, even moderates view reformers as perilously close to traitors and enemies of the people. Reformers seek radical change within the USSR, looking to give greater power to the people or even introducing certain capitalistic ideas. They see the current State as corrupt and bureaucratic, or intrusive and overbearing, or even as a force for evil.

Enemy

Enemies are permanently on the lookout for the possibility of being found out. They are totally against the State and everything that it stands for and they seek to bring it down, either through their own internal efforts or by encouraging the efforts of others.

All players must choose an ideology for their characters and stick with it. They may not have to reveal their ideology to begin with (in some cases it's better not to), but they should keep it at the forefront of their mind when playing the character.

Attributes, Traits, Secrets and Suspicions

Characters are defined by who they are and what they do. In a game sense, they're also defined by Attributes, Traits, Secrets and Suspicions. How you go about getting these is by assigning varying points to each. The number of points you have depends on which of the three basic options you choose for your character:

Youthful Pioneer

Youthful and vigorous, you are sandy haired, broad-shouldered hope for the future of the Soviet Union. You have little in the way of history, but brim with ideals and enthusiasm.

Attributes: 11

Traits: 9

Secrets: 6

Man/Woman of the People

Your youthful years are behind you, but you still retain a great deal of vigour and courage. You are well rounded, with a good balance of all the aspects needed to give effective service to the people.

Attributes: 9

Traits: 12

Secrets: 8

Old Guard

A stalwart of Party and State, you have been involved since your teenage years and despite not being as fast or strong as you used to be, you still give valuable service to the people.

Attributes: 7

Traits: 15

Secrets: 10

Attributes

There are three attributes, all ranging from 1 to 5. Attributes are bought on a point for point basis. The three attributes are:

Belief: This represents your strength of will, your ability to withstand the ideological attacks of others and your belief in your own particular ideological stance.

Form: This represents the physical aspects of the character, combining strength, speed, agility, dexterity and so forth.

Judgement: This represents native intelligence, cunning, education and awareness.

Once you've assigned points to each Attribute, you need to note one thing that your character does particularly well with each attribute and one thing they do particularly badly with each attribute. For example, the character of Vladimir Konev may look like this:

Belief: 4

Determined during political arguments

Prone to the temptations of women

Form: 2

Is agile and sure footed

Lacks raw physical strength

Judgement: 3

Excellent grasp of mathematical principles

Has poor situational awareness

Traits

Traits are skills, abilities, talents and knacks that the character has learned. The character could have been born with them, may have picked them up through practice, learned through study, received training or whatever manner is appropriate.

Traits can range in value from 1 to 3, in the similar manner as attributes. 3 is an exceptionally good score to have in anything, something really out of the ordinary. As well as writing down

what a particular trait is, the player should also note how or why (or a combination of these) the character gained the trait, why they are good at it and so on and so forth.

Sample Traits

Excellent Speaking Voice (was trained to enunciate and sing from an early age by a musically inclined Aunt)

Hand-to-Hand Combat (was a member of the boxing team while at school and technical college)

Intimidating Presence (has a piercing stare and aura of power)

Knowledge of the Party Line (father drove him to study the basic texts every day and quote passages by rote)

Pistoleer (was taught the basic use and maintenance of a pistol during her time in the Red Army)

Don't make traits too broad; just having a trait called 'Guns' is way too broad and should be seriously narrowed down.

Secrets & Relationships

Everyone has secrets, relationships, private thoughts and so forth. In the Secrets & Relationships section, players should note down any relationships the character might have, any dark thoughts or events from their past that could impinge on their future. You can choose to have relationships with other characters in the group, if you wish. Like attributes and traits, they can range from 1 to 3, with 3 being a secret that is hugely significant to the character. If someone can find out your secrets or who you care about, then they could have a lot of influence over you, denounce you in front of your comrades or, just perhaps, form a better opinion of you.

Sample Secrets & Relationships

Has fallen in love with fellow PAIC member

Passed secrets to an enemy agent

Has a drug addiction

Violently hates an influential Party member

Believes in the guiding power of spirits

Suspicious

Suspicious don't have values like attributes, traits and secrets. Suspicious are what you think of the other characters, the people you meet during the course of a game and people you might have met in the past. When starting a game, write down the names and positions of couple (or possibly more) people your character might have met in the past, as well as the names of the other characters in your group. Jot down what your character thinks about these people.

Equipment

The Gun

Pick some equipment for your character, paying special attention to their sidearm. The sidearm of a member of a Travelling Soviet of the PAIC is both a weapon and a badge of authority. Some sidearms may be old and worn through years of heavy use, perhaps during wartime. Other may be shining, pristine and new, covered in a thin film of oil from the factory. Assign a value of between 1 and 3 for the gun and describe it. The higher the value, the more intimidating, impressive or historically significant it is, so the higher the value, the more story you have to invent for it. So make up a story for the gun, just as you would for a character.

Other Equipment

Other items of equipment are also rated from 1 to 3. The higher the value, the newer, more impressive, larger or of higher value the item is. While it may be very advantageous to have items of equipment all with high stats, this would arouse the suspicion of your comrades. Why does this woman have such a clean uniform, smart leather belt, soft new boots and new digital binoculars? Is she speculating on the black market? Has she been stealing from the people? Too much good equipment can give rise to suspicion, so be warned.

In addition, take into account your ideology when assigning equipment. A hard-liner is liable to be much more austere than a moderate or reformer. An enemy is likely to be inconspicuous so as not to draw attention to herself. Take note of this for your character.

Character Creation Notes

You might have noticed there are no actual numbers associated with your Ideology and Suspicions. This is entirely deliberate. It's up to the player to decide how much of an impact these make on the character and what they truly are. It's vital that as a player, you have a firm grasp on what you want your character to be, the stance you want them to take. And to my mind, this is best served by simply describing these aspects, not adding another set of numbers to the equation.

Sample Character

Kristina Kotelnikov

Ideology: Hard-line

Option: Old Guard

Attributes

Belief: 4

Resolute conviction in matters ideological
Scared of theological debate which she sees as treacherous

Form: 1

Physically weak due to ongoing lung disease
Quite dextrous and nimble

Judgement: 2

Is very aware of her surroundings at all times
Quite a slow learner

Traits

Fast-talking	3 (Naturally quick on the uptake in conversation)
Navigation	2 (Grew up in the Siberian wastes and quickly had to learn how to navigate using map and compass)
Pistol	3 (Trains regularly on the firing ranges, likes to keep her eye in)
Oratory	3 (Used to speak at committee meetings for her local area and once had to speak in front of the Supreme Soviet when she was 16)
Sense lies	2 (An uncanny talent for telling when people are not being entirely truthful)
Superior eyesight	1 (Has naturally good visual acuity)
Machinist	1 (Metalworking skills learned at her mothers side)

Secrets & Relationships

Had a sexual relationship with a man who was later executed as an enemy of the people and she fears such a situation happening again 3

She has been suffering from kleptomania for a number of years 2

Shot and killed a fellow PIAC officer on her last mission 3

Has a phobia about spiders 2

Equipment

Kristina's gun is rated at 2. It is an ancient Tokarev automatic pistol, not a powerful weapon, but one patinaed with age and hard use. It was handed down to her by her Great Grandfather, who had many occasions to use it. Filed into the slide are the words: 'Berlin, 1945'.

CONFLICT AND CHANGE

“There are no morals in politics; there is only expedience.”

V I Lenin

Conflict will be rife in ‘Defenders of the Union’. Conflict between the characters, between them and the people they meet, between everyone. Conflict does not necessarily refer to a physically violent situation; conflict is any situation where two or more people have opposing views and wish to see different outcomes from a situation.

When running conflicts, you’ll need a bunch of six-sided dice, commonly referred to as D6.

At the outset of a conflict, you get a number of D6 equal to a pair of Attributes or, in the case of ideological conflicts, twice the value of your Belief.

For verbal conflicts, you use Belief and Judgement

For ideological conflicts, you use Belief x 2

For physical conflicts, you use Judgement and Form

At the outset of a conflict, each party must state that they are attempting to achieve in that conflict: what is their goal, what do they want the outcome to be? This outcome should serve to drive the story forward in some way, not hinder it or drive down a dead end.

At the start of a conflict, you roll a number of dice, as noted above. At this stage, each player must narrate exactly what their character is doing, what they are saying and how they are acting. If a player (or the GM for that matter) rolls the dice without narrating, then they must remove the lowest and highest dice that they have rolled (e.g.: A player rolls without any attempt at narration and gets a 2, 4, 4, 5 and 6. They would have to discard the 2 and 6 because they failed to narrate). Narration means much more than simply going “I tell Velikovsky that he is wrong!”, there must be more action, drama and input into it than that.

After the initial die roll, keep the dice in front of you and tot up the total value showing. At this stage, one side can give up in the conflict, admitting defeat and backing down. In this case, the character that did not back down wins the conflict and gets the outcome that they wanted.

However, you don’t just get dice for your attributes, you can also get extra dice for appropriate traits and secrets. If you can narrate a trait or secret into the ongoing conflict, then you get a number of extra dice equal to the value of that trait or secret.

So, further narration and die rolling is now possible. A player can narrate a trait or secret into the game and roll further dice, adding them to the total in front of them. Again, if they fail to adequately narrate, they must remove the highest and lowest dice (removing the highest if they only rolled 2 dice and getting nothing of they just rolled one die).

This process is known as escalation. Escalation involves ramping up the conflict to the next level. It may involve grabbing the opponent, using a piece of equipment or, in the ultimate escalation, drawing and potentially using your gun. When the conflict attains a physical dimension, the player who has undertaken physical action gets to roll a number of dice equal to his or her Form (if Form has not already been used, i.e.: the conflict did not start out at the physical level).

Now, this is all fine and well but at some point someone is going to pull a gun if they feel things aren't going their way. You'll remember that guns have a rating, just like traits, secrets and other bits of equipment. However, in a conflict you get to roll a number of dice equal to double rating of your gun if you choose to pull it and use it, otherwise you just get a number of dice equal to the rating. If you just pulled the gun and then later in the conflict, you get to roll the same rating again (so in total you get double the rating in terms of dice). This means that guns are a pretty good way to leap into the lead of a conflict but it also means that the consequences (see below) are going to be much, much nastier.

At any point, a player can also choose to have their character back out of a conflict. This is especially wise if it looks like things aren't going their way; things could get unnecessarily violent or dangerous. As you can always see what your opponents running total of dice is, that's a pretty good indicator of how well you are doing. If they back out of a conflict, their opponent is the victor and their aims in the conflict are fulfilled. However, as they backed out at a moment of their own choosing, they get to add an additional die to their initial pool of dice for the next conflict. So sometimes it can be beneficial to back out at the right time.

Consequences

Any conflict is going to give rise to consequences. These are the effects that a conflict has on the character. Consequences are different for the winning and losing characters in any conflict.

Consequences aren't arbitrarily assigned; you get to choose them. Pick from the tables below and apply consequences that you feel was appropriate to the conflict.

Losing – Verbal and Ideological conflicts

Gain a new relationship with the person who just bested you. This may well be negative or it could be a new-found respect.

When in the vicinity of the character that just bested you, you must act in a manner according to their ideology.

Gain a new Trait at level 1, appropriate to what just took place

Gain a new Secret & Relationship at level 1 with the character that just bested you

Losing – Violent conflicts (not using guns)

Consequences arising out of violence require a few extra dice to be brought into play. Roll your Form versus whatever hit you, using the rating of a bit of equipment or the Form of the opposing character if they were punching, kicking and generally striking you.

If you manage to exceed the opposing die roll, then choose from the following consequences:

Lose a point from an Attribute.

Lose an appropriate Trait, e.g.: the opposing character smashed you in the kneecaps with a sledgehammer and you have a Trait entitled 'Fast runner', it would be entirely appropriate to lose that trait.

Gain an appropriate trait. This could be something along the lines of 'Hatred for Red Army officers' if you just received a brutal beating from, surprisingly, a Red Army officer.

If you don't manage to exceed the die roll, then choose from these consequences:

Gain a level 2 relationship with the character that just bested you. And without a doubt, this is most likely to be negative.

Lose two points from any attributes, although one of these points must be deducted from Form.

Lose 1 point from an Attribute and gain a relationship (again, most likely to be negative) with the character who just bested you.

Losing – Violent conflicts (using guns)

In all cases (as with violent conflicts not using guns), there's an extra bit of die rolling required here. Roll your Form versus the rating of the gun, or twice the rating of the gun if the opposing character really was trying to shoot you dead. Tot up the dice and if you manage to exceed the total rolled for the gun, then you get the following result:

Lose 2 points from any attributes (this may be applied to one or two attributes, but one must be from Form).

If you didn't manage to exceed the total for the gun, then the following occurs:

The character is dying or quite possibly dead. Without some kind of medical attention, they will most certainly die. There's also the chance for the dying or dead character to narrate a dramatically appropriate death scene. Death scenes should have impact and drama, perhaps involving a character's ideology, secrets and relationships.

Winning – All conflicts

If you win a conflict, choose something from the following list that is narratively appropriate to what went on. Don't just pick something that makes your character 'better'; pick something that advances the story and gives your character another dimension.

Gain a new Trait at level 1

Gain a new Secret & Relationship at level 1

Increase an Attribute by 1 level

THE GROUNDS OF CONFLICT

“No amount of political freedom will satisfy the hungry masses.”

V I Lenin

In order for the Travelling Soviet of the PAIC to have something to do, there's a need to create a place for them to go. There must always be a reason why they have been sent there, whether it is to shake things up, to investigate supposed wrongdoing, to arrest a known enemy of the people and so on and so forth. By following the guidelines given below, it's reasonably easy to come up with an outline of the place, its people and all the machinations that are swirling beneath the surface.

It's entirely acceptable and good to involve the players in this stage of the creation of adventure and conflict. Let them have input into the place, its people and what is going on. You can even let them decide everything down to the slightest detail. The excitement and fun in 'Defenders of the Union' will come from the conflict and the consequences of this.

What is the place?

What exactly is the place that the Travelling Soviet will be visiting? Where is it located and what function does it serve? There follows a list of potential locations for 'Defenders of the Union' adventures:

Camp, town, village, scientific establishment, city, ship, Red Army base, city block, suburb, factory, mine, etc.

Is the place located by the sea? In the tundra? Up a mountain? In a desert? On a river? What is its physical location, what is the weather like, what time of year is it, and what physical aspect does it present to the world?

What is the dominant ideology?

Which of the four ideological viewpoints outlined in the character creation section is the one which holds the most sway in this place? This isn't to say that other ideological viewpoints aren't present, they most certainly will be. But which one is in the ascendant the moment: hard-line, moderate, reforming or enemy?

Who is in charge?

What are the force like who run this particular place and how much do they subscribe to the dominant ideology? Does the dominant ideology flow from them or are they in conflict with it? Make up names and personalities for those in charge, as they are likely to be key players in conflicts. Those in charge might be a camp boss, an elected Soviet, a ranking military officer, a secret police official, a senior scientist, etc.

What is the supposed problem?

What is the outward problem that the Travelling Soviet is being sent to investigate? There will always be a reason, no matter how tenuous, that they are sent to a particular place. Even if this is an invention of their political masters, they will always have a reason for being there. Is there any truth in the supposed problem? Is it totally false? How does it relate to the real problem (if indeed there is one)?

What is the real problem?

Underneath everything, what are the real problems and conflicts at the location? What are the secrets, lies, treacheries and hatreds? What is going on beneath the surface? Who is responsible for this? What are their ideologies and motivations?

An example location: Munitions Factory 103 Vladivostok

What is the place?

Munitions Factory 103 Vladivostok sits about thirty miles north-west of the port of Vladivostok at the extreme eastern end of the USSR. It employs a workforce of well over two thousand people, making explosive shells for the mass driver cannons of the great ships of the Red Pacific Fleet, based in Vladivostok. It also manufactures warheads for a variety of missiles.

The main factory area is a series of squat, slab sided concrete and armour steel bunkers, surrounded by a high electrofence and a number of gauss weapon equipped gun towers festooned with sensors. Outside the wire sit workers apartment blocks, whitewashed despite the harsh environment, with clean streets and well swept staircases.

The entire place sits in a broad valley with a narrow stream winding lazily through it. However, it's wintertime and the valley is blanketed in snow many feet deep, with only a rare stunted tree poking up through the drifts.

What is the dominant ideology?

The dominant ideology in Munitions Factory 103 is moderate. It is a relatively happy place on the surface, with a highly acceptable standard of living.

Who is in charge?

Almost all decisions in the factory are taken by the five person Elected Soviet, advised by the senior engineers, technicians and scientists. They are also 'advised' by Major Tolbuhkin (who is resolutely hard-line) of the State Security Directorate, the senior State representative at the factory.

The current peoples Soviet is made up of the following individuals:

Dr Anatoly Karpenko (engineer, moderate ideology)
Dr Larina Domodyevo (chemist, moderate ideology)
Technician Ivan Bulganin (repairman, hard-line ideology)
Teresa Valentinov (cleaner, reforming ideology)
Ivana Chernyenko (school teacher, moderate reforming ideology)

Bulganin constantly argues with everyone. Valentinov and Chernyenko have a personal dislike for each other, despite their similar political outlooks. Karpenko and Domodyevo have professional respect for each other, but are somewhat aloof. Tolbuhkin keeps a beady and suspicious eye on everyone.

What is the supposed problem?

The Red Pacific Fleet has reported that cannon shells it has been sent for training use have been failing to detonate on target or have been suspiciously jamming in the guns. This has

lead to a belief that someone at Munitions Factory 103 (which supplied the shells) is conducting sabotage, a highly serious matter.

What is the real problem?

Chernyenko is far more radical than she lets on. She has been indoctrinating selected members of her school class with her reformist ideas in the hope of changing the political balance within Munitions Factory 103. Her eventual hope is that there will be radical change.

Tolbhulkin is teetering on the edge of madness. He has taken a liking to Chernyenko, but she has so far spurned his advances. He's responsible for several 'punitive executions' in outlying villages in the area, executions that took place because the local women refused his advances. He's a violent sexual predator, albeit one who keeps a calm exterior.

NOT HERE, GRATITUDE AND ADMISSIONS

So, my first attempt at writing an RPG in 24 hours. I must admit to having been very impressed by the standard set by the previous 2 months of 'Ronnies' entrants, so there was a certain amount of trepidation on my part. Dragon, mud, gun and Soviet were this month's choice of words. Did this immediately inspire me? Actually, no. I tend to take a while to come up with ideas for games. But on the train in to Edinburgh this morning, it popped into my head that I didn't need to write something that was all high-concept gee-whizzery and fancy shenanigans. Something simple. Soviet? Gun? Why not just have a bunch of Soviet secret policemen investigating different towns, institutions and locations around the USSR, attempting to uncover treason and enemies. And why not throw in the fact that they might not be whiter than white themselves. Yeah, it's not fancy and it's not high concept, but it did it for me.

Why this particular game? Well, the Cold War, the Soviet Union and history in general has always fascinated me. So, why not do a game that involves some elements of this. So I did. Ideally, I'd like to expand the setting and background a lot. It's very situation focussed at the moment, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but could do with more detail and fluff to make it the kind of game that I would rush out and buy.

However, the basic concept itself excites me. I'd like to play a feared secret policeman engaging in furious ideological debates, with the potential for violence just around the corner. I'd like to see my character tramping across the frozen Siberian tundra in the shadow of a shining white monorail line, following the bright trail of blood laid down by his wounded opponent. Now time is ticking down and I should really have spent this time writing more for the game, but sometimes its good to just write down a note of what you didn't have time to get in and hope to do in the future. Not as any form of justification, more as an *aide memoire* for further drafts.

So hands in the air, a lot of this sees the influence of other games: 'Over The Edge', 'Trollbabe', 'Dogs In The Vineyard' and so on. A lot of this is inspired by their systemic elements, why reinvent the wheel?

And vitally, what has been left out? Well, there aren't any rules for conflicts between more than two people. The setting is somewhat more vague than I'd like it to be (more background, more history, more flavour and colour in future versions I think) and the basic system needs a bit of tweaking to get it to a truly workable stage. I'd also like to do a lot more with ideologies and their impact on play, but sadly time is against me on that one.

Still, I'm relatively pleased for a 24-hour effort.

Cheers
Malcolm

Falkirk, Scotland, 09/11/05

Some Useful References & Reading

'Capital' by Karl Marx

'Gulag' by Anne Applebaum

'The Making of Modern Russia' by Lionel Kochan

'Perestroika' by Mikhail Gorbachev

'The Red Star' (comic) by Christian Gossett et al

'Stalingrad' by Anthony Beevor

'The Trial' by Franz Kafka

'What Is To be Done?' by V I Lenin