

Operation LINSEED WATERBUG

By mellonbread

Then there was a stroke in which there was no hesitation. His manhood came away in his hand, looking like the offal from a butcher's shop when he held it up. Someone took it from him and laid it upon the fallen altar, and he stood with legs wide apart, bleeding like a woman—or, rather, like a bull when it is made an ox. The others made him lie on the ground and stanced his flow with cobwebs and moss.

“Now hear me,” Mother Ge said. She straightened her back, and it seemed that a great light shone there. a light from which her body shielded us. “This man is sacred to me as long as he lives”

Gene Wolfe, *Soldier of the Mist*

A GRU SV8 Scenario by mellonbread

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Playtested with the invaluable assistance of the users at r/nightattheopera

THE TRUTH

Sgt. Koba Korolov and his squad of ultranationalist pagan paramilitaries have descended on a hidden chamber in a 14th century Ukrainian church near Donetsk. They believe it holds a secret rite which will let them commune with a great goddess of the earth, granting them magnificent powers. In a way, they are correct: the crypt holds a series of Skoptsy religious paintings. And with them, the secret to the *great seal* which will summon the Magna Mater.

Too bad for everyone, one of his soldiers bragged about it on the internet and got SV8's attention.

THE BRIEFING

A Facebook posting by a Ukrainian paramilitary fighter in the Donbass region has caught our attention. According to Cpl Miroslav Radomir, he was visiting the recently shelled *Cathedral of Saint Origen* in a suburb of Donetsk, outside the rebel-held city itself. A pro-Russian mortar strike had collapsed part of the floor, breaking open a hidden crypt beneath the church. Radomir posted photos of some art he found in the basement, which got SV8's attention.

Photos of Destroyed Cathedral of Saint Origen - Bastard Russians!

In Ukrainian (mutually intelligible with Russian)

The images resemble 14th century Orthodox iconography, but depict a story not found in any Christian text. A village is looted by Mongols. Its church is burned, its people are massacred and its priest is crucified. The crucified priest speaks to a robe and hooded figure. A painting is just barely visible, in the edge of the last photo. The priest is trampling on a cross. The fleshy thigh of something enormous and round is poking into the frame.

Most of the comments on the post were decrying the barbarism of the insurgents for attacking such a historic site.

The Mission: The Agents are to reconnoiter the site, recover information and artifacts, and deny the aforementioned to the enemy.

Researching Online: Examining Cpl Radomir's account, he is a member of Azov Battalion, a pro-Ukraine paramilitary force made notorious by its shocking iconography and occasional allegations of torturing and murdering civilians. When the Kremlin accused the Euromaidan protesters of being Nazis, they were talking about these guys. His squad leader is Sgt Koba Korolov.

Miroslav is not actually an Orthodox Christian. His feigned outrage at the separatist artillery strike is intended to paint the pro-Russia faction in a bad light and score cheap political points.

An Agent with the Forensics or Artillery skill will notice that the hole in the church floor was not made by a mortar round. It looks like someone smashed it open with a sledgehammer.

"Saint" Origen is not actually a Saint, but was a real world Christian theologian from the 3rd century. The cathedral is named so as part of a long standing tradition of local religious leaders ascribing sainthood to non canonized religious figures (such as folk saints in Latin America). Players who investigate his biography (they can do this in real life) will discover an interesting detail: rumors persisted throughout Origen's life that he had castrated himself to secure entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE DONBASS

The Donbass is a region in Eastern Ukraine. Since 2014, pro-Russian rebels in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk have seceded from Ukraine. The resulting protostates are now engaged in a civil war with Ukrainian government forces and paramilitaries. Though all parties have ostensibly agreed to a ceasefire, both sides intermittently shell one another and exchange small arms fire.

Life goes on in the city of Donetsk, which is now in the hands of separatists and ruled by a Moscow-backed puppet government. Grad rockets and other artillery have destroyed large parts of the city, but the massive barrages of 2015 are thankfully a thing of the past. Civilian communities in between the rebel-held city and Ukrainian lines to the West act as a “no man’s land”. Both government and separatist forces have set up checkpoints and patrols to control the movement of civilians between zones, but this does not stop everyone.

Agents can disguise themselves as civilians fairly easily. Obviously they cannot openly carry weapons while doing so. Soldiers may challenge them, requiring persuasion or some other expedient to get by.

Operating openly as representatives of the Russian government, the Agents can move and act freely in rebel-held areas. They obviously cannot do the same in Ukrainian held sectors.

Anything the Agents do to make themselves look more like pro-government fighters will make separatists more likely to shoot at them, and vice versa.

SOLDIER - Use for both Rebels and Ukrainians

STR 12, CON 12, DEX 12, INT 12, POW 12, CHA 12
HP 12, WP 12, SAN 55

Skills: Alertness 50%, Artillery 40%, Athletics 50%, Bureaucracy 30%, Drive 40%, Firearms 40%, First Aid 40%, Heavy Weapons 40%, Military Science (Land) 40%, Navigate 40%, Persuade 30%, Unarmed Combat 50%

Armor: Helmet and kevlar vest (4 Armor)

Attacks: AK Pattern Rifle (D12 or 10% lethality, 3 AP)
Frag Grenade (70%, 10% lethality)

One man each in a squad might have
RPG (60%, 30% lethality, 20 AP, 1 shot before reloading)
PKM (40%, 15% lethality, 5 AP)

BTR or BRDM - Soviet era APC used by both sides

HP 60, Armor 20
KPV Machine Gun (NPC crew has 40% to hit, 20% lethality, 5 AP)

A Word on Language and Disguises: Ukrainian and Russian are mutually intelligible, but distinct languages. Russian is spoken often enough in the Donbass (in some areas it is the majority language) that an Agent will not be out of place speaking it, even in Ukrainian controlled sectors. The Disguise or Foreign Language: Ukrainian skills will allow an Agent to pass as a native speaker. Physically disguising themselves as Azov Battalion or other Ukrainian Loyalists is the easy part - their iconography and battledress are posted all over the internet.

Crossing the Border: There are two ways to get across the border between the separatist and government controlled regions. There are designated “humanitarian corridors” where civilians can move through from one side to the other. Anyone moving through such a checkpoint could be searched, meaning any weapons must be well concealed (or guards handsomely bribed) and the Agents must not look like Russians (or Ukrainians, if they’re coming the other way).

The other way in is to cross the no-man’s-land between the lines. This is certainly faster and offers more freedom of movement, but is a great way to get shot at if the Agents run into a patrol. They might be pinned down by a sniper or shelled by one side or the other if they aren’t careful.

THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT ORIGEN

The Cathedral is located in a Western suburb of Donetsk, now on the front-line of the pro Ukraine forces. It is a four pier white limestone and brick Orthodox church from the 14th century. Its belfry provides an excellent view of the surrounding landscape, including the outskirts of Donetsk proper in the East. Thanks to a couple separatist mortar rounds, there is a hole in the dome and part of the nave wall has collapsed. An Agent with Alertness or Military Science will note that the structure is currently occupied - armed men in fatigues can be seen moving around inside. A search of the surrounding area will confirm this. A KrAZ MPV (a Ukrainian MRAP analogue) is parked in the alley between a couple nearby buildings.

KrAZ MPV - Ukrainian MRAP

HP 60, Armor 20

KPV Machine Gun (20% lethality, 5 AP)

Inside, a couple of the stained glass windows are intact, but most were shattered by the pressure of the mortar blast. In the rear, the Sanctuary sits empty. The priests removed the icons and crucifix when the shelling started. The place is now littered with bedrolls, clothing, ammunition and other detritus associated with the soldiers staying there.

There is a hole in the floor, leading down into a dark basement or crypt below. An Agent with the Forensics or Artillery skill will notice that the hole was not made by a mortar round. It looks like someone smashed it open with a sledgehammer.

The Azov Battalion Squad: An ultranationalist unit of the Ukrainian National Guard, this eight man squad is currently billeted in the church. During the day, one will be on watch in the Belfry, one will be on watch at ground level, and D6 will be out on patrol elsewhere - leaving the remainder inside the church. At night, one or two men will be on watch while the rest sleep.

Around their fellow Azov Guards, other Ukrainian forces, or civilians, the squad acts like normal people. They wear fatigues and body armor, and when raiding they don black balaclavas. They are ardent Ukrainian nationalists, and one is an actual Nazi. Publicly, all are followers of *Rodnoveri*, a type of Slavic neopaganism. Privately, they are followers of Sgt. Korolov's private brand of the religion.

Sgt. Koba Kivovich Korolov is a short, muscular, wily man. How he learned of the secret tomb beneath the Cathedral is up to the handler to decide. Maybe he heard about the black icons from a *bratva* contact in the States. Perhaps the Black Monk showed it to him in a dream. If you're interested in running more games about the Skoptsy and Shub Niggurath, this is one way to make the connection. Currently, Korolov's ambition is to get the ancient Rus characters on the paintings in the crypt translated. He dreams of a new world of eldritch power at his fingertips, bestowed on him by the Goddess.

SGT Koba Korolov - Aspiring Beloved of Mat Syra Zemlya

STR 13, CON 13, DEX 12, INT 12, POW 12, CHA 9

HP 13, WP 12, SAN 46, Disorder: Skoptic Syndrome

Skills: Alertness 50%, Artillery 40%, Athletics 50%, Bureaucracy 30%, Drive 40%, Firearms 40%, First Aid 40%, Heavy Weapons 40%, Military Science (Land) 40%, Navigate 40%, Persuade 30%, Unarmed Combat 50%, Unnatural 3%

Armor: Helmet and kevlar vest (4 Armor)

Attacks: AK Pattern Rifle (D12 or 10% lethality, 3 AP)

Frag Grenade (70%, 15% lethality)

Besides Sgt. Korolov, there are seven soldiers in the Azov squad. Between them, they have six AKs, a PKM General Purpose Machine Gun, an RPG, and about two dozen hand grenades.

AZOV SOLDIERS - Seven almost-cultists

STR 12, CON 12, DEX 12, INT 12, POW 12, CHA 12

HP 12, WP 12, SAN 55

Skills: Alertness 50%, Artillery 40%, Athletics 50%, Bureaucracy 30%, Drive 40%, Firearms 40%, First Aid 40%, Heavy Weapons 40%, Military Science (Land) 40%, Navigate 40%, Persuade 30%, Unarmed Combat 50%

Armor: Helmet and kevlar vest (4 Armor)

Attacks: AK Pattern Rifle (D12 or 10% lethality, 3 AP)

Frag Grenade (70%, 15% lethality)

One RPG (60%, 30% lethality, 20 AP, 1 shot before reloading)

One PKM (40%, 15% lethality, 5 AP)

Koba and his men will be friendly with pro-Ukrainian visitors, and guarded but still cordial towards unaffiliated civilians. Agents with archaeological or anthropological knowledge will be asked for help translating the pictures in the crypt.

There is a wireless router in the MPV parked in the alley, which the soldiers have tethered their internet enabled devices to. Korolov leaves his laptop in the church when he isn't using it. If you want to seed details for where he heard about the secret tomb, this is the place to do it. Otherwise, his hard drive is full of unconventional pornography featuring genital mutilation and "unbirthing".

The Crypt: The crypt is one large room, with a ceiling about twelve feet high at the tallest. Access is possible by climbing down a rope the soldiers hung down from the church above. The curved ceiling is held up by four pillars and the space is wide open. The room does not look like it has been opened in about 200 years, until Korolov and friends broke it open.

A thorough search in good lighting will show that the stone tiles of the floor are scuffed by the passage of hundreds of feet in a circular motion. (The cultists that once occupied this place would dance in feats of religious ecstasy during rituals). In the center of the room is a section of stone floor, distinct from the stone tiles and much older. It is stained with old blood.

Observant Agents will notice that there is a passage out of the room in one of the corners. It leads to the overgrown foundations of a destroyed house, which conceal an escape hatch. The cultists that once occupied this place built this tunnel to allow for egress from their temple, in case they were ever found by religious authorities.

There are paintings on the wall of the crypt, the same ones Cpl Radomir photographed and posted on the internet. The five paintings depict a sequence of events:

1. A priest is proselytizing among the medieval Kievan Rus
2. Mongol warriors sack the town, slaughtering the villagers and crucifying the priest
3. As the priest dangles on the X shaped cross, a black figure appears before him
4. The black figure speaks to the priest, the priest tramples on a Bible
5. The priest engages in coitus with a huge faceless female figure

The figure resembles a kind of stone-age fertility goddess, like the Venus of Willhelmsdorf: a huge faceless female figure with a fecund belly and pendulous breasts. Careful inspection will note that the man has no genitals in the fifth image.

The paintings are accompanied by text, in ancient Rus. A Russian or Ukrainian speaker with the right knowledge of Anthropology or Archaeology could decipher it: summoning the Magna Mater requires her supplicants to sacrifice their genitals in a grisly rite of self-castration: the “great seal”. The reward: a wondrous transformation into one of the Goddess’ blessed children. The text and images together provide instructions for performing this ritual.

The Azov cultists looked at the paintings in the crypt and saw “indigenous White resistance to Mongol domination” - a parallel to Ukraine’s current struggle against the “Tatar hordes of the East” (similarities between ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians notwithstanding). The priest in the image abandons his belief in the crucified god and embraces a pagan goddess - flattering the Azov belief in *Rodnover*, the old faith. They identify the fertility goddess as Mokosh or Mat Syra Zemlya, the “Damp Mother Earth” of Slavic lore. They are trying to decipher the ancient-Rus writing on the paintings so that they can perform the ritual of communion with her. They are not fully aware of what lies in store for them.

THE GREAT SEAL

Elaborate Ritual, 1D10 SAN to learn; +2% Unnatural

This grotesque act of mass sexual self mutilation pierces the veil between our world and the infinite biological possibilities of the Magna Mater. Shouting and yelling and screaming in a glossolalia that spreads like wildfire through them, the participants sing and dance and amputate their own genitals. When this repulsive bloodrite reaches a fever pitch, the Goddess descends into our reality, lured by the offer of life giving organs and energy. The cultists toss their severed bits into the waiting maws of Shub Niggurath. The Goddess slurps down the goodies, then the cultist themselves. Into her loving orifices they go, laughing and wailing until nothing can be heard but the squelching and grinding of her many mouths.

Then, they are regurgitated from her many wombs.

And they are changed.

The beings which the Magna Mater disgorges are special to her: the Gof'nn Hupadgh. Gnarled and twisted, they shuffle and hop to their feet on mangled hooves, thinking only to serve their mistress - to live and die for the smallest chance at ever feeling her loving embrace again. Shub Niggurath departs, with the promise that she will return to taste her beloved children again, if only they bring her further offerings.

The summoning ritual costs 110 WP, split among the participants. But each participant who castrates himself (if male) or circumcises herself (if female) reduces the WP cost by 5. In addition to the SAN cost of actually seeing Magna Mater (D10/D100), undertaking the Great Seal costs D20 SAN. Thanks to their fit of trance-like religious ecstasy, willing participants are not subject to the temporary insanity rules while they complete the ritual.

- A newly birthed Gof'nn Hupadgh Shub Niggurath (Blessed of Shub Niggurath) automatically gains a Disorder: Addiction to immersion in the Goddess' womb. Each day they do not indulge this craving costs 1/D4 SAN.
- The transformation grants 6 POW and 6 CON, but costs 6 CHA. A Gof'nn Hupadgh's legs and feet are a dead giveaway that the person is not normal, and can only be concealed under loose clothing.
- Gof'nn Hupadgh regenerate D6 hit points per round as long as they are above 0 HP, and are immune to the effects of old age.
- A Gof'nn Hupadgh can claw, bite and kick with its new, malformed appendages for D6 damage, 3 AP.
- At the Handler's discretion, rebirth as a Blessed of Shub Niggurath may grant innate knowledge of Call Forth Those From Outside (Dark Young), Exaltation of Flesh, Healing Balm, or other rituals related to Magna Mater.

Don't worry about statting up Shub Niggurath. She costs D10/D100 SAN to witness and that's all you need for this scenario. She won't even notice anyone not participating in the ritual, and unless the Agents have a 70% lethality weapon they can't hurt her. If someone were to enter one of her vagina-mouths wearing a suicide vest, that would be enough to disincorporate her (splattering everyone in the room for D6/D20 SAN) - but she goes away on her own anyway, making this a bit of a waste. Not that the Agents will necessarily know that.

THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- **Day Before the Agents Arrive:** Sgt Korolov and the Azov soldiers break open the crypt in the Cathedral of Saint Origen. Cpl Radomir posts a picture on the internet of the damaged church.
- **Day the Agents Arrive**
 - **12:00 PM:** Sgt Korolov contacts archaeologist Dr Anastasia Dorevitch, an expert in medieval Russian languages and lore who is working in the region
 - **3:00 PM:** Dr Anastasia Dorevitch arrives to translate the ancient Rus characters in the crypt
 - **6:00 PM:** Dr Dorevitch departs, having translated the characters
 - **9:00 PM:** Sgt Korolov and his men conduct the Great Seal, sacrificing their genitals to Shub Niggurath. They are reborn as Gof'nn Hupadgh
 - **Midnight:** The Gof'nn Hupadgh lope forth on cloven feet to commit unspeakable atrocities behind separatist lines on behalf of the Goddess
- **The Following Days and Weeks:** The Gof'nn Hupadgh widen their scope to loyalists and civilians. Ostensibly hunting for spies and saboteurs. All the while enticing more and more soldiers to join them in worshipping the Great Mother

Obviously, these events can be interrupted by the actions of the Agents.

The Translation: Nobody in Sgt Korolov's squad can read or speak the ancient Rus language. Unless the Agents can credibly offer their assistance, Sgt Korolov will phone a friend. Dr Anastasia Dorevitch, Professor of Anthropology at the National Academy of Sciences. A few years ago, Dr Dorevitch was observing a Perun Day celebration by a Rodnovery congregation when she met Sgt Korolov. The two occasionally correspond. Dr Dorevitch is happy to brave the dangers of the Donbass to be the first into the crypt below the church.

DR ANASTASIA DOREVITCH - Expert on medieval Christianity and Slavic Paganism

STR 10, CON 11, DEX 11, INT 14, POW 12, CHA 14

HP 11, WP 12, SAN 60

Skills: Anthropology 50%, Bureaucracy 40%, Foreign Language (Russian 50%, Turkish 40%), History 60%, HUMINT 50%, Occult 40%, Search 60%, Persuade 40%

Dr Dorevitch is in her early 40s. She is never without her satchel, which holds her notes and basic archaeological tools (gloves, brush, flashlight, etc). She needs her notebook because she is quite forgetful.

Dorevitch is an Eastern Orthodox Christian and doesn't believe in pagan magic or demons. Still, she is fascinated by the interaction between the early church and Slavic paganism, and the paintings are an amazing find for her. She won't want to leave and it will take Sgt Korolov's repeated insistence that the frontline is no place for a civilian at night to make her leave. Her affiliation with him might lead her to an unfortunate fate if he and his men are not stopped.

If something happens to Dr Dorevitch that prevents her from translating the texts, Korolov will find another translator, possibly sending them images over the internet. This will delay the process by at least a day.

The Ritual: When the time arrives, the soldiers eat a canned meal of beef, buckwheat, crispbread, and other Slavic MRE favorites. They down cocktails of painkillers and stimulants to hype themselves up, and Sgt Korolov gives a sermon about Damp Mother Earth and becoming her favored children.

Then they descend into the crypt below the church, gelding knives at the ready. Shaking with amphetamines and anticipation, they drop their pants and undertake the Great Seal. If they have obtained an accurate translation of the ritual from the paintings, their devotion is rewarded by Shub Niggurath's corporal manifestation. She seemingly fills every available space with her fecund bulk, and eagerly devours the cultists' offerings, followed by the cultists themselves.

Resolution

- The Agents can kill all the soldiers in the church before they conduct the rite of the Great Seal. This is tough, and if he's losing the fight Sgt Korolov will try to escape - possibly using the MPV. He's got photos of the paintings and can always try to get more followers and try the ritual again.
 - The Agents could provoke the insurgents and Russians into shelling the Church again by firing out of it toward Donetsk, using the tower to send signals indicating an attack is imminent, etc.
 - Persuading the separatists into launching a ground attack is harder - they would be violating the ceasefire and putting themselves at considerable risk. The Agents would have to demonstrate that the church is being used as a staging area for an attack, or some other imminent military threat.
- Anthropologists or Historians can offer to translate the words of the ritual. By giving the soldiers a phony translation, they can ensure that the soldiers' self castration does not summon the Magna Mater, leaving them incapacitated and possibly bleeding to death.
 - If the Agents proffer a translation before Sgt Korolov calls up Dr Dorevitch, he won't bother asking her to visit.
 - If they do so after he calls her, they will have to argue and convince Korolov that their translation is better.
- If the summoning goes through, the Goddess appears in the church and transforms the soldiers, as described under GREAT SEAL.
 - This makes killing them more of a chore, but also produces useful biological specimens which can be taken back to Moscow
 - If they do get into a fight and it goes badly for him, Koba will gladly surrender to the Agents, offering vast knowledge of the Goddess. The SV8 higher ups will eagerly accept this offer.