

Turn 2: 1755 (Phase II)

“You know,” Kerensky stated slowly as he directed the mules further down the road, “there was a time, not too long ago, when we were simple farmhands back in the village. It was good, clean, honest work. We did not have to worry over disposing of bodies, or hiding blasphemies from the church.”

His companion laughed before taking a long draw from a flask of vodka.

Valentin shook his head. “You mean when we were worked from dawn to dusk by that bastard we called a father and that harpy we called a mother? Yes, truly, *those were the days*. Fearing beatings from the old man and whippings from the woman while cowering in fear of the lord of the land.”

The older brother snorted. “Alright, yes, perhaps the good old days were not so good.” His mood turned sober again. “Still, I wonder what Stanislava would have thought of us, someday. Doing the devil's work as we are.”

“If there is any justice in this world or the next, our sister is with the angels. If that is the case, then we are well and truly damned. If that is not, however, then the world is damned and I would rather have a full belly, warm bed, and long life than an innocent death in some torture-prison of the father who the man who raped my sister.”

Kerensky made a thoughtful sound. “You have been listening too much, I think, to the man who pays us to do horrible things.”

Valentin rolled his eyes. “I do not work for the tsar, brother.”

“That is not what I meant and you know it,” Kerensky snapped, scowling as he turned back to calm the mules pulling their wagon. He sighed deeply. “I apologize. It... merely makes me ill at ease to add misery to this already miserable world.”

His younger brother nodded. “And I am sorry in turn. Still, godlessness or not, we are paid and kept well, which is the best wanted me such as us can hope for. If the work troubles you so, make more time for church. I have no time for an empty cross and empty words of wealthy men asking us to endure more hardship for empty promises.”

Kerensky chewed on a strip of meat pulled from his pocket for a long moment. “I think it best we put this matter behind us. Regardless of what I think of the work, it would not do us well to quarrel when out on the roads like this. Distracted travelers make for easy prey.”

“Wise words, brother. Wise words.” Valentin rubbed at his short-cut beard and considered the surrounding farms and distant treeline. “They have been sending us and many others out on journeys, some as far as Moscow. Do you know what we are supposed to find, stopping in ever pissant little village like this?”

“Things of interest to them,” Kerensky's tone indicated precisely what he thought of anything which fit the described bill. “Strange things such as we glimpsed in the basement that one time.”

Valentin shivered. "Makes sense, I suppose. Even if their money is good, they are a gang of freaks." He paused apprehensively. "What do we do if we *find* something like that?"

"Turn and run back to the city," Kerensky stated immediately. "They will pay us for the information and send others... or even go themselves if it is worth retrieving."

The younger brother passed the older his flask and grinned. "A good plan, one I can drink to."

Kerensky chuckled humorlessly. "If you are interested, I think I heard some of the them speaking on..."

## **Reconnaissance:**

### **Mythos Beasts**

*"Creatures of this category run the gamut from those with minds to those without. Regardless, they are all dangerous. Moreover, they are insidious in their ability to make homes even in populated areas. We should focus our attention on ferreting out any possibility of eldritch beasts roaming nearby. If we are lucky, perhaps we will come across some of the more useful strains which we might render down for ingredients."*

### **Rival Cults**

*"Russia, even in these 'enlightened' times, is a land of many lands. Disparate former-princedom with divided loyalties kept under the yoke of a strong central government. There is the strong possibility, if not the certainty, that other individuals with occult interests have gathered under different banners for different purposes within what we now call the empire. Perhaps our purposes align and perhaps they do not. Nevertheless, the possible threat they pose is worth looking into."*

### **Artifacts**

*"Many ages, all lost to the history of mankind, have produced innumerable pieces of eldritch lore, idols to forgotten beings sometimes falsely remembered as 'gods,' and other more esoteric fragments sequestered away from the prying eyes of the idiot rabble who would destroy them for lack of understanding. It might be vital to our groups growth to discover a cache of these artifacts."*

### **Sites**

*"Pieces of pottery? Uneducated peasants cutting throats before a mere nightgaunt? Some slaving minor abomination wandering about the forests? No, it is best to go straight to the source of all of these things. We must find a site whereupon ancient and intelligent beings made their civilization. Such a place would be of indescribable worth to any who would take and hold it. We would instantly raise our stature to that of the highest authorities within the empire!"*

### **Legends**

*"Yes, yes, all of these things are well and good, but it is pointless to go about chasing them if one hasn't the slightest clue were to look. Instead, I propose we investigate for those selfsame clues. Oftentimes it is the lowest of society who, in seeking out a meager existence, will through desperate, undercover information of value. Even if it were to have occurred generations ago, the poor have little recourse for entertainment than listening to their elders' tall tales. Therein we might find grains of truth which will lead us to what we seek."*

## **Leadership:**

### **Meritocracy**

*"It's the most reasoned and logical way to proceed, simply put. Those who possess the greatest skills in advancing our cause will, in turn, rise to lead the cause itself. Even the empire itself is run along meritocratic lines... to a certain extent, at least. If there is an issue with this system, then I would name it most particularly to be a desire for reach to exceed one's grasp. Ambition is all well and good, but it could lead to trouble if allowed to run unchecked."*

### **Hereditary Inheritance**

*"While we have adopted many new ways, some tried and true methods should not be cast aside without good cause. Selecting leaders from the families of we who founded this group would not raise eyebrows either within or without our group. It would also provide us the benefit of enhanced secrecy as it is well-known that many privileged pieces of information are passed down within groups of blood relations. Where better to hide a tree than the forest?"*

### **Oligarchy**

*"It is those who have contributed the most who should decide in what way those contributions are spent and to what ends they are directed. To that goal, I would suggest that a limited number of individuals who have proven to be of substantial means should lead. In particular, this would guarantee a greater willingness of our members to be forthcoming with resources should they be rewarded with a greater say in the actions of the group."*

### **Democratic**

*"Not that we would allow all an equal say, of course. Weight would be given according to accredited learning, accomplishments within and without the group, standing in society at large, and other factors. It would be a complicated system, yes, but one which would factor in the weight of learned people's cumulative experience. Perhaps it would be a tad slow, though, with how carefully we would need to weigh that same experience."*

### **Lottery**

*"Leadership is a burden which only those hungry for power would seek out and only those worthy would flee from. This is the unfortunate paradox which we must resolve. For this reason, then, I would suggest a strict term limit and a random selection of officials on an as-needed basis. For certain, we would occasionally select individuals who would ultimately be unsuitable, but it would ensure that no single faction or person would seize absolute control over the direction and resources available to us."*

## **Reconnaissance:**

- Mythos Beasts**
- Rival Cults**
- Artifacts**
- Sites**
- Legends**

## **Leadership:**

- Meritocracy**
- Hereditary Inheritance**
- Oligarchy**
- Democratic**
- Lottery**