THE GM'S REAL-WORLD REFERENCE
Game-Ready People, Places, and Events

Tristan Zimmerman and Joel Dalenberg
TÉNÉRÉ DESERT
BARREN, EMPTY EXpanse OF
SAND Dunes

Part of the Sahara, the Ténéré is one of the larger vacant spaces on the planet: 150,000 square miles of empty desert and blowing sand dunes.

The only real geographic feature of the Ténéré is the dunes. Much of the central part of the desert is composed of unending miles of almost perfectly straight and parallel sand dunes: mile after mile after mile of scorching yellow sand. There is almost no water here; camels must be rehydrated not at oases, but at wells, sometimes hundreds of miles apart. The rarity of water in the Ténéré is proven by how few people live there: only two towns, of perhaps two thousand inhabitants each.

Beyond the two towns, the most important landmark in the Ténéré used to be a tree. Located in a stretch of almost perfectly flat desert, the Tree of Ténéré grew beside a well. It was the only tree for hundreds of miles in any direction. The Tree, a ten-foot-tall acacia, had been known for centuries until it was knocked down by a drunken truck driver. It has since been replaced with a metal pole.

Travel in the Ténéré is done by car. Though there are no roads (and there is little worth driving to), the spaces between the parallel sand dunes make decent substitutes, as they are perfectly straight and stretch for miles. If you choose to travel by camel, you will need to carry water and grass with you, for you will find nothing for your camels to eat or drink in the Ténéré. Travel is best done around dawn and dusk, when the temperature is between the mind-killing heat of the day and the bitter cold of the night. If you must travel by day, you run a serious risk of heat stroke. You will feel the nausea, the racing heart rate, and the headache, but it will probably be one of your traveling companions who notices your flushed skin and lack of sweat.

The nomadic Tuareg people of the central Sahara do not generally live in the Ténéré, but they have a great deal of influence over the region. For centuries, the Tuareg have crossed the barren Ténéré on their camels to the tiny town of Bilma, in the middle of the desert. The Tuareg bring millet and goats from the south to trade for Bilma's dates and salt. The Tuareg then return to southern Niger to trade the valuable salt for millet, the staple of their diet. Before the arrival of the automobile, few non-Tuaregs made the trip to Bilma, and even with modern transportation, the Tuaregs still do a brisk business.

The Ténéré hasn’t always been this way. Five thousand years ago, this was a lush area, with lakes and rivers drawing elephants, giraffes, and ostriches. Two separate cultures lived in the prehistoric Ténéré: one from 10,000 to 8,000 years ago, and the other from 6,500 to 4,500 years ago. Curiously, even though they were separated by 1,500 years, they both chose to bury their dead in the same place.

At your table, the Ténéré serves best as an empty space on the map. Even the Tuareg only cross it once a year, and they travel directly from well to well. In most of the Ténéré, if something were hidden beneath the sands, it would never be found. This, combined with the desert's formerly lush nature, could make the Ténéré a fantastic place to hide an Atlantis of the Sands.
The Wulingyuan Scenic Area in Hunan Province, China is a labyrinth of sandstone peaks, dense forests, and bottomless ravines. Some 3,000 spear-like stone pillars rise out of the mists into the light. Vegetation grows green on their tops and on every ledge on their sheer faces, while rich forests and winding streams fill the gorges between the pillars. The whole landscape is a fractal: forests of green coating a monumental forest of stone.

The canyons of Wulingyuan are full of life. Mists roll in most afternoons, feeding the lush vegetation. The floors of the gorges are thick forests that buzz with crickets. The large elevation changes mean the forest changes noticeably as you climb the peaks. The canyon bottoms are evergreen broadleaf forests. As you ascend the steep slopes of the mountains, you pass through some areas of conifers. The trees clinging to narrow ledges on the rock faces are mostly pines. Atop the peaks are deciduous trees that drop their leaves in winter. During this season, the pink plum blossoms look radiant against the white snow. The forests are home to monkeys, Chinese water deer, Asiatic black bears, and clouded leopards. Yard-long giant salamanders and rare fish lurk in the ponds and streams. Human habitation in Wulingyuan is a recent phenomenon. Tourism and large-scale habitation started in the 1950s. Before then, the region was too inaccessible to be worth living in. One relic of earlier habitation is a series of steps carved into the stone by bandits hiding in the canyons during the '40s.

You should probably only use Wulingyuan at your table on special occasions. This fantastical landscape should be used in sessions you want to inspire a feeling of “otherness,” like meetings with entities beyond the ken of man or visits to the domain of the gods. The bizarre and beautiful spires and gorges of Wulingyuan will help reinforce the idea that the PCs are in a situation well outside what they’re used to.
ANASAZI CLIFF DWELLINGS
FORTIFIED VILLAGES OF TERRIFIED PEOPLE

In the Four Corners region of the American Southwest, the sandstone canyons, mesas and buttes hide ancient villages high above the clear streams and cottonwood trees. Structures of mud and stone huddle atop mesas and perch on ledges and in caves high up the canyon wall. The buildings are multi-level complexes, mostly storage rooms. The living areas were outdoors on roofs or in plazas, with people retreating inside only in bad weather. Most of the villages were small, housing only a few families, but some were grand, filling deep caves or broad ledges. One has a half-million gallon reservoir. Another has a five-story apartment house with 800 rooms.

The era of the cliff dwellings was quite brief, perhaps only between 1200 and 1300 AD, the tail end of the Anasazi culture. Cliff dwellings were almost unheard of before 1200, as everyone lived in conventional villages on the ground. Then, a series of bad harvests provoked a period of bloodshed. The Anasazi fled to defensible cliff dwellings, but even these strongholds weren’t impenetrable. Some were clearly breached, resulting in horrific massacres. And there is very good evidence that the dead were eaten by their killers. Proteins found only in human flesh have been discovered in fossilized feces at these sites, and the bones have been processed as if by a butcher handling a cut of meat. They bear characteristic cut marks, have been broken open to get at the marrow inside, and many bear the particular sheen left on bones boiled in a clay vessel. The villages were eventually abandoned as quickly as they were built, probably when environmental conditions shifted, forcing the villagers to move elsewhere.

The fear that drove the Anasazi to live in these cliff dwellings is evident in their construction. For one thing, they couldn’t grow food on the ledges and mesas that housed the villages. This meant regular trips up and down the rock face. Access to and from the villages was by tree trunks, propped up vertically against the canyon wall. The trunks were notched with stone axes to provide small handholds. Climbing up these trunks, you’d go from narrow ledge to narrow ledge until you reached the village. Many settlements seem to have been linked in alliances based on visibility. One village has a line of sight on another, which has line of sight on a third, and so forth. If one settlement is attacked, it can get word to many others who may send help. The whole affair reeks of terror, even paranoia. It’s certainly not the sort of place you would choose to live unless you had no other choice.

The Anasazi seem likely to have come from numerous clans, all of whom migrated to the area from different directions. They were a short and stocky people who farmed corn, beans, and squash. Even after they had been farming for centuries, they still hunted mice and rabbits to supplement their diet. They were part of a continent-wide trading network, and had trade goods from as far afield as the Great Plains and the Gulf Coast. Even in the midst of their bloodthirsty wars, the Anasazi still produced lovely art: crosshatched pottery and paintings of animals both real and fanciful. Their society collapsed around 1300 AD. Their descendants still live in the area: the modern Pueblo peoples.

Today’s Pueblo maintain oral histories about their Anasazi forefathers, and make pilgrimages to their abandoned villages.
The PCs may first hear about the Anasazi from neighboring peoples who regard the cliff dwellers with horror. If the PCs travel to the region, play up the Anasazi’s diverse humanity. Some are likely bloodthirsty monsters, and some are probably utterly maddened by terror, but most are just people trying to do the best they can with the terrible hand they’ve been dealt. They eat the flesh of their enemies and shiver when they hear footsteps on moonless nights, but they also raise children, grow crops, and produce art.

Centuries after the collapse of Anasazi culture, PCs seeking shelter from the elements (or hiding from their enemies) may find refuge in a cliffside dwelling abandoned since its inhabitants were killed and eaten. But the bones are still there, protected from coyotes by the sheer walls, perhaps scattered a bit by vultures. And the same clues archaeologists used to uncover cannibalistic massacres will be there for the PCs to find.

POTOSÍ
THE ORIGINAL “RICHEST HILL ON EARTH”

In Southern Bolivia, over 13,000 feet above the sea, cold winds whip through the streets and plazas. Men in opulent costume scheme and duel in taverns and gambling houses. Here, 150,000 people toil and plot, drawing silver out of the Cerro de Potosí, or Cerro Rico – the rich mountain, a vast silver lode. The hills are alive day and night with flickering furnaces – until the furnaces are replaced by workers mixing mercury and ground ore with their bare feet, like a diabolical winery. This is Potosí, the mint of the Habsburgs, its name synonymous with wealth around the world.

The Inca Empire (see page 199) had mining operations for silver and gold all through present-day Peru and Bolivia, but they did not mine Potosí. There is a story that in the 1460s some Inca tried to set up mining operations, but were told by a voice from the heavens that the mountain “was meant for other masters.” Voice or not, the mountain remained unexploited until after the Spanish conquest. In 1545, a Quechua man was traveling through the area, and lit a campfire on the mountain. The ore body he was sitting on was so rich that molten silver began to trickle out from under the fire – or so the story goes. And the mining began.

In the early days, some Indians were able to do quite well for themselves, because local methods of smelting were most efficient: small clay furnaces, fueled by grass or llama dung, built on the windswept hillsides and using the wind as a natural bellows. There were thousands of the little furnaces around the city, little flickering lights in the cold Altiplano night.

But the small furnaces were a bottleneck in production, and in the 1570s Francisco de Toledo developed the patio process as an alternative. This required a large industrial plant: watermills to grind the ore, slaves turning wheels at the mint, mercury imports from a mine in nearby Huancavelica, and armies of workers to trod the powdered ore and mercury together into a silver-mercury amalgam. To remove the mercury, the amalgam was heated, filling the area with toxic vapors (and probably causing plenty of cases of mercury-driven insanity).

All this required massive amounts of labor. Fortunately for Toledo, the Incas had a system of corvée labor called the mita, and the Spanish had simply taken control after the conquest. They used the mita to force the natives to work in the cold and high-altitude mines: at its peak, Potosí drew mitayos from an area of 200,000 square miles! They died in great numbers: hundreds of thousands, or even millions over the centuries.
To be fair, many of the workers in Potosí were free labor – the mitayos were a particularly exploited minority.

At its peak, Potosí was a strange combination of wild west boom town and Baroque metropolis. Luxury items from around the world were imported, and the town attracted all sorts of adventurers and schemers, including up to 800 professional gamblers at any one time. Marriage was uncommon, largely because the high altitude made childbirth extremely dangerous: Potosí was, however, a great market for prostitution, with some particularly successful ladies of the night living in the grand style of Versailles courtesans. It was a violent place as well, as macho metal magnates swaggered around like they owned the place (mostly because they did), fighting regular duels and brawls.

In its heyday, Potosí was a major factor in the world economy. Over 45,000 metric tons of silver were mined there under Spanish rule, and the take from Potosí was 25 percent of the Spanish crown’s revenue during peak years. The silver of Bolivia stimulated inflation in Spain, paid for Hapsburg mercenaries during the Thirty Years’ War, and facilitated large-scale purchases of luxury goods from China – which is where most of the Potosí silver eventually ended up. Some say the $ symbol comes from the mint mark of Potosí – the letters PTSI superimposed together.

Potosí is an excellent model for a mining boomtown taken to extreme levels, especially in the early days when small-scale producers had a better chance to compete. Whether they’re in the city or not, the intrigue and plots of rival miners could certainly involve your PCs – or they could try to instigate a slave revolt, either to weaken the Spanish or for altruistic reasons. And of course, the yearly shipments of silver out of the city, as they travel down to the Chilean coast by pack mule, would be a ridiculously large haul if you could pull off the heist...

GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN
KNIGHT CAUGHT OUT OF TIME

The sixteenth century Germanic knight Götz von Berlichingen was an anachronism in his own day. Wielding a prosthetic hand centuries ahead of its time, he embodied a psychology and skill set that became increasingly obsolete over the course of his lifetime. He was a nobleman, a bandit, a rebel commander, and a living weapon.

Von Berlichingen lived for battle. As a young man, he squired for one of his kinsmen, learning the ways of the knight. He first rode off to war at age 19, and in his first battle saw the effects of gunpowder. He saw an arquebus (a precursor to the musket) shoot clean through one man and hit the man behind him. The man in front lived; the man behind did not. Von Berlichingen even got to fill a church with gunpowder and set it on fire. In a battle later in his life, von Berlichingen distinguished himself by an act of great heroism. The enemy was trying to pull their wagons together to form a temporary fortification – a powerful tactic. Despite cannon smoke so thick they could not see the enemy, von Berlichingen’s heavy cavalry charged the wagon fort without support from their allies. The fort was nearly complete when von Berlichingen, acting on his own initiative, charged one of the wagons, spearing its teamster, and breaking the fort. The event for which he is best remembered in Germany today was his response to a demand for surrender, roughly translated as “Kiss my ass!” Over the course of his life, von Berlichingen fought Turks, Swiss, Germans, French, and more besides.

But there wasn’t always a war going on. For a man like von Berlichingen, whose only skill set was dealing death, this meant he had to find something to do. During these times, von Berlichingen turned bandit, robbing merchants and kidnapping noblemen for ransom. As punishment, he was twice placed under imperial ban, where he was declared legally dead and
Götz von Berlichingen could make an interesting recurring NPC. His psychology, based on the need for and the rightness of violence, is antiquated, and not likely to line up with that of the PCs (though knowing some PCs...). This means that every time they meet von Berlichingen, he may have a different relationship with them. The first time, he may be an ally of the PCs, as he leads a peasant rebellion. The next time, he may be their enemy, as he preys upon traveling merchants. And this idea of an obsolete warrior with obsolete psychology is not restricted to pseudo-Medieval settings. In science fiction, Götz might be a special forces soldier in a world where drones, missiles, and robots have rendered his job unnecessary. In a western, he might be a mountain man lost in the settled west.

In 1504, von Berlichingen lost his right hand in battle. Ordinarily, this would have been something of a career-ending injury for a knight. Instead, he got a prosthetic hand made of iron. But this wasn’t just any prosthetic; the iron hand of Götz von Berlichingen was centuries ahead of its time. It offered control fine and deft enough to hold a quill pen or a playing card. But it also provided a strong enough grip to swing a sword or heft a lance. And, if he had to, von Berlichingen could use it to deliver one hell of a punch. As to the genius who built the hand, we haven’t the slightest idea who he was.

As a knight, von Berlichingen’s primary purpose – both as a soldier and as a human being – was to ride into battle dressed in heavy armor, carrying weapons designed to break through someone else’s heavy armor, and try to kill people exactly like him. Only knights had the equipment and training necessary to kill other knights. But gunpowder was rendering that conception of knighthood obsolete. Men with arquebuses could now kill knights; if you no longer needed a knight to kill a knight, what purpose did knights serve? Don’t get me wrong; in the right circumstances, knights were still very useful as shock troops against unprepared infantry. But their primary utility was disappearing. And don’t forget, knighthood was more than a profession. It was an entire way of life. And if knights were becoming obsolete, did that mean that von Berlichingen as a person was himself becoming obsolete?

The knight also commanded a section of rebels during the failed Peasants’ War of 1524-1526. His troops were responsible for a number of atrocities. After the rebellion was put down, he justified his actions to the government by claiming the peasants forced him into their service by threatening his wife and children, and that any atrocities were done against his orders. Von Berlichingen was imprisoned for five and a half years, plus sixteen years under house arrest.

Owning no possessions, meaning anyone was allowed to rob or kill him. Both times, von Berlichingen managed to get himself back into the good graces of the empire.
Tycho Brahe was born in 1546, the eldest son of a noble Dutch family. His father and childless uncle had an agreement: if Tycho was born a boy, his uncle could raise him. After Tycho’s birth, his father changed his mind, so his uncle, of course, kidnapped the baby. While a teenager studying law, Tycho saw a partial eclipse of the sun, which astronomers had correctly predicted. He was so struck by the beauty of the prediction that he became obsessed with astronomy. After the mathematical models of contemporary astronomers failed to accurately predict the close passage of Saturn near Jupiter, Tycho decided to devote himself to the most accurate observations of the heavens possible. This greatly displeased his family, who wanted him to continue studying law.

His first great discovery was that the stars, which had been thought to be permanent and unchanging, could in fact change. A star had gone nova, creating the appearance of a new, bright star in the night sky. By careful measurements, Tycho proved that this new star was actually in the heavens, and not an atmospheric phenomenon between the Earth and the Moon.

To further his research, the King of Denmark gave Tycho an island in the Baltic Sea, and bankrolled the creation of an observatory with a full staff of assistants, observers, and mathematicians. As this was before the invention of the telescope, Tycho’s hyper-accurate observations required the construction of giant tools, like a sextant with arms five and a half feet long, calibrated down to the sixtieth of a degree. The observatory had instruments that filled entire rooms, an alchemist’s furnace, and even a prison. The complex was set up so that four people could take measurements simultaneously, so that one man’s error wouldn’t muddy the data. It paid off; Tycho’s observations were ten times as precise as those of any predecessor or contemporary.

But Tycho’s scientific accomplishments aren’t all he’s remembered for. The astronomer is still infamous for his hard-partying lifestyle. As a teenager, he once got into an argument with another student over who was the better mathematician. As is right and proper, this led to a duel in which part of Tycho’s nose was cut off. He replaced it with an insert made of gold and silver. Distinguished visitors from throughout Europe visited Tycho’s observatory, and the astronomer made them welcome by throwing wild feasts. He brought to his parties a dwarf named Jepp, whom Tycho believed had second sight. Another memorable participant was Tycho’s pet elk, who died after getting quite drunk and falling down a flight of stairs.

At your table, Tycho Brahe would be an interesting change from the ascetic scholars that populate most games. His unusual life should affect the way he interacts with the PCs. For example, your Tycho may urge the PCs to solve their problems by kidnapping infants,
dueling over mathematics, or asking advice from psychic dwarves. As the historical Tycho’s fame made him a very influential man, such an NPC could make a delightful mover and shaker in court intrigue, and the PCs may want to court his favor. Alternately, he may be involved in eldritch mysteries with cosmic horrors beyond the void of the heavens. During the day, he’s all excellent science and riotous parties, but when the sun goes down and the astronomy begins, he undertakes a sinister communion with stellar abominations.

**GALVESTON HURRICANE**

**Horrific Natural Disaster**

The most deadly natural disaster ever to strike the United States, the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 killed an estimated 6,000-10,000 people in a city of 40,000. Flood waters fifteen feet deep and winds of 140 miles per hour left the city almost completely destroyed.

The real killer in a hurricane is not the wind, but the water. The hurricane drives a great mass of salt water before it (the “storm surge”), effectively raising the sea level. By the time the most intense part of the storm makes landfall, that land is typically underwater.

Before the storm, Galveston was complacent. It was the third largest port in the nation; street for street, the city had more millionaires than any other American town. What could harm Galveston? Hurricanes had hit the city before, flooding some of the streets, but that was all. There was some talk of building a seawall for protection, but the man in charge of the local Weather Bureau publicly stated that the passes between the barrier islands surrounding Galveston were so shallow that no serious storm surge could make it through. As far as residents were concerned, that settled the question. They were safe.

Before satellites, there was little that could be done to predict the path of a hurricane. Typically, some monster storm would slam into a seacoast without warning; no one even knew it was out there, let alone where it was heading. By the early 20th century, some progress had been made on this problem. When ships in the Caribbean encountered storms, they would telegraph Washington when they reached port, but the information was usually outdated. So while Galveston was dimly aware that there was some sort of storm in the Gulf of Mexico, and it was probably heading north, the city had little more warning than that. On the day when the storm hit, men left their homes to go to work, unconcerned by the rain and dark clouds.

The killing started a few hours later. The roof of a building tore off, and the second floor collapsed on the cafe below, killing five. Men struggling home through the neck-deep seawater drowned when they tired. As the water rose and rose, some took axes to their floorboards, hoping that by evening out the water pressure, they could save their homes from being swept away. It didn’t work. Houses rose from their foundations and capsized like top-heavy boats, trapping those inside beneath the raging water. The meteorologist who predicted no hurricane could harm Galveston leapt from a second-story window with his family just before his house rolled over. They clung to wreckage for hours. At one point, a man tried to shove the children aside to claim a spot on the makeshift raft, and had to be fended off with a knife. Above the howling wind, some could hear cannonfire from
a nearby fort: the soldiers were calling for help. And all the while, roof shingles flew through the air like knives.

A team was dispatched from Houston to survey the damage. When the train tracks to Galveston were blocked by debris, the team continued by boat. Their voyage was punctuated by quiet thuds from the hull striking floating corpses. Men. Women. Children. They were everywhere, bruised and broken by the waves. Much of the town was almost completely leveled, a vista of uninterrupted wooden debris. Corpses hung from tree branches. Survivors called for help from inside the taller piles of rubble. Driven by fear of disease, residents piled corpses on a barge and dumped them in the Gulf of Mexico. Many washed back ashore. From then on, bodies were burned in great piles. The city was under martial law. Soldiers were ordered to shoot looters on the spot. The residents were all reported to be in a daze. Said one, “You will hear people talk without emotion of the loss of those nearest them. We are in that condition that we cannot feel.”

We usually end by saying, “It might be fun to...” In this case, “fun” is the wrong word. A better choice might be “dramatic” — or even “traumatic.” PCs might take boats into the floodwaters to pluck the drowning from their deaths, or rescue children from houses that are about to roll over. After the storm, PCs might be interested in helping dispose of the bodies. If the corpses aren’t dealt with, the number who died in the storm will pale beside the number who die of disease. It’s ugly, awful work that few residents will want to do. They may need the PCs to lead them. If the storm strikes at the beginning of a campaign, encouraging the PCs to help in the rebuilding could be a very effective way to get them emotionally invested in the city, if it’s going to play a major role in the rest of the campaign.

THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR
INTERBELLUM CHAOS

The First World War scarred every nation that took part, but arguably none worse than Russia. Though the empire had been industrializing rapidly in the decades just before 1914, it was still a giant with feet of clay, a squabbling mass of rising nationalisms with a nervous autocrat trying to hold his throne. By 1917, the Russian Army was falling back in disarray on all fronts, and just about everyone agreed that Czar Nicholas II had to go. The czar abdicated on March 15 (March 2nd by the Julian Calendar, which Russia was still using), and was replaced by liberal aristocrat Georgi Lvov.

The Germans, meanwhile, had smuggled Bolshevik Vladimir Lenin from Switzerland into Russia on a sealed train, hoping to force Russia’s collapse. In April, Lenin arrived in the capital Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and began to organize demonstrations and unrest. Mass protests erupted in July, and the government attempted to compromise by replacing Lvov with Alexander Kerensky, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (actually agrarian democratic-socialists). The government was an uneasy coalition of the Duma (the old Czarist parliament) and the Petrograd Soviet (meaning “workers’ council”). But Kerensky continued the war, and the Bolsheviks rose up in November (October by the old calendar) promising “Peace, Land and Bread!” The Russian Civil War had begun.

The Russian Civil War is usually portrayed as a conflict between the Reds (revolutionaries) and the Whites (the old regime). But this is too simplistic: while the Bolsheviks were a fairly unified faction (with occasional infighting, as when Trotsky brutally crushed the Kronstadt sailors’ revolt), the Whites were a disorganized coalition of contradictory ideologies, from democratic socialists to liberal reformers to absolute monarchists to power-hungry warlords. And to get a full picture of the war, we need to add in three more colors: Blue, Green and Black.
Most of the world’s major powers intervened in the Russian Civil War, mostly in order to “strangle the monster (the Soviet Union) in its cradle,” in the words of Churchill. Intervening forces were usually called the “Blue Army,” and while most aligned with the Whites, some (particularly the Japanese in Manchuria and Siberia, the Turks in the Caucasus, and the Czech Legion (see page 181)) were out for nationalistic goals. But the intervening powers were exhausted from WWI, and not willing to commit large enough forces to turn the tide: Almost all troops were withdrawn by 1919. The intervention in Russia was the only time that US soldiers have fought Russians directly.

The term “Green Army” has two separate definitions: first, it refers to nationalist uprisings, of which there were many. Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states successfully gained their independence, while uprisings failed in the Ukraine, Central Asia, Siberia and the Caucasus. In general, the nationalists fought against both Red and White, though Finland and Poland were staunchly anti-Communist, and the Reds were able to co-opt some nationalist movements by promising (and granting) regional autonomy. Peasant revolters against the requisitions and oppression of both sides were also called Greens: most were crushed fairly quickly as they had only a local base of support.

The “Black Army” of anarchist Nestor Makhno was not so easily dealt with. Makhno’s band of anarchist peasants were the terror of the Whites in Ukraine for some time, and a reluctant ally to the Reds – until the Reds betrayed them in 1920. Makhno fled to Paris, and depending on what you read, he was anything from the Russian Civil War’s Robin Hood to its Pol Pot. Another figure more clearly villainous but just as much “on his own side” was Baron Ungern-Sternberg in Mongolia (see page 115).

In the end, the Reds won the Russian Civil War (excepting the losses of Poland, Finland and the Baltics), largely because the enemy coalition was geographically and politically disconnected. A centralized and ideologically unitary power block won against a loose coalition that was never able to rally the masses to its cause, because it was never able to repudiate the failures of the czar. The last remnants of the White forces (excepting the exiles in Paris and China) surrendered in 1922, in Siberia.

The Russian Civil War can fit into your game in all sorts of ways: as a story of the brutal tragedy of civil war (Hoover earned some of his fame helping to feed the millions starving during the war), or as a comic-opera romp of bad accents and stolen zeppelins, or even just as backstory. It’s full of dramatic events for your PCs to be involved in, some of which are detailed in other chapters. And it’s a great example of how confusing an ideological civil war can end up being.