



HUNT 2017: CAPTURE THE FIREBIRD

In this walk-through, small sans serif type like this indicates Facilitator instructions.

Large, indented serif type like this is read out loud to the teams.

Three teams of four people competed on 2017 October 14: (1) John, Ben, and Nick Manwell and Kristin Matherly; (2) Jon, Kristin, and Mia Thomason and John Cooper; and (3) Jacob Davenport, Simone Larson, Aaron Gee-Clough, and Gina Mai Denn.

Technically, each team is a single person in the world of the Hunt.

Teams are told to ask questions, look around wherever they go, and take whatever they find—you never know what might be useful later. Each team also has paper, pencils, and a smartphone with a decimal latitude/longitude finding app.

Teams can use smartphones to solve puzzles, but real-world objects are not part of the world of the Hunt. Only objects they find or that are given by Hunt Facilitators can be given to other Facilitators or be part of the world of the Hunt.

Start: Tsar Berendei

(Sharon Grant; 15215 Avery Rd)

The Tsar has invited his subjects to the palace for an important announcement.

Welcome! I have asked you all here to catch a thief.

Tsar Berendei indicates a bowl of apples.

As you know, my orchard of beautiful golden apples is famous throughout Russia. But someone has been stealing them. Not any ordinary thief—it is no less than the fabulous Firebird!

With my own eyes, I have seen him in my orchard. But we cannot capture him.

And I must have the Firebird. Not just to protect my apples—now that I have seen his glory, I cannot live without the Firebird here in my palace.

So I am offering a rich reward to anyone who brings me the Firebird.

Because I want you to succeed, I give each of you small gifts that may be useful.

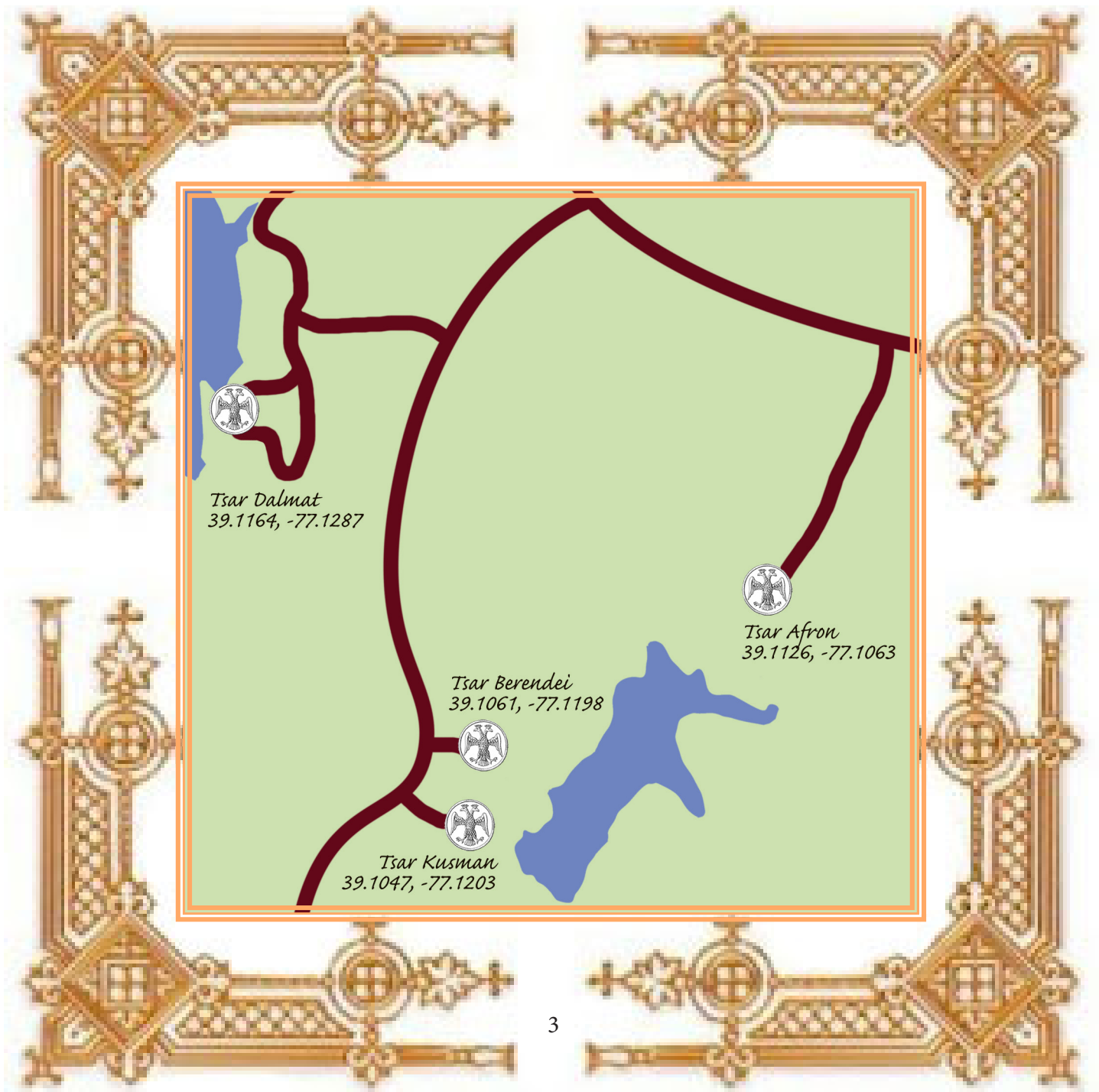
The Tsar provides each attendee with a lunch bag containing a notched ruler and a “peasant lunch” of black bread, cheese, an onion, and salt.



Of course, if I can perform any other small favors, you may ask me at any time.

I do not know where the Firebird may be found, but perhaps one of the other Tsars nearby can help. I have marked their palaces on this map. Here is a copy for each of you.

Good luck!



Since the team shouldn't be able to get random objects, most requests to Tsar Berendei will be denied with vague excuses—"I don't have one of those," or "I am most sorry, but it is not possible for me to give that away." But if at any time a team asks for a golden apple, the Tsar will happily give them one.

Teams are free to choose their first destination. Hopefully, the size of the lakes in the map suggest that the thick lines connecting the palaces are streets. As an additional help, the numbers below each Tsar's name are decimal latitude and longitude coordinations of the location.

It's time for the teams to hit the road! Let's follow one, which happens to first visit...

Tsar Kusman

(Sarah Manwell; Lake Frank Parking Lot)

After the team explains why they have come to see the Tsar:

Of course I wish to help my fellow Tsar... and I may even have the information you seek.

But knowledge, they say, is power. It must be earned, not given away. What can you do to earn this knowledge?

Hmm... I see you are traveling through the Deep Woods in search of the Firebird. Perhaps you can be of use to me.

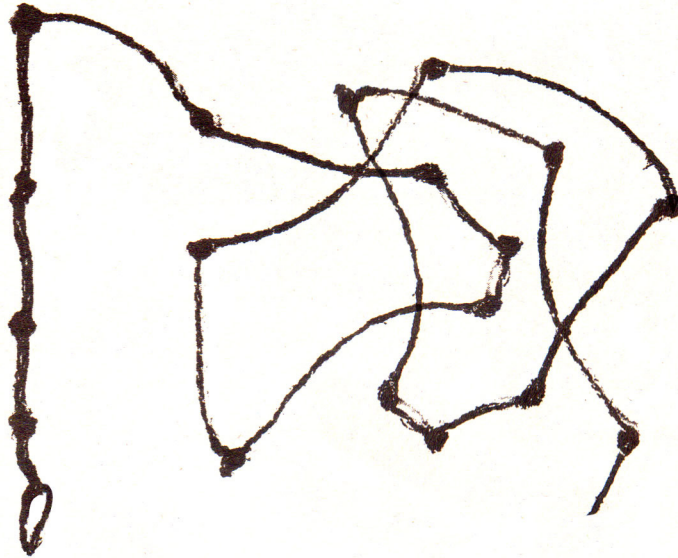
The serfs on the edge of the Woods tell me that something is ravaging their crops. It sneaks in during the night, eats the choicest portions, and steals away unseen.

If you find the creature responsible and stop it, you will have earned the knowledge you desire—the Firebird's nesting ground.

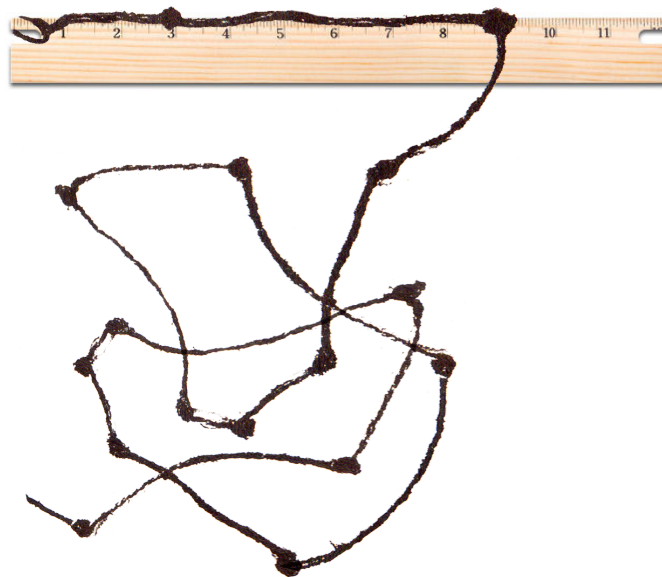
This will guide you to the field most recently attacked. Do not return until you have accomplished your task. Good luck and godspeed.

The team is given a long string and dismissed. The Tsar will not speak to them again until they succeed and return.

But how can a string guide the team anywhere? On closer examination, the string is found to have a loop at one end and a series of irregularly spaced knots.



The loop is just the right size to fit around one of the notches in the ruler from Tsar Berendei's lunch bag. And once the string is in place, it can be seen that each knot corresponds to a number on the ruler.



By winding the string around and around the ruler, the team can read off 10 digits:

3 9 10 3 3 7 7 11 9 2

Put together and formatted, the numbers should look familiar from the map:

39.1033, -77.1192

Yes, it's a latitude and longitude coordinate to the next location. There's no road, so the team has to set off into the woods surrounding Lake Frank to find...

Grey Wolf

(Amber Blaha; south of Lake Frank)

When the team arrives at the crop-ravaged field, they are surprised to be confronted by an enormous wolf.

They are in no danger—Grey Wolf is caught in a rope trap. She calls out when she sees the team.

Noble traveler! Do not be afraid, for we are not enemies. Indeed, should you rescue me I swear to be your truest friend.

Some hunter laid this trap, and he will kill me if you do not find its secret. Magic it must have, for not even my sharp teeth can rend this little rope.

If the team needs more encouragement:

No one knows the Deep Woods like Grey Wolf! If you set me free, I will owe you my life. I will not rest until my debt is paid.

If the team asks about Tsar Kusman's crops, and the creature who is eating them, Grey Wolf answers eagerly:

Yes, yes! No one sees the thief because it is not one creature. But Grey Wolf's eyes are keen. I have seen them in the night—a swarm of locusts.

And I know the secret to trapping them. Free me, and I will bring you the locusts before the sun rises again.

The team must decide to trust Grey Wolf and figure out how to free her from the rope trap.

One rope ties together Grey Wolf's front paws, while a second rope is secured to a tree and encircles the first rope:



The trap is magic, so the rope can't be cut or broken in any way and the knots can't be untied. Yet there is a way to separate the two ropes! See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiNI-EL6vfk> for the solution.

Once the ropes are disconnected:

Ah, the trap's magic is broken! I can feel it. Now, teeth, to work!

Grey Wolf quickly gnaws through the rope binding her paws and is fully free.

Do not leave—I shall return before the sun next rises!

Grey Wolf rushes off and returns some hours later. She has lured the locusts into a honeycomb and trapped them inside. She gives the honeycomb to the team.

But this does not compare to saving my life. I am still in your debt.

She pulls out a tuft of her fur with her teeth and gives it to the team.

Take this tuft of my fur. If you hold it and call out: “Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf, I need you!” I will come to your aid.

I suggest you not use this gift frivolously; only at a time of life and death.

Fare you well, then, until we meet again!

Grey Wolf runs off, and the team can now...

Return to Tsar Kusman

When the team returns with the piece of honeycomb and explains that the locusts will no longer eat his serfs' crops, the Tsar is pleased.

Thank you—the serfs will be most grateful. And you have earned your prize.

The Tsar gives the team an ancient scroll with a strange inscription:

Where Is Found the Firebird

As Romulus said to Remus:

Tax axes for oxen six. Female experts sing in pairs
—Lax foxes are having issues. My calx hexes extra vision

These hints, I have been told, can lead you to the Firebird's nesting ground.

But I should warn you—it is a fool's errand. The Firebird will not blithely come to your hand; you must tempt it out of hiding with something it cannot resist.

And even then, how will you catch it when the Firebird is the swiftest flyer in the sky? If you catch it, how will you keep it?

I wish you fortune, but I fear this quest is doomed to failure.

The team is dismissed again.

What is the meaning of these curious lines? Well, it is supposed to tell the location of the Firebird. And locations in this Hunt are usually latitude and longitude numbers. But there aren't any numbers here... or are there?

The team should realize that Romulus and Remus were ancient Romans—so of course they would use Roman numerals. If you keep only I's, V's, X's, L's, C's, D's, and M's from the message, you get:

XXXIX.MLXIII
- LXXVII.MCLXXXVII

Which translates to 39.1063, -77.1187—the exact coordinates of the Firebird's nesting ground.

Is the end of the quest so near? Hardly. If the team was listening closely to Tsar Kusman, they'll know they need a few more items before they can hope to capture the Firebird:

- 1) Something to lure the Firebird out of hiding.
- 2) Something to hold the Firebird still so it can be caught.
- 3) Something to keep the Firebird in while they travel back to Tsar Berendei.

The team's only hope is to visit the other Tsars. Let's say their next stop is the palace of...

Tsar Dalmat

(Steve Grant; Lake Needwood Boat House)

Tsar Dalmat is so distraught, he can barely hear what the team says.

**Firebirds? How can I think about such nonsense at a time like this!
My poor child, my treasure, my precious daughter... taken from us,
stolen by that monster Koschei!**

**You want my help to find this Firebird? Return my daughter to me,
and I will do whatever is in my power to aid you.**

**This is her. Is she not beautiful? How could even Koschei be so
cruel?**

The Tsar shows the team a portrait of the Tsarevna he carries in a locket:



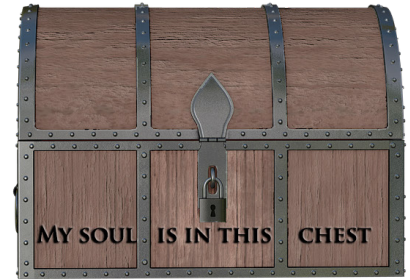
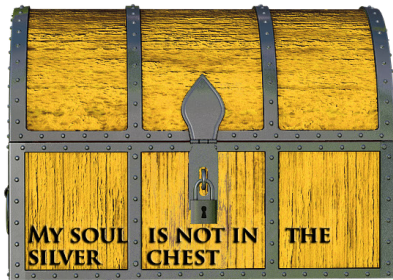
Go. Do not return unless it is with my child.

The team is dismissed.

Before they leave the palace, however, a burly Huntsman pulls the team aside.

I heard you talking to the Tsar about Koschei... A few days ago, I found a bear digging at the base of an oak tree in the Deep Woods. After I chased him away, I continued digging and found these:

Bring out the three caskets and the parchment that was wrapped around them.



*Unending life have I
My soul and body sundered
Beware! If you should try
To steal Koschei's thunder*

*My soul is pent within
But which chest holds the prize?
The one who doesn't win
By noxious fumes soon dies*

*Know you this besides:
Not all chests are true
At least one baldly lies
At least one speaks the sooth*

I haven't known what to do about it. It reeks of evil magic, and I dare not trouble with it.

But if you seek Koschei—maybe this will help you, maybe not.

You know he cannot be killed? Koschei the Deathless, he is called. They say he poured all his soul into his little finger, then cut it off. Now he cannot die unless that fingerbone is broken.

Here—what a relief to be rid of this!

I'd like to help you more, but no one knows where Koschei lives. Maybe the old hermit in the Deep Woods can tell you...

The Huntsman gives the team coordinates to the hermit and rushes off.

The locks on the chests are easy enough to break, but opening the wrong chest will lead to sudden death by poison gas. What to do?

The rhyme says that at least one chest has a true statement, and at least one chest has a false statement.

Let's look at the wooden chest first. If it's true, we know where Koschei's soul is! But if it is true (and his soul is in the wooden chest), the other two chests are also both telling the truth—and that's impossible, since at least one must be false.

So the wooden chest is false, and Koschei's soul is not inside it.

But look at the other two chests. They're essentially saying the same thing—that Koschei's soul isn't in the silver chest. So either they're both true, or they're both false. And since the wooden chest is already false, and therefore at least one other chest must be true, it follows that both the gold and silver chests are true.

Which means that Koschei's soul is not in the silver chest. And we already know it's not in the wooden chest.

Koschei's soul must be in the gold chest. Opening it reveals a human fingerbone. So armed with Koschei's soul, the team can attempt to rescue the Tsarevna! Thanks to the Huntsman, they know the coordinates to...

The Old Hermit

(Leanne Miller; by the shore of Lake Needwood)

Arriving at the Huntsman's coordinates, the team finds an elderly peasant outside a modest cottage. He seems surprised and perhaps a little scared:

Who are you? Why are you here?

Once the team explains their presence, the hermit invites them into his cottage. A teapot warms atop a samovar there, along with two cups and a fork and knife. A cat wearing a distinctive necklace sits on the table.



Yes, I can help you. Please, sit down. I was just about to share some tea with my cat. It's so rare to have a visitor! She is my only company.

You are very brave, to face Koschei all by yourself. The stories I've heard about him! Here, have some tea.

Woe to the team that drinks any tea... An observant team should have noticed a few things: the kitten's necklace matches the Tsarevna's from her portrait, and the hermit is missing a little finger.

Yes, this "innocent" peasant is none other than Koschei himself! The enchanted tea will turn anyone into a turtle, fit for soup.

However, If the team pulls out the small fingerbone from the gold chest, Koschei drops his pretence and grabs the knife from the table.

What do you have there? That does not belong to you. Give it to me, and I will let you live. If you dare defy me, the price is death!

If the team breaks the fingerbone, Koschei dies instantly, and all his spells are broken. The cat reverts back to the Tsarevna Yekaterina, who thanks them tearfully.

(If the team doesn't break Koschei's fingerbone, he will kill them. Their quest has ended.)

Before leaving, the team should heed the advice to take whatever they find and grab both cups. One cup is larger, and has a fill line with the number "7" near the top. The second cup is smaller, and has a fill line with the number "5" near the top.

Having rescued the Tsarevna, the team can now...

Return to Tsar Dalmat

When a team returns with the Tsarevna, the Tsar is understandably overjoyed.

Thank you—thank you! You have my eternal gratitude. How can I repay you?

Wait, I remember. You seek the Firebird. Alas, I do not know where it may be found. This I do know: You will not catch the Firebird without magic, for it is shy and magical itself.

So magic you shall have!

Tsar Dalmat gives the team a flute.

This flute will lull to sleep any who hear it play, except the musician. If you can lure the Firebird out of hiding, simply play the flute and it will fall asleep. Then you may seize it.

May fortune smile upon you!

The team is dismissed. They are one step closer to capturing the Firebird, but still lack something to lure the Firebird out of hiding and something to keep the Firebird in while traveling.

What could lure the Firebird? Well, the team knows of at least one thing the Firebird loves to eat: Tsar Berendei's golden apples! If they haven't already, they should ask the Tsar for an apple.

As for something to keep the Firebird in, the team's only hope is to ask...

Tsar Afron

(CeCe Hilte; Lake Frank Nature Center)

When the team explains why they have come to see the Tsar:

Naturally I will help you! After all, I am known far and wide for my generosity.

Still, those seeking generosity must share in kind, must they not? Else even a Tsar would soon be a beggar!

I have a magic birdhouse that can hold the Firebird so it will not fly away from you. And I will give it to you happily! ...Once you have proven your generosity.

What can you give me? Surely there is nothing you have that I do not already own, and grander than yours!

Perhaps you can provide some service... You are not afraid to wander the Deep Woods, I see. You know it is full of dangers: bandits, witches, wolves, and wizards.

Yes, if you are not afraid there is something you can do for me. One of my boyars has been conspiring with the witch Baba Yaga to curse my realm and take my place as Tsar. I know this—but I do not know who.

Is it Boyar Ivan? Boyar Yuri? Or Boyar Boris?

Find Baba Yaga. Discover the traitor's name, and you shall have my magical birdhouse.

Alas, none know exactly where the witch dwells. It is... a riddle.

The Tsar gives the team an old scroll and dismisses them. Upon unrolling the scroll, the team sees the following riddles and answers:

Russian Folk Riddles

- ___ Four sisters spit into one basin.
- ___ It has neither eyes nor ears, but it leads the blind.
- ___ I have four legs and feathers, yet am neither beast nor bird.
- ___ I go into the bath black and come out red.
- ___ It neither barks nor bites, but keeps you out of the house.
- ___ You barely see him but can hear his song.

Answers

- 10) A lock
- 11) A walking stick
- 27) A bed
- 39) Milking a cow
- 77) A crayfish
- 99) A mosquito

The answers are curiously numbered. The blank space before each riddle suggests that the number of the correct answer is to be written there, and the correct answers are:

- “Four sisters spit” ... Milking a cow ... 39
- “Has neither eyes nor ears” ... Walking stick ... 11
- “Has four legs and feathers” ... Bed ... 27
- “Goes into the bath” ... Crayfish ... 77
- “Neither barks nor bites” ... Lock ... 10
- “Barely see him” ... Mosquito ... 99

Putting the numbers together, in order, gives 391127771099. By now, the team likely recognizes quickly that this is the latitude and longitude coordinate 39.1127, -77.1099.

Which means they know where to find the infamous...

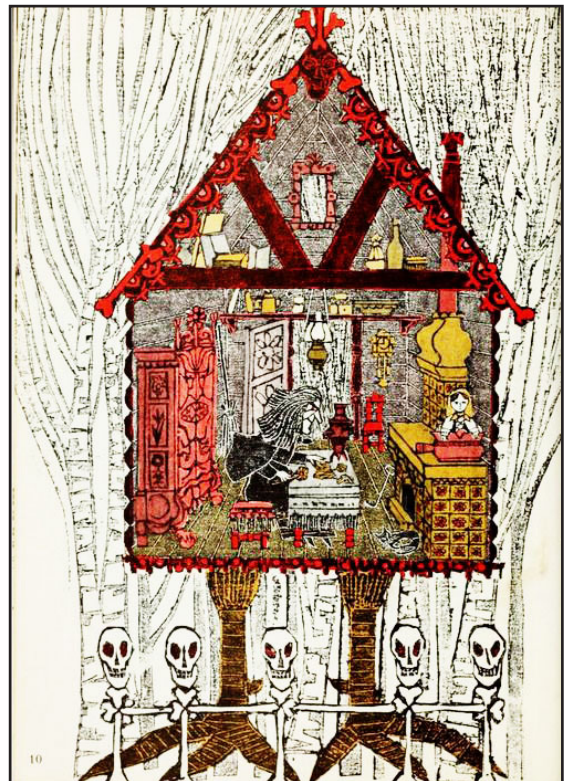
Baba Yaga

(Anne Grant; Meadow Trail)

When the team arrives at the coordinate from the riddles, they see:

Before you is the eeriest home you've ever seen. There's a fence around the yard, seeming to be made of human bones and crowned with skulls. The latch on the gate is made from teeth. The hut itself stands on enormous chicken legs.

Though the shutters are drawn, light seeps out between the cracks, and you see and hear movement inside. A thin wisp of smoke rises from the chimney.



If they're smart, the team will wait until the coast is clear and they can search the hut in safety. If they ask about a place to hide, they learn there is a perfect thorny bush nearby that will prevent them from being seen.

After a few minutes, the light goes out in the house, the chicken legs squat down, and Baba Yaga walks into the yard.

There she whistles, and a giant mortar swoops out of the sky. Baba Yaga climbs in and flies off, swinging the enormous pestle like a whip and sweeping away her tracks in the sky with a broom.

Now it's safe for the team to enter the hut.

Inside, the hut shows evidence of a frugal existence. A single table and chair, a Russian stove with bedding, and a small cabinet. The remains of a small fire smolder in the fireplace.

The team should ask questions and poke around. The table and the chair are ordinary. The cabinet is full of the odds and ends of everyday life—nothing interesting.

If they examine the fireplace, however:

There's not much left of whatever was burning, but you find three scraps of paper that aren't entirely charred.



HUMED



BAH



2385

Homer? Bah? 2385? What does it all mean?

The team must remember that they are in medieval Russia, not 21st-century USA. And medieval Russians didn't write in English... these mysterious letters are actually Cyrillic!

(Knowledge of Russian isn't needed to solve the Hunt—recall that smartphone use is allowed.)

So what looks like “HOMER” is actually “HOMEP”, or the Cyrillic letters for N, O, M, Yeh, and R. Pronounced “noh-mer”, it's the Russian word for “number”. Not much help there.

And the scrap with actual numbers doesn't seem promising, either. But the third scrap—”BAH”—is really the Cyrillic letters for V, A, and N. And one of the Boyars definitely has a name ending in “VAN”. Boyar Ivan is the traitor!

Before the team can bring their proof to Tsar Afron, however, Baba Yaga returns home. She casts a spell that holds the team immobile.

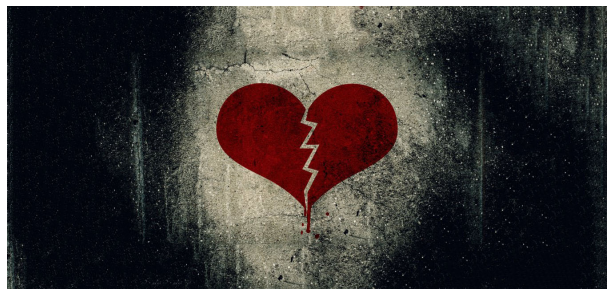
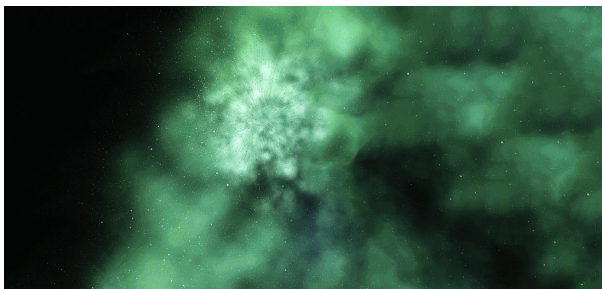
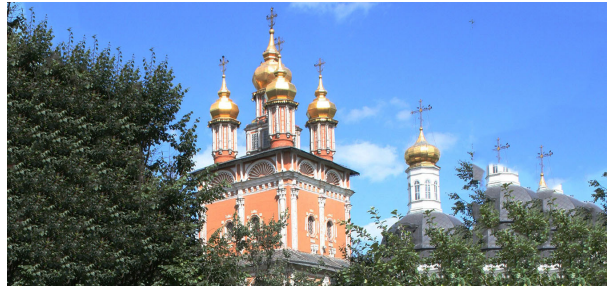
**Intruders, thieves! What to do with you, I wonder? Are you tasty?
No use to me for anything else. Unless...**

Baba Yaga takes a shadowbox from the cabinet and displays it proudly.

Have you seen my Onomasticon? My beautiful collection is nearly complete. One more item, and I will complete a decade—ten pieces. And “decade” is so appropriate for this collection!

An Onomasticon is very special—only very specific items belong. See what I have so far, and what I would not accept into the collection:

**A metronome, but not a pocketwatch; a termite, but not an ant;
a shellfish, but not a starfish; a church, but not a cathedral; some stardust, but no sunlight; a tomato, but not a squash; essences, but not perfumes; heartache, but not stomachache; and a neckbone, but not a backbone.**



Give me a final piece to complete my Onomasticon, and I set you free. If you cannot... into the stew pot you go!

What do all the items have in common? The key realization is that the shared property is nothing to do with the objects themselves. Rather, it is a property of the *names* of the objects.

The name of each item in the collection starts and ends with the same two letters in the same order: ME-trono-ME, TE-rmi-TE, SH-ellfi-SH, etc. As a clue, both “Onomasticon” (a real word, look it up!) and “decade” also start and end with the same two letters in the same order.

To escape, the team must give Baba Yaga something they have that is part of the world of the Hunt (i.e., obtained from a Facilitator) and whose name fits the pattern.

The only such item is the onion from their lunch bag. If they hand over the onion—and explain why it belongs in the collection—they are free to leave. If they can’t... their quest ends here.

Having come so far, surely the team will figure out which item is required. And now that Baba Yaga’s Onomasticon is complete, the team is free to...

Return to Tsar Afron

The Tsar smiles grimly at your news.

Ivan, is it? He will learn what it means to betray his Tsar.

You have done me great service today. Bless you! Here is the magical birdhouse. May the four winds watch over you in your travels!

With the magic birdhouse, the team now has all they need to capture the Firebird!

Thanks to Tsar Kusman, they know where to find the Firebird. So they immediately turn their steps once again toward the Deep Woods and...

The Firebird's Nesting Ground

(Elliot Grant; the spring on the hill above Lake Frank)

Unfortunately, life is never easy:

You are attacked by bandits!

Since the team is technically a single person in the world of the Hunt, the bandits are easily victorious.

The bandits steal the apple, flute, and birdhouse and leave you close to death. Have you come so far only to fail at the end?

Of course not. A little tuft of fur was hardly worth stealing... And the team should remember Grey Wolf's promise. If they hold the tuft of fur and say "Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf, I need you":

The moment you finish the chant, Grey Wolf runs up and cries out in shock, "What has happened? Who has done this?"

But seeing that you can hardly speak, she shushes you. "No matter. You are indeed fortunate to be here, where the Waters of Life and Death spring forth from the earth.

"Four ounces of the waters will heal your wounds and revive you to life. No more, no less—the waters are potent. Have you anything to measure four ounces?"

If the team took the two cups from Koschei's cottage, they do.

It may not be immediately obvious how to measure four ounces using a cup that holds 7 ounces and a cup that holds 5 ounces—with neither cup showing any intermediate measuring lines—but it can be done:

- 1) Fill the 7-ounce cup from the spring.
- 2) Fill the 5-ounce cup from the 7-ounce cup. (This leaves you with 5 oz in the 5 cup, and 2 oz in the 7 cup.)
- 3) Empty the 5 cup.
- 4) Pour the remaining 2 oz from the 7 cup into the 5 cup.
- 5) Fill the 7 cup from the spring again.
- 6) Pour as much as possible from the 7 cup into the 5 cup. Since the 5 cup already has 2 oz, you can only add 3 more ounces.
- 7) Since you started with 7 oz in the 7 cup, and you have just poured 3 of those into the 5 cup, you are left with... 4 oz in the 7 cup!

Grey Wolf gently tips the four ounces of the Waters of Life and Death into your mouth. Amazed, you feel your body return to life. Soon you are completely healed.

You explain the situation to Grey Wolf. "Wait here," she says, "While I attend to these bandits." She runs off on their trail.

Some time later, Grey Wolf returns with all your belongings. "The bandits," she tells you, "Will no longer trouble innocent travelers.

"And so my debt to you is repaid: A life for a life. Fare you well!"

There's not much left to do. The team should put out the golden apple and wait.

It may be a little while, it may be a long time... but eventually a shining figure flies down from the treetops to the golden apple. It is the Firebird.

The team must start playing the magic flute. At once, the Firebird falls deeply asleep.

The team can now easily catch the Firebird and put it in the magic birdhouse. All that is left is to...

Return to Tsar Berendei

The Tsar is as good as his word, and bestows a princely reward upon the team for successfully bringing him the Firebird.

The quest has ended.

In the real-life event, the winning team was Jacob Davenport, Simone Larsen, Aaron Gee-Clough, and Gina Mai Denn.

But it was close! The Thomasons and John Cooper descended the hillside toward the spring just as the winning team was climbing the hill back to Tsar Berendei.

Thanks to all the Facilitators, and of course the players! It couldn't have happened without you.

—Elliot Grant

Lake Frank, 2017 October 18