

MUTANT

YEAR ZERO



Zone Compendium Russia

Marble Marshes

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MARBLE MARSHES

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The map is a hand-drawn sketch on a grid background, showing a coastal area with a river and various landmarks. A large red 'S' watermark is overlaid diagonally across the center. The map includes the following labels and features:

- Top Left:** A north arrow pointing towards the top left.
- Top Center:** A circled label "Eden?!" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Top Right:** A label "Swarms of blood suckers!" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Center Left:** A label "Vyak-Vyak!" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Center:** A label "TOO MUCH ROT" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Center Right:** A label "MEGRICEONS" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Bottom Left:** A label "The Htuleh" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Bottom Center:** A label "TRASH (or seaport)" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Bottom Right:** A label "The Fortress" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Far Right:** A label "The Way Underground" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Far Bottom Right:** A label "Big Snake" with an arrow pointing to a small island.
- Compass Rose:** Located in the bottom left corner, showing cardinal and intercardinal directions.
- Grid:** The map is overlaid with a grid of numbers 1-30 and letters A-S.

Under a lead-grey sky that often gifts cold rains, moss and lichen-ridden bogs reign supreme. They have consumed what little remains of the civilization left behind by the Ancients that once lived there. Skeletal frames of once magnificent buildings of brick, metal and marble are now covered in bindweed. Young trees sprout all over them, despite the conditions, bursting through cracks to reach for the grim sky above. The rusted hulks of riding machines squat, forlorn and forgotten amongst frozen chunks of asphalt while scraggly bushes climb through their windows. The River, full to the brim with hungry monsters, splits as it hits the Island. Fetid water slowly eats away at the artificial marble shore — the last protection laid before it. There is only one Bridge over the River. It connects the Island to the Mainland, which harbors the Golden Ray that strikes through the eternally grey sky.

Welcome to the land of drizzling rains, rot-filled mists, majestic ruins, rusty riding machines, half-sunk boats, broken bridges and gardens that managed to escape their carefully manicured spaces to transform into forests. Welcome to the Marble Marshes.

FOREWORD

The Ark the People inhabit is quite literally an ark — a buoyant carcass with “cess Anasta”¹ written in large blue letters on its side. Once it was a place where food and water were abundant, as well as some other things. But time passed, resources grew scarce, the Elder began losing his mind — a small bit every day — until finally the Mutants were forced to venture out into the world.

It was a cold day, despite the sun sitting high and bright overhead, when several mutants stood before the People. They spoke to us and their words echoed in our hearts. Even the Elder woke from his slumber for a short time to endorse the First Expedition. That was the name he gave them.

THE FIRST EXPEDITION INCLUDED FOUR OF OUR BRAVEST PEOPLE:

- ❑ **Chronicler Mirza** — a dreamer and an idealist. She believes that somewhere out there she can find other People who would become good friends to the inhabitants of “ces Anasta”. She never fails to find a word of kindness for anyone and has an ability to brighten up any dark situation — even the most desperate one;
- ❑ **Gearhead Ignat** — a fan of any piece of rusty junk left behind by the Ancients. Metals seem to be attracted to his hands. He has an unusual sense of humor, but doesn’t let the fact that few people laugh at his jokes

“Our days are numbered. The People are bound to die. We aren’t like wandering dogs or ghouls that walk those lands and multiply with each passing day. We aren’t like the Ancients that once filled the world. The Elder said that the Ancients would call us Mutants. But we do not fear the name that smells of Rot and is filled with terror, no. We fear extinction. We can bear no children, for during the lifetime of this ark not a single child has been born. You all know of this. But there is still hope. We have to explore the Zone and find others like us. Other People — they must exist. And if we join our forces we can only become stronger. What if the only way for us to procreate is with others, not of our ark? What if there are artifacts out there that can change that? Listen to me! If we lock ourselves in, we die out. We go extinct. We have no other choice. We have to go into the Zone. We have to find the others”.

— Chronicler Mirza

get him down. Rather, it only seems to amuse him even more;

- ❑ **Stalker Mora** — a huntress of few words, with a sharp-eyed gaze that notices even the smallest details of her environment. She has been to places that others would never return from and it seems she has a rather special relationship with the Rot;
- ❑ **Dog Handler Agafon** — energetic hunter who thinks there are two essential things in life: adventure and Orpho — his dog (he once heard that the name was associated with some hellhound from the myths of the Ancients). Agafon himself looks like a beast. He has fangs as well as powerful claws. It’s quite possible he managed to actually find a common tongue with Orpho. They’re a lot alike.

Many moons have passed since that day. The People became used to the existence of the First Expedition. What few riches the surrounding swampy areas granted quickly ran out. Even the Treasury that was found some distance away was emptied, though the Expedition still brought home quite a bit of food from there. But having to fight Zone-Ghouls for the riches made things difficult, and what was worse, Mora and Agafon were wounded in the process.

It isn’t fair to say that the Island was explored all over, not a stone unturned. No, far from that. But the People now understood their surroundings much better. Howev-

¹ “Princess Anastasia” is a cruise liner, that once traveled from Saint-Petersburg to Helsinki to Stockholm to Tallinn before returning to Saint-Petersburg.



er, the lands that laid beneath the Bridge were still a mystery to the Ark. Sometimes when the mists would thin, the other side would flicker with dancing lights, invitingly.

Not so long ago the Expedition encountered others, different People. The Bridge Guard welcomed the First Expedition, exchanged tales, helped Mora fill in the blanks on her map and shared many stories about the Marshes.

During the first couple of weeks the Expedition explored a different side of the Island, though their real goal waited less than a day's journey away — if you followed the river upstream.

After their triumphant return to the Ark, the Expedition shared the knowledge they'd gathered. There was a place beyond the Bridge that the Guard marked with two crosses. It was a commune that — if the Guard spoke truthfully — was happy to trade and to chat with other "bearers of intelligence". Mirza believed it was a place to find artifacts galore and knowledge that would help the People survive. Which is why the Expedition only rested briefly before heading back out again.

The moon turned into but a slice of light, disappeared and then transformed back into a shining circle, yet the Expedition still had not returned. This worried the People, some of whom even assumed the worst. But there were those who were close to the First Expedition, those

who knew them personally and were willing to go out and search for them. And yes — you are those people. You are the Second Expedition. Your goal isn't just to search out a new home for your People — it is to save them. And you should start by saving the First Expedition. You are expected to go across the water, to pass the Bridge and reach the Golden Ray — ruins of the Ancients that escape the greyness around them and reach for the sky. For if you move south-west from the Ray, you should come across the Two Crosses, which is exactly where the First Expedition was headed.

THE BEGINNING

The player characters are of the People. They are the ones who are bound by duty or by choice to go after the First Expedition and save them, as well as everyone else in the Ark. The water filters there function erratically, rendering some of the water undrinkable; the food stock is not rich by any standards; the People's numbers are dwindling since deaths are all too common while births are unheard of. There are fish in the river, but the Rot poisons their flesh. Huge, toothy osmers make it impossible to travel by water.¹ They are cunning, bestially so and their perfected hunting instincts are considered by some to be

¹ Because of the way local fauna is, the usual boats you could find in the Zone are useless. If any of the players got those at character creation, the GM might allow them to take a different one, since they are quite useless here.

FAILURE AND KEY INFORMATION

As we all know, failing is something that should be done right. It should push the story forward, not stop it in its tracks. Which is why when the characters are seeking information about the First Expedition, trying to realize that someone is not being straightforward with them or looking for important clues, you shouldn't let failure stop their success. Which admittedly sounds oxymoronic.

The characters need to have certain key pieces of information in order to solve the puzzle. It serves no one if the story grinds to a halt because they didn't get it due to a failed check. Instead you could give them the bare minimum and put the characters into a worse position. Hurt them as a result of a failed check, make someone mad at them, make someone unhelpful, put someone in the wrong place at the wrong time. But give them the pieces that make up the puzzle anyway.

Why make a roll if they get the clue even if they fail? The roll is important to determine the cost of their actions, to make them feel competent when things go right and to provide appropriate consequences when things go wrong. And, of course, to let them earn their mutation points.

a form of primitive intellect. They attack in packs, turning over boats and rafts before proceeding to drown and eat everything they consider tasty. Until the People figure out how to fight them off, any creature that favors water, be that due to mutations, bestial nature or artifacts, won't be able to fully realize their potential.

For almost the entirety of the warmer part of the year, the nights are filled with light (chroniclers say the Ancients called them "white"). On those nights it is easy to move around and even work during the latest hours. From the end of May until the middle of July, the sun doesn't leave the sky at all, refusing the star-filled darkness to the People, while in winter, the darkness is repaid in full — daylight lasts barely a third of its normal timespan during this period. If the characters travel during the summer, they receive a +1 modification to Find the Path and a +1 to +4 modification to Scout rolls made outdoors (depending on what time of day and what month it is). In winter those modifications are replaced with the exact opposite (+1 becomes -1, and so on).

During character creation, while determining the relationships in the group and to the various NPCs, the players add another relationship, either one from the list below or one inspired by it:

- ❑ I am in awe of [First Expedition member], because they showed me new ways to utilize my abilities. I want them to become my mentor.
- ❑ I have to save [First Expedition member], since they once saved me and I owe it to them.
- ❑ [First Expedition member] is a shining example of what each and every one of us have to do for the People. I want to be even better than them.

SECTOR ENVIRONMENT

Marble marshes are different from the environments most mutants are used to. Those are marshes, after all. Which is why we present a table that you should use instead of the one found in Mutant Year Zero on page 156. Roll D66 or choose:

D66	ENVIRONMENT	RUIN	THREAT	ARTIFACT
11–12	Thick woods	No	Yes	No
13–15	Overgrown bushes	No	Yes	No
16–21	Marshes	No	Yes	No
22–24	Perilous swamps	No	Yes	No
25–26	Deep quagmire	No	Yes	No
31–32	Peat deposits	Yes	Yes	No
33–35	Overgrown ruins	Yes	Yes	Yes
36–42	Ruins	Yes	Yes	Yes
43–51	Dilapidated buildings	Yes	Yes	Yes
52–56	Enduring buildings	Yes	Yes	Yes
61–64	Abandoned industrial buildings	Yes	Yes	Yes
65–66	Settlement	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Ark is connected to the land by a ropeway. Water is more than enough to stop most of the Peoples' natural enemies. Living creatures will find it difficult to get on board the Ark unless they have sufficiently advanced technology (adversaries' technology should be 30 or more) or someone on the inside. In any case, the defenders of "cess Anasta" gain +1 to their Battle Level. GMs should remember that some threats are completely incapable of reaching the Ark!

Despite all that, there is a rat infestation. Apparently, even osmers consider those pesky creatures inedible. The infestation is a serious problem — the rats are soaked in Rot, munch on the liner's sheathing and steal food. For as long as the rodents are present, the Food level decreases by 2 each session, while the body count increases by 1. One possible solution to this problem is the project "Rodent Hunters" that becomes available af-

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ter finding barsiks¹ in the Zone. Should the players come up with a different way to rid the Ark of rats — be kind to them, oh GM, and help them bring those plans to life!

MARBLE MARSHES AND THE METAPLOT

In this book, you will find the description of four special sectors: The Bridge, Two Crosses, Big Build, and the Seaport Lands. They are tied together by the search for the First Expedition. It shouldn't be difficult for you to put other sectors into the Zone. As a GM you are free to decide whether to use the existing ones from compendiums and books or to make up your own as described in "Mutant Year Zero". The Marble Marshes plot is easy to fit into the metaplot and can be a useful part of it. The metaplot itself is described in Chapter 16 of "Mutant Year Zero".

RETURNING HOME

Even though Marble Marshes does connect several Zone sectors through a unified plot, the characters still have a home to which they might want to return from time to time. It might be useful for them to come back and do

some project work, bring back the treasures they came across during their travels or ask for help. Don't forget that the characters neglecting the Ark means the Ark isn't being developed and the People might die out.

So don't discourage characters from returning periodically to the Ark to develop their home or protect it from threats. After all, it only makes sense for the characters to bring barsiks they found within the ruins of Niversity back to "cess Anasta" to avoid having to carry them around with them throughout all of their adventures.

WHERE IS EDEN?

Eden is purposely placed outside the map. This is to encourage players to come up with ways to cross the Big Water. It might even be in a different Zone — in that case the travel rules from Zone Compendium №1 (page XX) will be useful. If it doesn't make sense to you to send the characters to a different Zone, you should assume that Eden is located on an artificial island at the edge of the map. The description and the purpose of Eden can be found in Chapter 16 of "Mutant Year Zero".

¹ Barsik is one of the most common names for cats in Russia. The creature gained its name because of that. If you want to move them over to other countries or just leave the entourage out of your game, the US mutants might have come up with the name "Snuffles" or "Snowballs", while other countries would have their country-specific names.



MAIN GROUPS OF MARBLE MARSHES

- ❑ The Bridge Guard (page XX) are the children of scientists, students and engineers. Nⁿ-mutated humans. Their duty is to protect the Bridge and not let it collapse. They rarely move far away from the Bridge.
 - ❑ Knights of the Golden Ray (page XX) are People of a different Ark. Mutants. They protect the Bridge. You can encounter a traveling knight anywhere in the Zone.
 - ❑ Metraders are inhabitants of an underground city. Nⁿ-mutated. Their caravan is the biggest and the richest one in the known land. They may be encountered along their route between the main settlements or during their rest in one of these destinations. They travel by way of several heavy riding machines, accompanied by armed riflemen mounted on tamed moss bosses. Metraders sell food, water, artifacts, moss boss calfs and slaves. They will gladly take ammo, artifacts and slaves as payment.
 - ❑ The Gatekeepers (page XX) are the Killer Whale's gang. Rarely encountered beyond the Two Crosses. The gang consists of both mutants and non-mutated humans.
 - ❑ Adepts of a Playful God (page XX) are inhabitants of Two Crosses and are rarely encountered anywhere else. Mostly non-mutated humans, with a small percentage of the population being mutants.
 - ❑ Evil Osmers (page XX) are a huge gang. Mostly mutants. They guard the Big Build and small groups of them can be encountered in the adjacent sectors.
 - ❑ Megapigeons (page XX) are Zone-ghouls with a distinctive culture. Mostly encountered on the other side of Burrow-Under-River.
 - ❑ The Small Folk (page XX) are Zone-ghouls possessing a surprising amount of business acumen. They rarely wander far from Burrow-Under-River.
 - ❑ The Rebels (page XX) are three (possibly four, depending on how the campaign goes) non-mutated people from project "Mimir". They are not touched by Rot or even the smallest of mutations.
 - ❑ The Resistance (page XX) are two Beast Mutant groups who currently reside within the Seaport.
 - ❑ Food Cathers (page XX) are Zone-ghouls who had to learn the advantages of diplomacy.
 - ❑ Positronic robots (page XX) are a group of robots who arrived with the Rebels and became self-aware.
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THE BRIDGE

Once, many paths across the River existed, but they have long since fallen to the relentless onslaught of time and the elements. Only a single way remains — the Bridge. It connects the Island to the Mainland. It too would have fallen long ago if not for the Bridge Guard — descendants of scientists, lab-assistants, professors, and students who found protection from the apocalypse inside a bomb shelter under the University. The University itself lies in ruins but the bunker entrance has been cleared of debris and remains well-guarded around the clock.

Both sides of the Bridge are fortified with outposts, while the Bridge itself is guarded by members of the Knights of the Golden Ray (see below).

PLACES

The Niversity Ruins (K23). Partially collapsed galleries, old laboratories choked with rubble, and huge, empty auditoriums carpeted in broken window glass and smashed furniture are what populates the empty halls of Niversity. You may find some scrap amidst the ruins here or meet wild barsiks (see page XX) hunting rats and insects. Somewhere amidst all this chaos hides Rada's gang, waiting to ambush the unwary.

The shelter entrance (K24). One of the fallen galleries peels away from a huge, round, metallic trapdoor. The

Bridge Guard protects this place and there is always a group of at least four of them present here. The passage is opened only to other members of the Guard. PCs might try to get inside by force or by earning a Bridge Guard's unconditional trust.

Bomb shelter (K24). The bunker has a working power station, a water desalination system, a functional kitchen, a storeroom with plenty of stuff, and a spacious room with beds. It is occupied by the elderly, children, and several (usually 3–4) adults, catching a quick rest inside. Children are never to leave the shelter: Bridge Guards make sure that they are not seen by outsiders (even the Knights), let alone spoken to by them.

The Island Outpost (L24). Anyone who might want to cross the Bridge first comes to a minibus occupied by one of the Guards (usually Rada). There they must pay with bullets, food (four rations to one bullet), fuel or booze (two bottles to one bullet), or other useful "currencies". Passing across the bridge costs 1 cartridge per person crossing. If someone atop a riding car attempts to cross, they will be billed 5 cartridges for the car plus an additional cartridge per passenger. The Outpost is always guarded by four Bridge Guards with an unusual ranged weapon (see page XX) as well as four Guards with melee weapons. When the toll is paid, the Guard lights up a green lantern — a signal of passage.