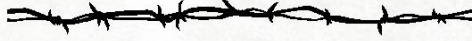
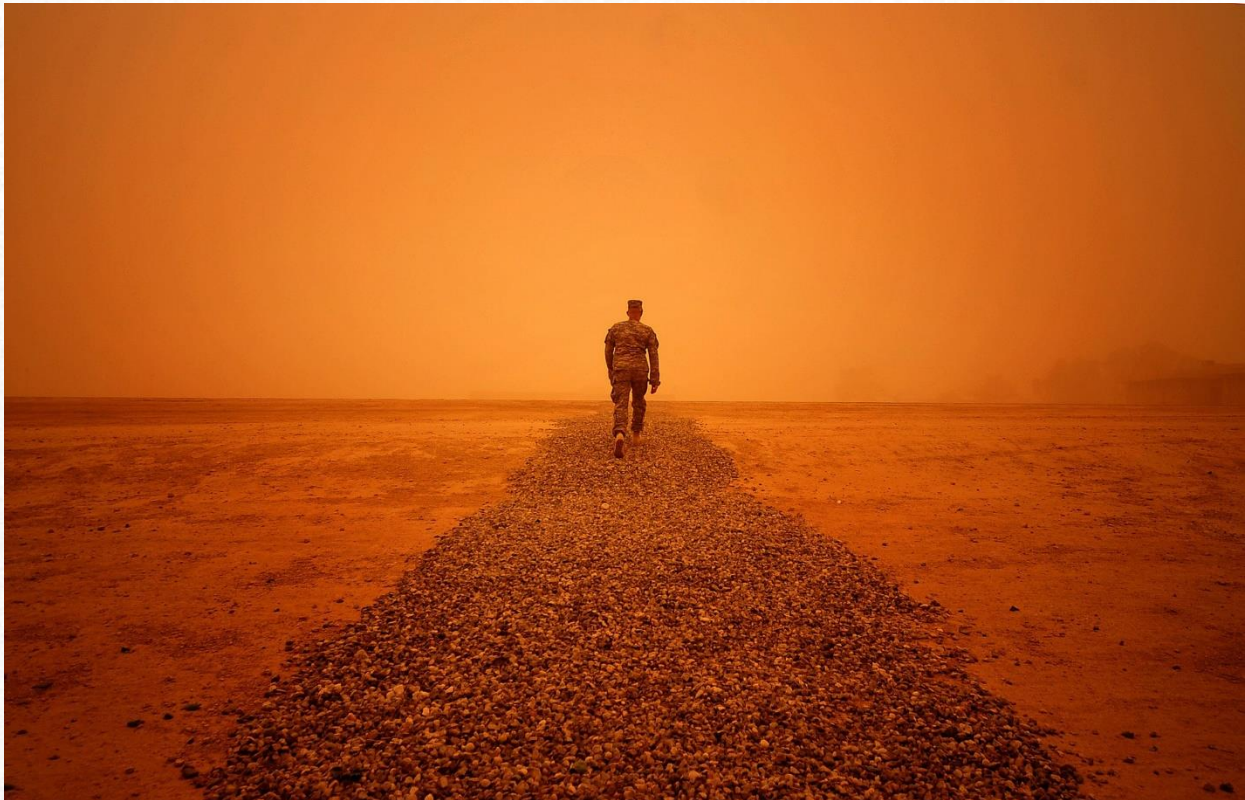


MUTANT



The Weird Zone

Where nobody dares travel



Introduction. For this very special Zone Sector, I have drawn inspiration from Uddezonen, first published in the product *Göborg – Encyklopedistens klagan*, for *Mutant: Undergångens Arvtagare*. All pictures are courtesy of Pixabay, and is free of charge. Black/white illustrations are from Forge Studios.

by Bjørn Ove Asprem



The Weird Zone

Deep in the zone is the inferno known as “The Weird Zone”. Stalkers usually joke that at least you won’t have to worry about being eaten by a devourer here, as even these foul beasts shun this traitorous place.

Rumors say that even the terrain is dangerous. Fire starts spontaneously in the ground itself, acid pools suddenly opens beneath a traveler’s feet, and smoke and smog in unnatural colors carry all kinds of poison and ill effects. As if this weren’t enough, the landscape shift and change, making it impossible to map. You might survive the chemical inferno, but you might not find your way back.

Background

Before the Fall, a powerful tech company called Matsuyama Inc. tried to prepare humankind for the inevitable by using nanotechnology. While humans stood no chance to survive a nuclear blast, nanorobots could help humankind survive the fallout and protect against radioactivity (the Rot). Their work was nearly done when the Fall came, but it was not complete. As they lost control over their project, the nanomachines ran wild. Their programming and instructions were randomly altered, creating what the inhabitants of the Zone today call “The Weird Zone”. The nanomachines are constantly working, restructuring, rebuilding or tearing down structures.

In addition to making the land itself lethal and volatile for travelers, the nanomachines have created several strange beings that can be encountered here. Combinators, crystal creatures and crystal swarms are all monstrous, alien and completely made up of tiny machines. The nanomachines are also responsible for the creation of The Golden Ones.

Overview

Any growths, be they trees or tall grass fields, are reduced both in numbers and density the closer you come to the Weird Zone. Grass and trees in nearby sectors may be discolored. As you enter The Weird Zone, the ground itself becomes barren, and dry sand blows over rock outcroppings covered by yellow or grey moss. A sure sign that you’re approaching the Weird Place is the ever-present smog. The smog changes color but are most often yellow-brown or grey. Breathing in the air is not dangerous (yet) but is irritating and can provoke fits of coughing.

The landscape quickly changes character as one travel deeper into the Weird Zone. The grass soon disappears completely. Not even moss or lichen grow here. The color of the ground turns into a rusty brown and orange hue, almost resembling a stone desert. The smog thickens and changes color to different brown hues. Crystalline formations start appearing in the landscape. At first as fist-sized outgrowths on cliffs or the ground. Then, larger batches of crystal appear as trees or bushes. These are quite beautiful to look at and may fetch a good bargain at a market. They are also treacherous, as they are sharp and painful to step on.

Close to fields of crystal formations, unfortunate travelers may also encounter crystal smog. Over certain patches of crystal, the smog thickens and changes color from brown to a sparkling white. The smog causes the crystals in it to change, both in color and shape.



Returning stalkers may suddenly find the path from yesterday closed in by a huge wall of purple crystal. If travellers are caught in the crystal smog, they will quickly find that it eats away their clothes and other gear made of organic material. A different kind of smog is the grey-green one, which quickly infects food that isn’t stored properly.

Deep in the Weird Zone, the crystalline growths are huge as trees. “Time to turn back”, most stalkers will say. The fog is thinner here, but the many crystal outgrowths bend and reflect the light, making it difficult to see far ahead.

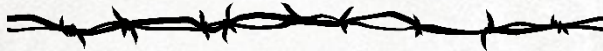
The Weird Zone

Rules

The Weird Zone works a little differently than normal Zone Sectors. The Weird Zone should cover more than one sector, at a minimum between 3 and 5. The sectors contain few, if any, buildings.

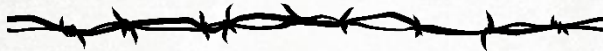
General rules in the Weird Zone:

- Compasses and Maps do not work here, a stalker gains no bonus from these artifacts.
- The changing landscapes and the smog make it impossible to follow one's own tracks. A Stalker must therefore roll Find the Path even if he's returning the way he came.
- Every day in the Weird Zone, roll Endure. Failure means 1 Fatigue due to the dry air.
- The nanites have cleaned the air for Rot. All sectors in the Weird Zone are considered Rot Oasis.



NOTE :

The Weird Zone is not just weird and alien. It is extremely lethal, so make sure the PCs understand this before venturing into this bizarre land. Maybe have them meet other stalkers or wanderers who have visited the place. For PCs who feel they are not challenged anymore by the Zone, this might be a welcome challenge for them.



Encounters in the Weird Zone

Instead of the table in the MYZ CoreBook, use the following table to see what kind of threat the PCs face.

d66	Encounter
11-12	Crystal Creature
13-14	Crystal Insects
15-16	Combinator
21-24	Golden Ones
25-26	Spontaneous Fire
31-32	Acid Pool
33-34	White Smog
35-36	Grey-green Smog
41	Sharp Crystals
42	Blood Cough
43	Ignition Smog
44	Poison Smog
45	Glass Plague
46	Vibration Field
51-56	Visual Phenomenon
	Two threats (roll twice on this table)
61-66	

Crystal Creatures, Combinator, Crystal Insects and the Golden Ones are described on page 7 and onwards.

If an encounter with the Golden Ones is rolled, it could be with a single Golden One, a patrol, or the PCs could stumble upon the Golden Ones' camp.

Phenomena

In general, all *Know the Zone* rolls made to understand anything about these phenomena is made with a -3 penalty. There aren't too many who have survived the Weird Zone to tell about it.

Spontaneous Fire

The unstable chemical composition of the air and ground combusts, and bursts of fire shoots up from the ground or from crystalline outgrowths nearby. A PC who is alert and succeeds on a Scout roll, may become suspicious when the crystals suddenly start flaring an angry red.

In order not to be hit by the fire spewing forth, a successful Move roll with a -1 modification must be made (any successes on the Scout check counters this). If hit, roll 6 Base Dice. Any success inflicts one point of damage. The victim also catches fire. The Weird Zone's fire is hard to put out. Water doesn't work, and rolling on the ground or trying to suffocate the fire is only possible by a successful Move roll with a -2 modification.

Acid pool

A portion of the ground suddenly opens. Unless they make a Move roll, one or more PCs fall down into a subterranean acid pool. Make an attack with 10 Base Dice every round. Every success rolled, inflicts a point of damage. A PC can either try to get out of the hole in the ground himself (by making a Move roll at a -2 penalty) or be helped by someone with a rope or similar. A regular Force roll is needed to pull a PC up.

White smog

White smog targets organic material such as most clothes, backpacks and other gear made of leather, fur, etc. It is not harmful to living beings. The smog targets d6 items of gear per round per character and degrades the gear bonus by 1 each round. Normal clothing normally only has 0 or 1 gear die, and falls apart rather quickly. A Move roll is needed to get out of the smog.

Gray-green smog

As white smog, but this targets Grub. Canned food is immune to this. Crystal like growths appear on the food. While it is

relatively easy to scrape off with a knife, the food is considered poisoned at this point. Eating it inflicts 1 point of damage. You cannot eat poisoned food in order to meet your daily needs of grub or to heal damage. Cooking the food doesn't help either.

Sharp crystals

Razor-sharp crystals lie hidden on the ground, covered by a thin layer of sand, or suddenly sprout up from the ground or from a cliff wall as one or more PC pass it. Unless a Scout roll is made, roll 6 Base Dice. Every success rolled inflicts 1 point of damage.

Blood cough

The air becomes thicker, and it becomes even more difficult to breath. Roll for Endure once per hour. Failure causes the PC to cough up blood and suffer both 1 Fatigue and 1 Damage. The PC must roll until he succeeds, at which point he is cured (for now). Leaving the Weird Zone does not help, as the air particles have fastened on the lungs.

Ignition smog

The smog changes color to a greyish hue. It seeps through the PCs' clothes and gear. A PC must roll a Gear Die for each bullet on his person. For every success, the bullet ignites, injuring the PC by 1. A Move roll is required to escape this dangerous smog.

Poison smog

This yellowish smog causes crystallic outgrowths on a PC's eyes, nose and mouth. Roll 8 Base Dice every round. The first success causes the PC to become blinded, subsequent successes causes Fatigue. When a PC is broken by Fatigue, the trauma is Damage.

After succeeding in a Move to get away (-3 if blind), a Heal roll is necessary to carefully scrape away the outgrowths (-2 if you try this on yourself).

Glass plague

This almost translucent mist may give the Zone traveller the idea that the smog is getting lighter and less dangerous. This is definitely not the case, as this insidious smog seeps into your body and attaches itself to the bones in your body. Roll 6 Base Dice. Every hit inflicts 1 point of damage. Protection suits helps, and PCs covered by armor or other heavy clothing may

The Weird Zone

also be protected somewhat (1-2 Gear Dice, at the GMs discretion).



If the PC is at least damaged by 1, his bones are infected. Every hour causes another point of damage and fatigue. This cannot be healed by normal means. Healing mutations may stave off the disease temporarily, but does not cure it. The only way to cure someone inflicted with glass plague is to completely shatter the infected bone before it spreads. This must happen before the PC is broken by the plague. To even come up with this solution, a Heal roll must be made with a -2 modification. Then, someone must succeed with a Force roll (Gear dice can be applied if used with a blunt weapon). This will automatically break the PC and give it a suitable critical wound (depending on which bone was crushed).

The bone will heal, but imperfectly. Reduce Strength (if the arm was crushed) or Agility (if the leg was crushed) permanently by 1.

Vibration field

Large crystal fields may, if disturbed by a high-pitched sound (either set off by the PC or by a single, shattering crystal), set off a chain reaction of exploding crystals. The first attack comes as a complete surprise. Roll an attack with 8 Base Dice, each success inflicting 1 point of damage.

In the following round, the ground starts shaking. Roll d6. 1-2 An acid pool opens, 3-4 Spontaneous fire spews forth, 5-6 Both phenomena occur at the same time.

In the following round, dangerous crystal smog forms over the now shattered crystal field.

- 1 = White Smog
- 2 = Grey-green smog
- 3-4 = Ignition Smog
- 5 = Poison Smog
- 6 = Glass Plague

Visual Phenomenon

The PC witness the Weird Zone at what it does best – being weird. These phenomena are generally not dangerous.

They see:

- A special crystal formation.
- Crystal formations change or grow out of nowhere.
- The haze changes color.
- A river of acid.
- An old stone church, one of the few buildings left. It is completely covered in crystals.
- Sand blows over the barren landscape, before it's suddenly lifted in the air, whirling around in a tornado, defying all laws of physics.
- An exceptionally large patch of crystal. The reflection from the sunlight makes it hard to see, and sight is reduced to Short range.



Two threats (+ roll again)

If you roll between 61-66, the Sector will contain an additional threat. Roll again. This could potentially lead to a Sector with a lot of threats. The Weird Zone is a dangerous place, after all.

Scrap & Artifacts



Why would anyone dare to enter the Weird Zone? Unless the Weird Zone simply is in the path to a more desirable place, there must be a reason why foolhardy Stalkers enter it? The truth is that the nanites, for some reason, have chosen to preserve random items from the past in pristine condition. Or they have simply made new ones. For what purpose, nobody knows. Is it to lure treasure seekers to their doom? The truth is probably the same as with the rest of the choices the nanites make – there is no reason to it.

A high Threat Level (see the section on **Rules**) also means more artifacts. In addition, every sector in the Weird Zone contains d6 scrap items (50/50). Roll for scrap items on p. 262 of the MYZ CoreBook or any other list of scrap items you may have. These scrap items are in great condition and will normally fetch at least 2-4 bullets at a market.

If the PCs return to a cleared-out sector of the Weird Zone after a few months, new items can be found. Exactly why is anybody's guess.

Creatures of the Weird Zone

The next chapter describes some of the “sentient” creatures that may be encountered in the Weird Zone.

Combinator (-3)

These insectlike creeps are about 50 cm long and seem to consist of crystalline parts, which look like blinking grey and red metal. A single combinator is no big threat, but where one is spotted, more will soon come. These creatures travel around the zone searching for prey while hidden. When it finds it, it somehow calls to the rest of the swarm, which quickly joins in the attack. When a combinator dies, three other, live combinators consumes the dead combinator and merges together to become a larger combinator.

When killed, the swarm and the individual combinators which make up the swarm, almost disintegrates into unrecognizable ashes. If someone were to capture a combinator and study it closely with a magnifying glass (or even better, a microscope from the Old Age), he would discover that these are technological creatures, the remnants of a nanotechnological experiment gone awry.

Attributes: Strength (starting Strength 4-6)

Armor: 1

Weapons: Fangs (weapon damage 1, but can increase)

Swarm: Can only be damaged by fire or explosions. Roll a base die every combat round. On a 1, the swarm increases in Strength by 1. On a 6, it increases by 2.

Increased size: If a swarm takes damage in a round, individual combinators merge with the dead ones and become bigger. This increases weapon damage by 1, to a maximum of 5.

Crystal creature (-3)

A crystal creature is a creature made entirely of crystal. All such beings are different. Most have four legs, some have eight. Some have tails, some have two heads. The only thing

they have in common are the sharp crystal claws on their paws or crystal teeth in their mouths.

A crystal creature’s only purpose is to kill. Nobody knows why or how it is created. It can sense living creatures within Long range, so hiding is futile.

Attributes: Strength 6, Agility 5

Skills: Fight 3

Armor: 4

Weapons: Claws, fangs or tail (damage 2)

Pouncing attack: A crystal creature can charge an opponent within Short range and attack with a pounce. If successful, the attack causes an extra damage.

Immunities: Immune to fire and energy weapons

Sharp body: If a PC misses a melee attack, he takes 1 damage as he cuts himself on the sharp, protruding crystals of the creature.

Vulnerability: Sonic attack, like mutations or ultrasonic weapons, does 1 extra damage.

Crystal swarm (-3)

This swarm of small, yellow crystals is in fact a swarm of rebellious nanomachines which for some reason have rejected the programming from the rest. At a distance, the swarm may be mistaken for a swarm of small insects, but as it comes closer, it becomes apparent that it consists of many small crystals. The swarm still creates a buzzing sound as it travels through the air, and it emits a yellowish haze in its wake.

If the Crystal Swarm flies into a Smog of any kind, it disperses immediately. While the PCs may think the swarm somehow is an ally, it quickly turns on the PCs.

Strength: 5 or more

Weapons: Bite (weapon damage 1)

Swarm: Can only be damaged by fire or explosions

Gas cloud: The yellowish cloud of sulfur gas that trails behind the crystal swarm inflicts one point of Fatigue every round within Near range. The victim can Move away from the cloud.

Granting immunity: PCs attacked by a Crystal Swarm are immune to the effects of all smog (including Blood Cough and Glass Plague) for d6 days.

The Golden Ones

The Golden Ones were once scientists, laborers and others who were in the vicinity of the old Matsuyama Inc. facility when the nanomachines went awry. As the researchers tried to beat the clock to complete their project before the Fall, the nanomachines spiraled out of control. They attacked the researchers, penetrated their protection suits and entered their orifices, effectively taking over their bodies. Guards and lab assistants tried in vain to stop the nanites from spreading, but soon, the entire facility and the nearby blocks were overrun by these nanomachines.

Generations later, these victims are still alive, kept breathing by the nanomachines constant regeneration of tissue and vital organs. Normal beings would turn insane after all this time, but the nanomachines have taken control of their brain circuitry as well. Nothing much is left of the personality and memories of those that once worked for the proud corporation Matsuyama Inc.

Their skin has a golden sheen, and their alien way of living makes them both feared and enigmatic. All look like androgynous, hairless humans, golden in color.

Behavior

The Golden Ones are generally hostile towards strangers. The nanomachines that protect them from the Rot has an “attack first, ask questions later” attitude programmed. They do not speak any language, but communicate with each other through what looks like telepathy, but which is actually more like a computer-like interface. They cannot communicate with others verbally, and the communication attempts that have been successful, have been using some sort of rude sign language.

The nanomachines that infect the Golden Ones, periodically need to immerse themselves in water. Some Golden Ones therefore venture outside of the Weird Zone from time to time searching for a water source to bathe in. Tributes in the form of water or safe passage to a water source is the only thing that will entice the Golden Ones to enter into some sort of trade or

peace agreement with other people. Chroniclers have long pondered why the Golden Ones need to bathe. In truth, this is just a random programming malfunction on the nanites’ part.

Now and then, the nanomachines for some reason completely take over a single Golden One, making it act more or less like a robot or someone under the constant influence of the Puppeteer mutation. This Golden One takes charge of the tribe in order to enact the nanomachines’ orders. Most of the time, this order is related to the need of replenishing their numbers in case of unnatural deaths (see *Infections* below), but it can sometimes be different orders, like preemptively attacking other settlements, reaching out to other settlements in a peace gesture, venturing out into the zone searching for information or leading all Golden Ones on a pilgrimage to a river or a lake in order to bathe.

When the nanomachines’ task has been accomplished, the controlled Golden One is released from this control, with little to no memory of what has transpired.

The Golden Ones does not need to eat and drink, but patrols of Golden Ones can still be spotted elsewhere in the Weird Zone, harvesting crystal formations as if they were mushrooms or fruit, or even hunting combinators and crystal creatures. When the yield or prey is brought back to camp, the nanomachines simply dissolve the creature/formation.

The Tribe

The Golden Tribe number about 80 individuals. Their lair is deep in the Weird Zone, in a place completely free of the ravages of the Fall, the weirdness of the Weird Zone or time itself. This is the original facility of Matsuyama Inc. Unlike the rest of the Weird Zone, the building is free of crystals and it looks like an industrial park which was built yesterday. The nanomachines are constantly cleaning and maintaining the building, both on the inside and the exterior. The Golden Ones do not live inside the building. Instead, they have made camp on the parking lot. When they are not out harvesting crystal formations or hunting combinators or crystal creatures, they are relaxing and meditating in the open or in their lean-tos. Entering the Matsuyama facility is anathema.

The Weird Zone



The Golden Ones are fiercely protective of their home and will defend it to the last Golden One. Inside the facility, a Scholar or Technician from Elysium may find a way to override the nanotechnology and change the Weird Zone back to “normal”. It would be extremely dangerous though, as the nanomachines inside the facility would create combinators and crystal creatures to protect themselves.

Attributes: Strength 3, Agility 3, Wits 3, Empathy 4

Skills: Fight 3, Comprehend 2, Know the Zone 5 (Weird Zone only), Endure 2, Sneak 2, Scout 3

Armor: Some have scrap armor (3-5)

Weapons: Crystal knife/sword (treat as scrap knife or machete)

Immunities: The Golden Ones are immune to the effects of the smog in the Weird Zone.

MUTATIONS

While the Golden Ones are not considered mutants, some have abilities that mimic mutations. This is the nanomachines’ way of helping the Golden Ones survive. These cannot misfire, but they have limited use and must spend MPs from the GMs pool like normal.

All of the Golden Ones are considered to have the mutations Luminescence and Regenerate. About half of Golden Ones have one extra mutation-like ability. The other “mutations” can be Extreme reflexes, Human magnet, Sonar, Manbeast, Four-Armed, Sprinter, Electric, and Beast Master (crystal creatures, crystal swarm or combinators only).

Golden Ones controlled completely by the nanomachines can change and develop these abilities as needed (at will) up to a maximum of four abilities (not including Luminescence and Regeneration).

Infection

A Golden One can infect others with their nanotechnology. Depending on the relationship between the Golden One and the subject, this may be beneficial or detrimental.

If the recipient doesn’t want to be infected, the Golden One must first succeed in a melee attack. He then chooses one of the following infections:

- **Healing.** The Golden One infects the subject with nanotechnology that functions as the REGEN artefact.
- **Enhancement.** The nanotechnology increases Strength and Agility to 5. This lasts for d6 days.
- **Mutation.** The nanotechnology duplicates the effect of a random mutation or animal power. This lasts for d6 days.
- **Virus.** The nanotechnology infects the PC with a virus resembling Machine Fever (see Mutant Mechatron p. 92). This virus affects both robots and non-robots.
- **Inhibition.** The nanotechnology reduces Strength and Agility to 1. This lasts for d6 days. The victim’s attributes cannot exceed 1 until this time has elapsed.
- **Transformation.** The victim will gradually become a Golden One. Unlike the other infection types, the victim will have a slight chance of resisting. If the victim succeeds in an Endurance roll with a -3 modification, he rejects the nanites. Otherwise he will slowly succumb to the transformation. Over a period of d6 months, he will gradually take on a golden sheen and start to appear more and more like a Golden One. As the infection reaches the brain, he will start to act more and more erratically. When the transformation is complete, the new Golden One will make its way out to the Weird Zone to join the Golden Ones’ community.

Golden Ones rarely uses the latter infection, but if several Golden Ones have been killed, they will try to replenish their numbers by infecting unwary travelers. Some Golden Ones may also leave the Weird Zone to hunt for new recruits. The use of a REGEN artifact gives the subject a chance to be healed. A new Endurance roll with a -3 modification is required to be healed.

The Weird Zone



condition, the Stalker pleads with the PCs to go into the Weird Zone to find a cure. This NPC may be one the PCs already have a good relationship with. The only cure available in the Weird Zone is to persuade a Golden One to use his REGEN infection to counter the transformation.

- A group of zone travelers containing a protocol robot from Mechatron-7, has come up with a solution for cleansing the Weird Zone once and for all. The robot has hypothesized (quote correctly) that the creatures in the Weird Zone are, in fact, tiny robots. He wants to try and infect the area with machine fever. This might be a long-term plan, as they would need to find a contagious robot (or infect the protocol robot), and then venture deep into the Weird Zone. There, they can try to gain access to the Matsuyama facility and infect the mainframe with machine fever.

The Weird Zone in play

Here are a few hooks to get the Weird Zone in play.

- The PCs encounter a dying stalker out in the zone. The Stalker suffers from glass plague and will most likely die. Before he does, he tells the PCs about the Weird Zone and its many treasures.
- In the Weird Zone, a patrol of Golden Ones surprisingly come to the PCs aid as they are battling crystal creatures or are stuck in an acid pool. The Golden Ones need help getting to a nearby river for their annual bath. A hostile group of mutants or zone ghouls have taken up residence nearby and drove the Golden Ones away last time. The PCs must negotiate safe passage or kill the other group. The Golden Ones may feel they are even now or grant the PCs some artifacts and scrap.
- A Stalker from the PCs Ark returns alone from an expedition to the Weird Zone. He has been infected by the Golden Ones and will turn into one of them in d6 months' time. While Chroniclers in the Ark study him and try to understand how to halt or cure this