

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #29:
Mutualists I



By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

To mangle a paraphrase from John Donne, no mutant is an island — unless your mutant *is* an island. And even then it probably does not live entirely alone. Whether you are part of a community or a party of adventurers, Ancient philosophers from the Liver Pool had it right: everyone gets by with a little help from their friends. When two or more different species help each other, the cooperation is called mutualism. The coexistence may be symbiotic, where one creature lives on (or in) the other, like human gut flora; or it may be less intimate, like bees simultaneously feeding from flowers and pollinating them. In some cases, one species domesticates the other, like humans and dogs (or vice versa), while others just adapt their behavior to one another, like some large mammals standing lookout for each other at watering holes. The creatures below illustrate varying degrees of this cooperative behavior, whether living in constant and necessary proximity, or just trailing along, one behind the other, hoping to snag a snack. They are listed as pairs or groups, making it easier to find creatures that operate together.

Active Coral

No. Enc.: 0 (3d8)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 10' (3')
Armor Class: 3
Hit Dice: 16
Attacks: 1 (crush and spines)
Damage: 3d10
Save: L8
Morale: 12
Hoard Class: XII

A smooth brain coral found throughout the warm shallow waters of the tropics, active coral formations can reach 20' in diameter, although most clumps are much smaller. It appears harmless — until a victim ventures near. Then the creature opens a series of hidden spine-filled, craggy maws, which it uses to “inhale” its food, kill it, and cut it apart.



Corals over 5' wide have two mouths, those over 10' have four, and those over 15' have eight. Anything bitten is trapped and takes damage every round until it dies or the coral is killed. The only animals the coral will not attack are the cleaner wrasse (tiny fish) and coral eels, which both live in and around the coral, eating leftover bits of the coral's meals while maintaining and protecting it. Although it might seem like a good sentry creature for underwater races, the coral makes a poor guard, because prey must come to within a few inches of a mouth, and the eels are nasty to have around. The coral is vulnerable to ranged and chemical attacks, and to predation by worms, snails, and other little critters that can feed away from the mouths and avoid the eels.

Mutations: *aberrant form (natural weapons), special.*

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This publication is dedicated to providing useful information, game content, and ideas to players of modern, science fiction, and post-apocalyptic table-top and role-playing games in general and to fans of Goblinoid Games' *Mutant Future* RPG in particular. The material contained herein are compatible with it and any others that use the “Basic” system introduced in the most popular role-playing games of the early 1970s and are easily adaptable to many other games (especially successor systems, to include those covered by the Open Game License).

Coral Eel

No. Enc.: 0 (5d10)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: Swim 90' (30')
Armor Class: 7
Hit Dice: 2
Attacks: 1 (bite)
Damage: 1d6
Save: L1
Morale: 8
Hoard Class: None

Like the clownfish, coral eels partner with the coral that acts as home and ally. They eat or drive away fish trying to eat the coral, and feed on bits of anything the coral kills. The come in two distinct types: one that is 6' long, green/brown, and active during the day; and an 8' long, black/brown version, active at night. Even though the two different species look different and do not interbreed, they are mechanically the same. Being part of a reef ecosystem means other kinds of fish will eat the eels, which are protected by the coral, both actively (with the mouths) and passively (with the limestone skeleton). This can sometimes turn out well, because the eels draw larger fish within striking range of the coral's mouths, turning predator into prey.

Mutations: *none.*

Big Bass

No. Enc.: 0 (2d10)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: Swim 180' (60')
Armor Class: 6
Hit Dice: 6
Attacks: 1 (bite)
Damage: 2d6
Save: L3
Morale: 9
Hoard Class: None

The shallow waters of lakes and rivers are home to these mutant smallmouth bass. No longer small, the fish are 6'



long and prey on whatever comes along — with one exception: they act like sheep dogs around shore forager shrimp, eating them only when other food becomes scarce. Some communities have tried farm-raising the bass, but this has met with mixed results: the fish are large enough to take a hand or arm, or even swallow smaller humanoids.

Because the fish and the shrimp are found together, and the shrimp range farther than the bass schools (and go on land), some people use the crustaceans to show where the bass spearfishing will be good. Some fishermen prefer a greater margin of safety, and use electrical mutations, like lightning, or explosives. Using a fishing pole is a futile technique, as an angler would just lose his bait and hook when the fish easily bite through the line.

Mutations: *gigantism.*

Shrimp, Shore Forager

No. Enc.: 0 (8d12)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 90' (30')
Swim 120' (40')
Armor Class: 4
Hit Dice: 2
Attacks: 1 (bite)
Damage: 1d4
Save: L1
Morale: 6
Hoard Class: None

Huge, mutant descendants of green prawn, the shrimp grow to between four and six feet long. The amphibious crustacean is mostly found in rivers and lakes, or on the shores nearby. They are often seen at night, cropping grass and other plants within 500' of the water, while during the day they clump together underwater.

Their size and terrestrial habits might make them seem to be a great source of food for waterside communities, but most humanoids find the shrimp nasty and unpalatable, acrid because of the toxins in the grasses they eat. Some mutant cattle, giant insects, and fish people (including fishermen) do enjoy throwing these shrimp on the barbie, considering them a piquant delicacy. Even though humanoids do not like them, they do track the shrimp, using them to find the more appetizing, more dangerous big bass.

Mutations: *gigantism.*

Black Mush

No. Enc.: 0 (d20 or more)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 0'
Armor Class: 8
Hit Dice: 30 per 100'
Attacks: 1 per target (tentacles)
Damage: 3d8
Save: L8
Morale: 12
Hoard Class: VI



Most underground ruins have few permanent residents because these places usually cannot provide a consistent food supply. One exception to this is black mush, a fungus found on subterranean walls and floors throughout the ruins of temperate and subarctic cities. It grows in dense patches, sometimes miles long, clogging sewers and subway tunnels.

The fungus is unusual because it can be both prey and predator, and can support a great many creatures in a subsurface ecosystem. Mostly, black mush is food for insects and other fungivores. But when eaten down to a critical thickness of about one foot deep, the remaining mush suddenly turns carnivorous and consumes everything it can touch with 10' long tentacles that erupt from everywhere. After the resulting massacre, the mush has an amazing growth spurt, regaining a depth of four or five feet, and returning to its original, harmless state. Intelligent creatures can usually tell when the mush is about to turn, so they can either run for the surface or feed the fungus with dead plants and animals.

Black mush has not invaded the surface world because any amount of ultraviolet light kills it. Even reflected sunlight causes the outer layers to die off. If enough fungus dies, and the light is removed, this can trigger the fungi's remaining mass to change into the carnivorous state.

Mutations: *aberrant form (bud sport, if you have access to this mutation), epidermal susceptibility, toxic weapon.*

Harpy

No. Enc.:	3d6 (8d8)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	Fly 180' (60')
Armor Class:	7
Hit Dice:	1/2
Attacks:	1 (cry)
Damage:	1d4
Save:	L0
Morale:	7
Hoard Class:	VI

Harpies are descended from greater black back gulls that adapted to nesting underground. The birds are just over a

foot long, with a beak harmless to humans, so they do not appear threatening. But their piercing cries are sonic weapons, able to damage everything within a 10' radius. Because of this, harpies are silent unless disturbed.

They normally feed on insects and rodents drawn to black mush, but do occasionally forage on the surface at night. People living in mush tunnels frequently drive harpies to the surface in an effort to help the fungus; the birds return with food and create waste that adds minerals and mass for the fungus to feed on. While harpies frequent areas with black mush, they can be found anywhere underground that has a prey population.

Mutations: *night vision, shriek (special).*

Wall Rat

No. Enc.:	1d4 (5d8)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	5' (1') Climb 90' (30')
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	1
Attacks:	1 (bite)
Damage:	1d3
Save:	L1
Morale:	5
Hoard Class:	None

Wall rats are unusual rodents that graze on black mush and other fungi. In their dim underground habitat the rats might be mistaken for small dogs, but their feet have grown abnormally large, covered in hairs that help them walk on walls. Their tails have also changed, becoming very strong, almost prehensile, and able to catch them if they fall. Wall rats are so adapted to the vertical they can barely move on horizontal surfaces (and not on ceilings). They only go to the ground voluntarily when the mush turns carnivorous, there is a fire, or the food runs low. These rodents have also adapted to their food source, developing spade-shaped teeth that are better suited for slicing fungus. Because of their diet, some wall rats do carry fungal-based diseases, so they can



contaminate food stores. But on the whole, they are much less a threat than standard giant rats.

Mutations: *gigantism, new movement type.*

Slimy Skaken

No. Enc.:	1d4 (d8)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	60' (20') Swim 30' (10')
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	3
Attacks:	1 (bite)
Damage:	1d6
Save:	L2
Morale:	5
Hoard Class:	None

Although black mush can do well all on its own, the skaken's arrival is like sounding a dinner gong for the fungus. This 6' long, red-brown salamander has slimy skin, a small head crest, and a bony jaw that can rip into flesh. Skaken also have a strong, sweet odor that drifts up through subway entrances, basement doorways, and manhole covers, drawing many different kinds of creatures (even intelligent ones) from miles away. The waves of insects, animals, and the occasional olfactory-equipped plant lured underground provide both the salamanders and the mush with plenty of food.

Fortunately, skaken are very rare in most regions because they also attract their own predators. But a group of skaken in a subway tunnel or basement can survive because their odor is left everywhere — predators cannot zero in on the salamanders by scent. In fact, they will not be able to smell anything at all, other than the skaken. Only when bred by others do skaken thrive. And, aside from the problems presented by their scent and dentation, raising them in captivity is remarkably easy: they are kept in cages, on a tray able to hold some water. Because of this, humans living in mush lairs use skaken to draw all kinds of edible creatures.

Mutations: *prey scent, gigantism.*



Earth Lord

No. Enc.:	1d4 (6d6)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	30' (10') Burrow 90' (30')
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	8
Attacks:	1 (bite)
Damage:	3d4
Save:	L4
Morale:	5
Hoard Class:	None

At 15' long and 8"-10" in diameter, these huge earthworms can churn up a lot of soil across the temperate regions. This drives insects and other animals to the surface, where carnivores, like clucks, grab them. In return, the herbivorous earth lords eat plants sprouting in the clucks' guano. Some have tried to "farm" earth lords, using them to till and fertilize fields, but the worms have a talent for escaping restraints. Also, their subterranean activity poses a threat to most any permanent settlement, forming small sink holes and disrupting small building foundations. Humanoids do hunt the worms, which reportedly have a taste and texture like beefy calamari steaks when properly prepared. In the wild, giant birds, giant moles, and other mutants living underground hunt earth lords, which forces the worms closer to nearby permanent communities.

Mutations: *aberrant form (natural weapons), gigantism.*

Cluck

No. Enc.:	0 (5d10X10)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	90' (30')
Armor Class:	8
Hit Dice:	1/2
Attacks:	1 (peck)
Damage:	1
Save:	L0
Morale:	3
Hoard Class:	None



Clucks are one of many, many mutant chickens found in the world of *Mutant Future*. This particular type ranges from 9"-15" tall, has lost its wings, and is extremely social. Clucks are carnivorous, eating whatever earth lords drive to the surface, and whatever small animals wander by. The birds might seem unremarkable, but they are a danger no one expects — not in themselves, but as the favored prey for many predators. Those not familiar with the species collect the birds, and then have to deal with increasingly frequent raids by large predators hunting both clucks and earth lords.

Mutations: *aberrant form (wingless).*

Fishman, Sardine

No. Enc.: 0 (4d8)
Alignment: Lawful
Movement: Swim 120' (40')
Armor Class: 5
Hit Dice: 4
Attacks: 1 or 1 (weapon or fist)
Damage: Weapon or 1d3
Save: L4
Morale: 6
Hoard Class: VII (anything that floats)

Like the fishmen in the *Mutant Future* core rulebook, these humanoids have arms, speak, and can breathe both above and below the surface. But unlike the others, sardines are larger than normal, standing about 5'-6' tall, and do not hate land dwellers. This might be because their shoals (or schools) are usually far from land.

Sardines live near the surface, close to gyres, collecting the circling trash and selling it to boaters, or fixing items for their own use (they can use any technology they can figure out). Each family has its own barge made of floating trash. These function as working surfaces and lure in the occasional fish or other swimmer. Because they can get quite large, the barges are allowed to drift with the current, rather than being pulled.

Because there is very little food so far out to sea, most shoals maintain swarms of semi-domesticated green fuzzy flies. To do this, the fishmen devote space on their barges to

fuzzy green fly maggot production. The sardines provide waste (fish and other aquatic carcasses) where the flies lay their eggs. Since there is no where else to breed, the flies are stuck living with the fishmen, who catch the adult flies after they lay their eggs. The flies are fed fish, turtle, or other paste, and are eaten when times are lean.

Mutations: *aberrant form.*

Green Fuzzy Fly

No. Enc.: 0 (10d12X10)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 30' (10')
 Fly 90' (30')
Armor Class: 8
Hit Dice: 1
Attacks: 1 (bite)
Damage: 1d2
Save: L0
Morale: 4
Hoard Class: None

Green fuzzies get their name from being an aggregate of flies and algae. The algae in their fur allows the flies to survive long periods without food, but this is rare because they can eat just about anything organic. The 2' long adults are a common sight — indeed, so common many flying predators imitate their buzz. The flies are found throughout temperate and tropical regions, but are usually near water for breeding. The maggots are 2"-26" long and aquatic, some varieties in freshwater while others need salt water. Those found out to sea are drawn to sardine shoals by the odor of rotting meat or blood. Some people have tried (and most failed) to train them for minor skills, but the flies are just too dumb. Sardine fishmen have had the most success, managing to partially domesticate the flies.

Mutations: *epidermal photosynthesis, immunity to poison and disease, special.*



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