

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #12: Parasite Mutations/Transformations



By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

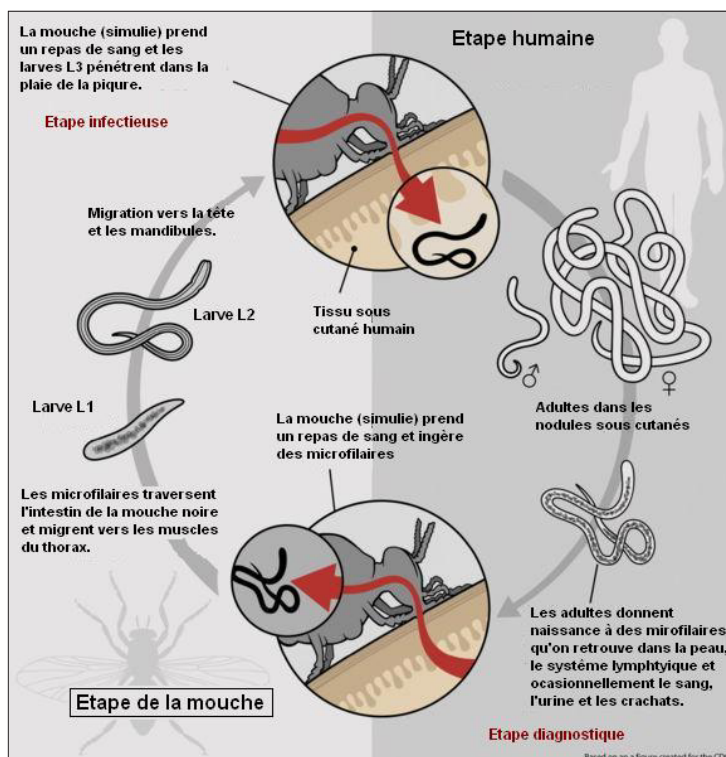
Gut worms and intestinal bacteria, athlete's foot fungus, toxoplasmosis protozoa, lycanthropy and Rage and vampire viruses. Whether biological fact or fictional terror, we are surrounded (and colonized) by parasitic lifeforms, some of which evolved to become a necessary part of us — while others affect our behavior, or become our nightmares.

Parasite mutations were originally introduced in the Skirmisher Publishing LLC sourcebook *Creatures of the Wastelands*, but transformations are a new evolutionary step regarding the concept of symbionts bonding with hosts.

Parasite mutations are powers or abilities a host develops after being colonized by another creature, which lives on or within the host, drawing nutrients from it but remaining a discrete organism. These mutations provide the host character with a benefit, usually a standard mutation, and have a penalty, usually the loss of ability points. These penalties are continuous even if the granted mutations are conditional, weakened, or temporarily unusable.

The parasites can be removed by medication, surgery, or some healing mutations, and the host character will suffer no after effects. In fact, some Mutant Lords may disallow parasite mutations for mutants that have *accumulated resistance, body adjustment, regenerative capacity*, or similar mutations. As for things such as habitats for the specific species of parasites, how people use or react to them (breed, collect, or fear), and methods of transmission, the specifics are all up to the ML.

Transformations are different because they involve a complex set of changes to the host, with new benefits and penalties appearing over time as the two creatures gradually fuse together. At a certain point, usually one-half or two-thirds of the way through the process, the changes become



irreversible, even if the symbiont is killed. However, before this time, the host can be cured and the changes will revert at the same rate they were gained. Although most turn the host into a new and different organism, some transformations effectively kill the host once the process is complete.

Both parasite mutations and transformations can be used by pure human and mutant characters.

Some of the mutations used below have a new concept applied to them — mutation modifiers. These are ways of altering a mutation, allowing the Mutant Lord different possibilities for using the mutation. Each modifier has a specific effect on the mutations it is applied to. See the upcoming *Wisdom of the Wastelands* “Mutation Modifiers” issue for many more modifiers and suggestion on how they may be used in your settings.

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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).

PARASITE MUTATIONS

Black Hook: This crustacean burrows into the host's skin and extends spines out. It provides the *spiny growth* mutation (d4 damage) at the cost of two Dexterity points.

Crimson Leaf: Insects burrowing into the host's leaves give it the ability to throw fire (*thermal emissions*) but also make it vulnerable to cold (*thermal sensitivity*). Extreme cold (over 25 points inflicted in a single attack) will kill the insects. And, because the insects infest the leaves, deciduous plants will have to be reinfected every spring for the plant to regain this mutation.

Dusty Antennae: After this insect burrows into the host's neck, it extends antennae out of the host's head. These provide the *increased senses (smell)* mutation, but cause the *epidermal susceptibility* drawback as the host suffers +1 point per die of additional damage from sonic attacks.

Ghost Skin: This bacterial infection turns the host pale (*albinism* drawback) and makes it harder for him to fight other diseases (*reduced immune system* drawback). The bacteria also tap into his nervous system giving him the *energy-retaining cell structure* and *thermal vision* mutations.

Glass Worm: This tiny mutant worm burrows into the host's skin, giving her the *control light waves* mutation. Unfortunately, the worm is temperature sensitive (*frailty* drawback) so the host takes double damage from both heat and cold attacks. The worm will die if the host fails three or more consecutive saves versus temperature attacks.

Red Tusk: A centipede that lives in the host's neck, the tusk provides an *aberrant form (natural weapon)*, which contains a class 4 poison and has a range of 2'. Besides compromising the host's immune system (*reduced immune system* drawback), red tusks are not very popular because they tend to attack anyone that gets very near the host.



Red Eye: This fungus invades the eyes and enhances the host's vision, in some parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. Red eye provides *ultraviolet vision* and *unique sense (x-rays and radiation)* with a range of 120'. The price is hefty, though: the *epidermal susceptibility* and *vision impairment* drawbacks. The mutant cannot see well and bright flashes of light cause complete blindness for 2d6 rounds if a save versus death is failed.

Screaming Skull: This tiny vine burrows into the bark of trees and shrubs to leech sap, which induces the *slow mutant* drawback. The screaming skull is named for its skull-shaped tuber and noise it makes. If the host plant squeezes the symbiont slightly, the vine screams (*shriek [plant]*). When the scream is used more than once per four rounds, the parasite drains a point of Constitution from its host. The points are regained at a rate of one per hour of rest.

Skull Slug: There are many different kinds of skull slugs and maggot heads (from *Creatures of the Wastelands*), all of which provide mental mutations. Most feed on their host's blood or cerebral fluids and cause immunity problems, mental drawbacks, or even weird cranial growths (*bizarre appearance*). The most common skull slug species gives its host the *mind thrust* mutation while causing the *reduced immune system* drawback.

Scuzzy Skin: A fungal infection similar to athlete's foot, scuzzy skin covers the entire host, which can be both plants and animals (including humans). The fungus absorbs electrical and provides *reflective epidermis (electricity)* at the cost of *increased caloric needs*.

Snothorn: This fungus grows out of the nose and onto most of the face (looking similar to a tiny horn), but it also spreads throughout the host's entire muscular system. Snothorn induces *aberrant form (xenomorphism)*, *gigantism (environmental dependence)*, and *optic emissions (bright eyes)*, mutations allowing the host to breathe underwater, double in mass when exposed to salt water, and produce flashes of light from his face.

The mutant also suffers from *bizarre appearance*, *pain insensitivity*, and *frailty (environmental dependance)*, as the fungal growth looks disgusting to most races, and damages the nervous system, making it difficult for the mutant to feel physical stimuli. Also, when the mutant's body enlarges, it is not that much stronger. This presents a problem if he is ever exposed to salt water on land: the mutant enlarges for 3d6 rounds and his movement rate is reduced to 30' (10') because his muscles are not strong enough to move his bulk.

Should the fungus ever be eliminated from the host, his nerve damage slowly heals, with the *pain insensitivity* fading away after two months.

Spinyscale: Scales are tiny, immobile insects (as adults) that infest many plant species. These mutants cause the plant's outer layer to form thorns (*projectile thorns [accelerated]*) covered with a class 6 poison (*toxic weapon [activated]*). The thorns can be fired first in the round no matter what the plant's initiative is and the poison only harms those who are also exposed to class 2 or higher radiation. As with all parasite mutations, the insects also have a downside. They do not tolerate cold very well (*thermal sensitivity [cold]*), and they make the host plant vulnerable to insecticides (*poison susceptibility [crippled]*).

MUTATION MODIFIERS

The descriptions below are only brief introductions. The upcoming *Wisdom of the Wastelands* issue dedicated to modifiers will more fully cover this concept and the mechanics involved.

Accelerated means the mutant automatically gets the initiative when using this mutation. If two opponents both have accelerated mutations, they go simultaneously.

Activated requires the target to be exposed to a certain stimulus for the mutation to function, e.g., a topical poison that is only activated when exposed to sunlight.

Crippled lessens the effectiveness of the mutation or drawback, reducing damage or the number of targets, affecting saves, and the like.

Environmental Dependance requires the mutant to be exposed to a certain stimulus (such as water, sunlight, or chemicals) for the mutation to function.

TRANSFORMATIONS

Ant Colonization: Some mutant ants can invade a body without killing it. They slowly turn the host's skeleton and flesh (or heartwood and leaves) into a powerhouse meant to defend their queen. The host becomes the colony's new home, with between 500 and 50,000 workers living inside at one time, depending on the size of the colonized body. Usually, most of these workers will arrive with their queen, but a



queen can establish a colony on her own. If the infestation starts with just the queen, it takes four months before any changes occur, the time needed to build up the minimum number of workers for the host's mass.

Some beings allow this invasion to happen because of the additional power the colony provides, but the cost is significant. The host's body is twisted and his senses are dulled, with the worst being the loss of sight. As his mind is slowly taken over by the colony, he loses access to many of his former skills. To drive out the colony, the host must either stay underwater for more than 36 hours without access to air in any form or ingest a pesticide that will kill the ants (and probably harm the host's body as well). This treatment will reverse any changes if done before day 101.

Days	Changes
1-10	Armor class decreases by one, gain <i>pain insensitivity</i> drawback
11-50	Armor class decreases by one, Strength increases by one, gain <i>bizarre appearance</i> drawback (ants visible through skin)
51-100	Constitution increases by one, technology rolls decrease by 25%
101-150	Technology rolls decrease by 25%
151-250	Armor class decreases by one, gain <i>vision impairment</i> drawback
251-300	Constitution increases by one, gain <i>obese</i> drawback
301+	Host is controlled by colony like the <i>possession</i> drawback, and will die if the colony is destroyed

Ghost Form: These symbionts are a spider-like parasites from another plane brought in via the *plane shift* mutation. They phases through the flesh and slowly causes their hosts to become ethereal, unable to interact with normal matter (including most artifacts). But the spiders also provide access to a variety of rare mental mutations. Killing the spiders is very difficult as no physical or energy weapon can affect them. The only known method is the *killing sphere* mutation, which will also affect the host. If the spiders are not slain before day 33, changes to host cannot be reversed.

Days	Changes
1-8	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>control light waves</i> mutation
9-16	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>acute hyper healing</i> mutation
17-24	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>flight (psionic)</i> mutation
25-32	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>mental barrier</i> mutation
33-40	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>teleport</i> mutation
41-48	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>empathy</i> mutation
49-56	Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity decrease by one, gain <i>precognition</i> mutation
57+	Host becomes incorporeal

Granite Form: This transformation is caused by nanites that make the host's skin and muscles harder and heavier. The host becomes increasingly resistant to physical and energy damage, but eventually the weight overwhelms and immobilizes him—as he effectively turns into a very tough rock. The process is permanent unless reversed before day 1000 with an EMP weapon or effect. As popular as this mutation is, the nanites are difficult to find, or are very expensive.

Days	Changes
1-50	Strength increases by one, gain <i>natural armor</i> mutation
51-100	Strength increases by two, gain <i>natural armor (improved)</i> mutation
101-250	Gain <i>reflective epidermis (heat)</i> mutation, gain <i>bizarre appearance (skin changes)</i> drawback
251-500	Gain <i>reflective epidermis (cold)</i> mutation, armor class decreases by one, movement is reduced by one-fourth
501-750	Strength increases by two, gain <i>reflective epidermis (electricity)</i> mutation
751-1,000	Gain <i>reflective epidermis (radiation)</i> mutation, armor class decreases by one
1,001-1,250	Gain <i>damage turning</i> mutation (treat as physical)
1,251-1,500	Armor class decreases by four, movement is reduced by one-fourth
1,501+	Becomes immobile

Rad Eater: A very common transformation in the irradiated wastes, rad eaters have worms infesting their skin. The longer the worms are in the host, the more radiation they consume. Excess energy bleeds off in the form of the *energy ray (heat)*



mutation but also boils the host's nervous system. Some communities breed the worms for use as a preventive treatment, helping members survive in blasted, radioactive wastelands. Removing the worms is easy, they starve to death after 10 days in a normal radiation field (weaker than class 1). The changes to a host are permanent if the worms are not removed before day 101. And, if the worms die after the transformation is complete, the host's body implodes into a puddle of flesh and blood. All that is needed for the worms to survive is a radiation source. Some people even ingest or implant bits of radioactive metal in their bodies so they do not have to worry about the health of their worms.

Days	Changes
1-30	Radiation damage is reduced by one point per die, <i>energy ray</i> does d6 points of damage
31-60	Radiation damage is reduced by two points per die, <i>energy ray</i> does 3d6 points of damage, Intelligence is decreased by one
61-100	Radiation damage is reduced by three points per die, <i>energy ray</i> does 5d6 points of damage, range for ray increases to 75', Dexterity is decreased by one
101-200	Radiation damage is halved, <i>energy ray</i> does 8d6 points of damage, Intelligence is decreased by one
201-250	Radiation damage is reduced to one point per class, <i>energy ray</i> does 12d6 points of damage, ray range increases to 125', Dexterity is decreased by two
250+	Gain <i>reflective epidermis (radiation)</i> , <i>energy ray</i> does 15d6, Intelligence is decreased by two, death of worms causes host to implode

Roachling Curse: Transmitted by some species of cockroach, the roachling curse is a bacterium that slowly transforms the host, giving him some traits of the insect. In addition to being able to eat almost anything organic, the host gains an



exoskeleton, resistance to radiation, and a narrower body. The body change allows the host to slip through small cracks, a useful trait in fallen ruins and shattered cities (exact effects and dimensions of the body are up to the Mutant Lord). As the body changes, the host becomes progressively more insect-like in appearance, something that makes interaction with others difficult. The penalties from the *bizarre appearance* drawback stack for the host. The process can be halted with artifact medicine but the changes can only be reversed before day 201.

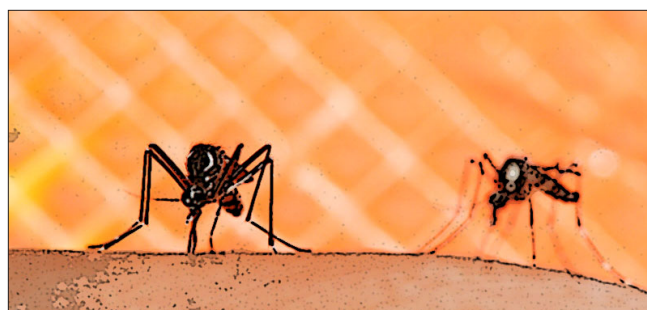
Days	Changes
1-25	Armor class decreases by one, gain ability to consume rotting organic matter
26-50	Gain <i>bizarre appearance</i> (skin changes), gain <i>increased sense</i> (smell)
51-100	Armor class decreases by two
101-200	Become resistant to radiation (1/2 damage)
201-350	Gain narrow body shape, gain <i>bizarre appearance</i> (mouth structure changes)
351-500	Armor class decreases by two
501+	Gain <i>reflective epidermis</i> (radiation), gain <i>bizarre appearance</i> (antennae and limb bristles)

Shattered Form Plague

Mosquitos transmit this transformation. The host slowly breaks down into a swarm of mosquitos. He does retain a hivemind but as the insects are so small, the host will not be able to use any technology after the transformation. Nor will

he be able to use certain physical mutations. However the host also gains a few odd abilities such as reading the mind of those he feeds on, and being able to become a swarm for limited amounts of time before the change becomes permanent. While the transformation is occurring, the host's body stays solid unless the mutant shatters himself. Any damage to the swarm will obviously result in damage to the host's solid form. If the host is not allowed to transform back (such as the swarm being held in two or more places), the host dies horribly when the reversion is attempted. The process can be stopped with artifact medicine but it has to be done before day 51.

Days	Changes
1-10	Strength decreases by one
11-20	Constitution decreases by one
21-30	Dexterity decreases by one, gain <i>increased sense</i> (smell)
31-40	Strength decreases by one, gain ability to read the mind of those the host feeds on for one hour after feeding
41-50	Constitution decreases by one, gain ability to become swarm form for 10 minutes per day
51-60	Dexterity decreases by one, time for mind reading increases to 10 hours
61-70	Strength decreases by one, gain ability to become swarm form for 1 hour per day
71-80	Constitution decreases by one, gain <i>spiny growth mutation</i> (actually proboscis attacks, cannot be thrown)
81-90	Dexterity decreases by one, time for mind reading increases to 24 hours
91+	Swarm form becomes permanent, loss of some physical mutations, gain permanent hivemind, gain <i>metaconcert</i> mutation



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Skirmisher Publishing LLC has got a section of its website dedicated to material for *Mutant Future* and other post-apocalyptic games in general and content tying in with this publication in particular. This gives readers the opportunity to obtain free bonus content, post their own material, and comment on this publication and Skirmisher's support for the genres it covers overall.

Content posted on the site includes material tying in with specific issues of this publication, Chris "Outlander" Van Deelen's ongoing feature on "Monsters from Movies, Games, and other Media," and more!

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