

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #14:
Aggregates



By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

Having another creature living on or inside your body is not a thought most would enjoy. Nor is the idea of having the same type of creature living inside a child and grandchild, joining generation after generation, until, over time, the two species gradually merge. But, this already happens. Humans and termites rely on intestinal bacteria to aid digestion, lichen are the synthesis of fungus and algae, and mycorrhizae are vital fungal symbionts in plant roots.

Aggregates are composite creatures that result from endosymbiosis, the changes that develop from a host and a symbiont living as one. This is similar to transformations (see *Wisdom from the Wastelands Issue #12: Parasite Mutations/Transformations*), but rather than one individual host creature being infected by a single parasite, the aggregation process describes how two *species* merge over generations. Because host and symbiont adapt to one another at a slower rate than in transformations there tend to be fewer drawbacks for both — at least in the later steps. Many aggregates do not survive the initial infection or bonding process, and it is only through large numbers of the host species and symbiont species combining that a new species eventually develops. In most combinations, only the initial bond is necessary; because a symbiont lives inside a host, it can access the host's reproductive tract and can add its gametes to the host's, so they reproduce simultaneously. Over a very long period of time, the symbiont and host may exchange genes, but most Mutant Lords probably do not run games lasting hundreds of generations.

Aggregates form because mutations in either the host or the symbiont species affect them both. Because of this, each combination of species produces very different aggregates. And, unlike transformations, aggregates have no real end

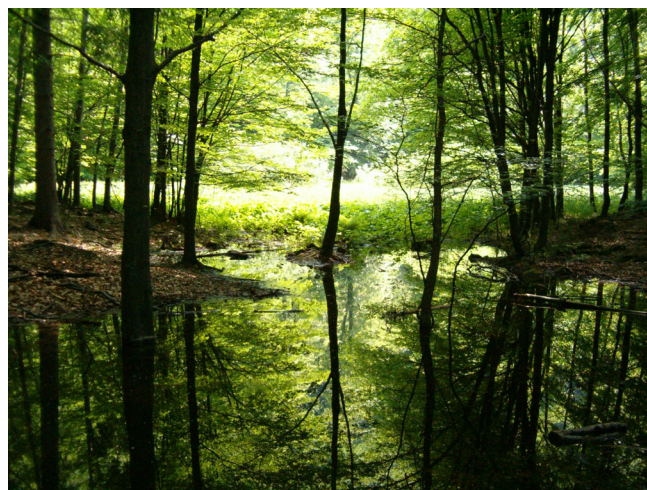
point: any mutation or evolution in one of the pair may cause a cascade of changes in both. In some very rare cases, the symbiont may develop a life cycle free from the host, thus breaking the aggregate and stopping the process.

The term *Step*, which is used in the charts, refers to a stage of mutation that affects either the host or the symbiont, and describes how changes in one ripple and cause changes in the other. (In this way it is similar to the term *generations* used in the Skirmisher LLC sourcebook *Creatures of the Wastelands: Mutational Evolution*.) A Mutant Lord can decide if an aggregate's progress from one step to the next involves natural evolution and takes generations/years, or if mutagenic exposure (e.g., to radiation, chemicals, or nanites) hastens the process to weeks or months.

As a clarifying example, consider a pack of chicken wolves settling into swamp rife with green hide (the chick wold appears in the *Mutant Future* core rulebook and is reproduced in this issue for convenience). Over a few weeks, the algae gradually infects the entire group. Several members

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Brain Worm and Brain Lasher, Green Hide and Chicken Wolf	2
Shrimp and Giant Catfish, Water Mold and Glue Flower	3
Water Mold and Kelper, Water Mold and Null Plant	4
New Mutations	5



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).

die from this exposure, but most survive and manifest Step 1 characteristics. Their offspring are slightly different from “stock” chicken wolves because they are also infected by green hide. Over time, as the aggregate species adapt to one another, or because of a radiation leak in a nearby factory ruin, survivors begin displaying Step 2 abilities. Should members of the pack leave the swamp before the leak erupts, they might remain at Step 1, while the descendants of those staying behind continue to be altered by their exposure to the radiation, later becoming Step 5 or 6 level aggregates. If another pack of stock chicken wolves moves into a nearby forest where brain worms live, and become infested by these creatures, over time they would develop into a significantly different species than the chicken wolf/green hide aggregates.

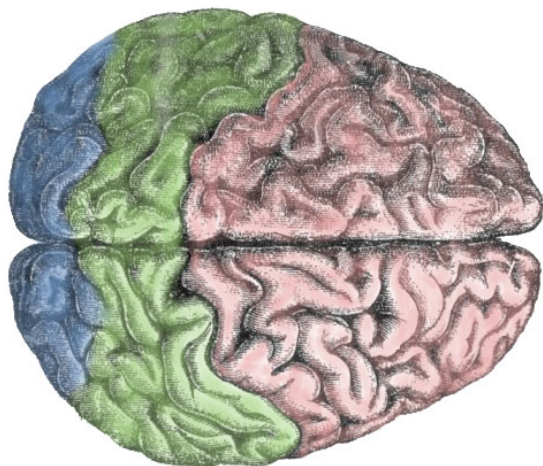
The following examples (i.e., the charts) use creatures from *Mutant Future* as hosts, but Mutant Lords are encouraged to alter the results to make them fit their particular settings. If MLs desire to create their own symbionts, fungus and worms are good starting places: they are by far the most common because many species are already symbionts, and well adapted to living in or on other creatures. But truly, anything in *Mutant Future* can be used as a symbiont given the right mutations. Consider how birds, rodents, cats, squid, sharks and other fish, lizards, turtles, plants, or even elephants could be symbionts within other species should these mutants possess *dwarfism* and *aberrant form (xenomorphism)*. The latter mutation covers many different changes, one of which could give the mutant some traits of parasitic worms—allowing it to survive within another creature.

Also note, some charts refer to random mutations: these may or may not be completely random and may in fact be placeholders for ML customization. When such a mutation is suggested, the rolled or selected result applies to all creatures within that step.

Brain Worm And Brain Lasher

Brain worms are symbionts that invade many species and make changes to the brain. Brain lashers become hosts after eating brains already infected with worms.

The worms initially damage host brains, but slowly adapt to become new ridges on the cortex. Over time, the worms



also cause significant changes to the host species' biochemistry, which affects lasher behavior and immune system functions. Mechanically, this means a change in alignment (50/50 chance for which of the other two alignments results) as well as the *reduced immune system* drawback. After four steps, these behavioral and immunity changes cease. However, in later steps other negative changes appear and vanish as the brain lashers' bodies continue to change and adapt.

Steps

Changes

1	Lasher alignment changes, gains <i>reduced immune system</i> drawback
2	Lasher gains <i>negative empathy</i> drawback
3	Lasher gains <i>quick mind</i> mutation
4	Lasher alignment is returned to normal, loses <i>reduced immune system</i> drawback, gains double strength <i>quick mind</i> mutation
5	Lasher loses <i>negative empathy</i> drawback, gains <i>mental reflection</i> mutation
6	Lasher gain <i>know direction</i> mutation, gains <i>mental reflection (defective)</i> drawback
7	Lasher gains <i>neural telepathy</i> mutation, gains <i>metaconcert</i> mutation

Green Hide and Chicken Wolf

Green hide is an algae that invades the skin of various plant and animals. At first, this plays havoc with the hosts' chemistry, and it is only after a few steps that survivors start to reverse these changes and adapt to their new coexistence. Once this happens, however, the chicken wolves are able to access random plant mutations as the algal cells are influenced by the host bodies. Eventually the alteration process begins to affect the hosts' brains, causing minor negative changes that may or may not last for many steps. For chicken wolves, a significant change is the loss of the

Chicken Wolf

No. Enc.:	2d6 (3d6)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	360' (120')
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	3
Attacks:	2 (bite)
Damage:	1d8/1d8
Save:	L3
Morale:	9
Hoard Class:	None

The dreaded chicken wolf has the head of a rooster, the forelimbs and body of a wolf, and the rear legs of a chicken with a plume of feathers for a tail. It hunts and lives in packs, much like wolves. It attacks twice each round with a powerful beak, and is extremely fast due to the mutation *quickness*.

Mutations: quickness.



quickness mutation, which is eventually regained—but only after six steps.

Steps	Changes
1	Wolf gains <i>epidermal photosynthesis</i> , gains <i>reduced immune system</i> drawback, gains <i>increased caloric needs</i> drawback, gains <i>pain sensitivity</i> drawback, loses <i>quickness</i> mutation.
2	Wolf gains <i>frailty</i> (+1 point of damage per die from heat based attacks) drawback, loses <i>pain sensitivity</i> drawback, gains <i>pain insensitivity</i> drawback
3	Wolf gains one random plant mutation, loses <i>reduced immune system</i> drawback, loses <i>frailty</i> drawback, loses <i>pain insensitivity</i> drawback, gains <i>quickness</i> mutation
4	Wolf gains one random plant mutation, gains one random plant drawback, loses <i>increased caloric needs</i> drawback
5	Wolf gains two random plant mutations, gains one mental drawback

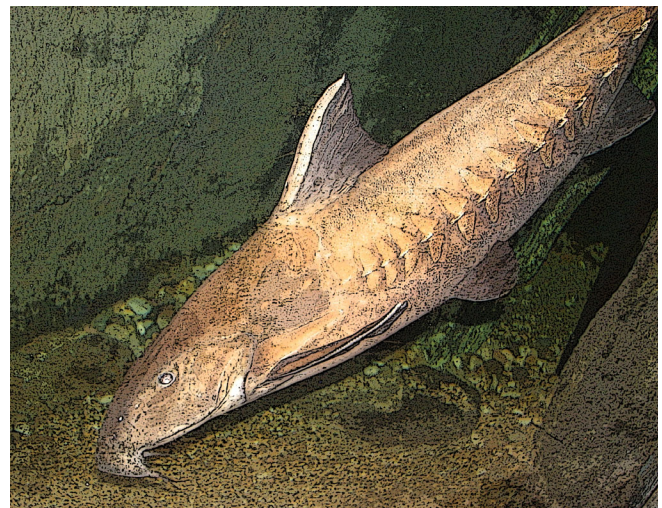
Shrimp and Giant Catfish

Giant catfish are found in waters throughout North America, but in some more northern regions there are shrimp that scavenge catfish carcasses exclusively. Occasionally, the shrimp find a wounded fish and invade its body through the blood vessels and gill arches. This mostly results in one or both animals dying, but there are instances of both surviving. Even when this happens, the shrimp/catfish aggregate rarely progresses past the first step, because reaching the second requires the shrimp to somehow find their way from the adult catfish bodies into the next generation. Most frequently this happens because the parent catfish dies just after its offspring

hatch. In later generations this problem is moot because the shrimp lay their eggs within the catfish eggs.

As the two species adapt to one other, the shrimp get smaller and start taking roles related to the defense and wellbeing of the aggregate, while the fish grow stronger and wider. Eventually the catfish can use the shrimp as a form of attack, releasing a swarm that will break down prey. This swarm attack is good against one opponent, though the range and damage increase over steps as a segment of the shrimp population becomes specialized in acquiring food. While this happens, the fish digestive system degrades because the shrimp dump food directly into the blood. The fishes' mouths become staging grounds for the shrimp as well as water intakes for the gills. The fishes' whiskers atrophy and eventually vanish as their sensory and attack functions are taken over by the shrimp.

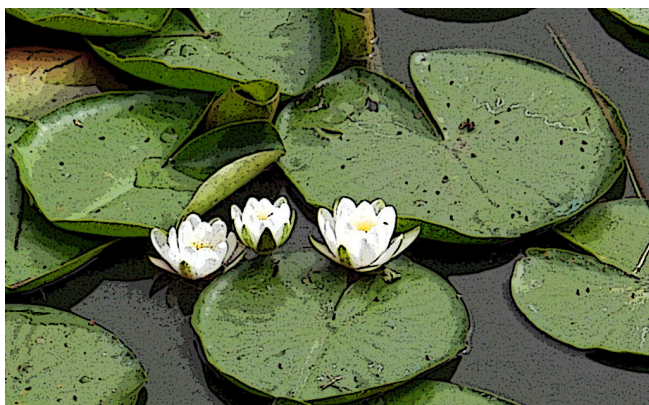
Steps	Changes
1	Catfish hit dice reduced to 4, gains <i>reduced immune system</i> drawback
2	Catfish hit dice increase to 6
3	Catfish hit dice increase to 8+3, loses <i>reduced immune system</i> drawback
4	Catfish gains increased <i>physical attribute (strength)</i> mutation, gains swarm attack (10' range, damage d6), loses feeler attacks
5	Catfish hit dice increase to 10, swarm attack improves (range 25', damage 3d6)
6	Catfish swarm attack improves (range 50', damage 5d6), loses bite attack



Water Mold and Glue Flower

Water mold is a fairly common fungus found in and out of water. This particular species infests many kinds of plants, usually as a disease. There are three known plants that can form aggregates with it.

Glue flowers usually survive a water mold infestation but rarely become aggregates beyond the second step because the two species have different reproductive cycles and seasons: glue flower seeds mature in late summer and the fungal spores



are released in late spring. Only a few mild mutations allow for a change in either schedule, but when this does take place second and subsequent step aggregates have significant changes to their physical structure and chemistry. The most important change allows the plant to survive fire. After forest fires, aggregate water mold/glue flowers will remain and experience a visible population increase. Unfortunately for the plant, the merge makes it less able to tolerate being in the shade. As a forest grows, there is less and less ground for the water mold/glue flowers to colonize. Populations that have a long history (i.e., many generations) get around this problem because the aggregates eventually can move on their own. Those that do can become a plague upon the region, gluing anything and everything together.

Steps	Changes
1	Flower gains <i>natural armor</i> (plant) mutation
2	Flower gains <i>reflective epidermis</i> (heat) mutation, gains <i>frailty</i> (all damage suffered while shaded or in darkness is doubled) drawback
3	Flower gains <i>prehensile tendrils</i> (constrictive tendrils)
4	Flower gains <i>free movement</i>

Water Mold and Kelper

Kelpers do not take water mold infestation well and most die. Those few that do survive are always found in warm waters. As time passes, the water mold/kelper aggregates become more powerful predators because the mold's ability to consume prey is added to the plant's. As the plant improves

as a predator, it increases in size and strength, eventually blanketing the bottoms of lakes and pushing out other plants.

Steps	Changes
1	Kelper gains <i>thermal sensitivity</i> (cold only) drawback, gains <i>dermal acid sap</i>
2	Kelper gains one hit die, damage increases to 3d6
3	Kelper gains <i>toxic weapon</i> (class 4 to other plants only)

Water Mold and Null Plant

Null plants suffer water mold infestations only in their flowers. The result is bizarre, even for *Mutant Future*. The seedlings are aggregates and become mobile predators. MLs should use Wolf stats to describe the seedlings, with the number encountered being 4d6 (0) for small seedlings and 2d6 (0) for large seedlings. Fortunately, many seedlings die before reaching wolf size, or the planet would be covered in them. As the mold and plant species become more accustomed to each other, the seedlings gain several mutations and a few drawbacks. The most spectacular change is growing wings made of fungal tissue that allow seedlings to roam far from the parent. In all steps, the seedlings find a place to set root within a few weeks, or they will die from a lack of minerals.

Steps	Changes
1	Null plant gains <i>animate seed</i> mutation
2	Seedling gains <i>combat empathy</i> mutation, gains <i>pain insensitivity</i> drawback, gains <i>poison susceptibility</i> (herbicides and fungicides only)
3	Seedling gains <i>increased sense</i> (hearing) mutation, gains <i>epidermal susceptibility</i> (d6 points of damage from salt per round of contact) drawback
4	Seedling gains <i>fragrance development</i> (plants) mutation, gains <i>injected poison sap</i> mutation (class 6 poison)
5	Seedling gains <i>flight</i> mutation (movement 300' [100'])



WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS ONLINE

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 allows readers to obtain free bonus content, post their own material, and comment on this publication and Skirmisher's support for the genres it covers overall. Go to <http://skirmisher.com/forum/38> to check it out!

NEW MUTATIONS

Following are some new mutations that you can use to make new aggregates and to modify those that appear in this issue.

Mental Mutations

Block Light (D)

The mutant forms a 10' diameter field that excludes all light. The mutant cannot see through it even with thermal vision or ultravision. The field is active day and night, compelling the mutant to depend on its other senses.

Crawling Claws

The mutant can detach and use his hands from a distance. The range is 50' and the hands have an effective strength of 1. Both hands can be animated and do different things at the same time.

Social Chameleon

The mutant has a low-level form of telepathy that allows him to hide in other cultures. He gains knowledge of language and social forms. This are not permanent and will fade after leaving a community or group of people in one week.

Telepathic Ideal

The mutant is covered with a minor illusion that strengthens the subconscious viewpoint of the people who look at him. Those who are favorable to the mutant see him as stronger, cleaner, smarter, wiser, etc. Those who who dislike the mutant see the opposite.

Physical Mutations

Adaptive Egg

The mutant's eggs absorb one plant mutation or trait from its nesting material and pass it along to the embryo within. This can give the mutant's offspring drawbacks.

Altered Chemistry

There is a 25% chance that a mutant with more than six mutations will have this. It represents a significant change to the mutant's metabolism and some chemical now has a very different effect on the mutant. This can include normally inert elements like atmospheric nitrogen or xenon or common substances like water. In any case, the substance may act as a medication, narcotic, hallucinogen, food, or have some other effect. The GM and player should work together to develop the exact chemical and effect.

Carrier (D)

The mutant has a disease that does not affect him. He is infectious and others that come in contact or within a short range of the mutant can become infected. Randomly roll or select the disease.

Crystal Bones and Spurs (D)

The mutant has strong but brittle bones and bone spurs from various places on the body which are different for each mutant. The spurs can be used as weapons and do d4 points

of damage. If the mutant is subjected to blunt weapons or sonic attacks, he suffers double damage.

Dragonfly Wings

The mutant has two pairs of wings that allow him to fly twice as fast as those with complete wing development. The wings, however, are fragile and easily break but, unlike true insect wings, they also heal. Any successful attack against the mutant from behind has a 50% change of rendering the wings useless for a week.

Explosive Organ (D)

The mutant has an altered organ that will kill him sooner or later. Most explosive organs are set off by heat or electricity but some require a massive impact or chemical catalyst. If the organ goes off, the mutant dies and everything within 50' takes Xd10 points of damage, where X equals the mutant's Constitution score. The organ can be harvested, killing the mutant, but the explosive will degrade over 2d4 days.

Hidden Egg

The mutant's eggs appear to be some common object in the region. 25% of the mutants with this can select the appearance of the eggs.

Peel Skin

The mutant has extra thick skin that can be used as a weapon. The mutant must cut the skin like an apple peel, doing d4 points of damage to itself. It can then be used to grab something or someone from 10' away. On a 20, the target is strangled for d6 points of damage. Otherwise, it is a grapple attack. If the damage is healed, the skin must be cut again if it is to be used.

Planar Sight (D)

The mutant sees into another plane of existence. Depending on how similar the plane is to the one he is on currently, it may be very difficult for the mutant to determine what objects, creatures, and people are on which plane.

Stable Genetics

The molecules used to repair the mutant's DNA are much more efficient than that of unmutated creatures. The mutant must fail 10 saving throws versus radiation in a day to gain a mutation or drawback. See the *Mutant Future* core rulebook for details.

Unstable Genetics

The mutant mutates much more often than other creatures. The mutant must fail two saving throws in a day to gain a mutation. See the *Mutant Future* core rulebook for details.

Plant

Strangle Twigs

The mutant can produce a tiny swarm of leaves and twigs for a ranged attack. This requires an attack roll, has a range of 200', and does d12 points of damage.

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