

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #34:
Plant Mutants I



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No matter what your choice of post-apocalyptic game, plants usually get the hind bud. And, unfortunately, *Mutant Future* is no exception. Although the rulebook has example mutant plants and many plant mutations, there just are not enough of either. This is especially true considering that our world has *many* more plants than animals.

To help address the disparity, this issue of *Wisdom from the Wastelands* presents eight new mutant plants and several new mutations. There will also be a detailed and expansive look at plant mutants featured in an upcoming issue of the *d-Infinity* multi-platform game supplement.

First, for Mutant Lords interested in creating their own plant mutants, some useful real-world botany. Unlike most animals, which produce smaller copies of themselves as offspring, plants have different forms in alternating generations. Although it is difficult to generalize about them, given the wide variety of species, the life cycle of many plants contains three different organisms. The **sporophyte** makes spores, which grow into the **gametophyte** form. This produces the eggs and pollen, which fuse into embryonic plants and **endosperm**. The embryos grow into sporophytes, completing the cycle.

As a very basic example of this, consider the maple tree. The dominant, tree form is the sporophyte. When this blooms, a part of each flower is the gametophyte (with eggs and “sperm” — allergy-triggering pollen). Like many other plants, the maple’s seed (those helicopter projectiles littering your lawn) contains two organisms: the embryonic plant and the endosperm. The latter protects and feeds the developing embryo, until the seed germinates and the endosperm dies.

Living within the plant’s roots are mutualistic organisms



called **mycorrhizae**. These soil-dwelling fungi act as a second root system absolutely vital to many species. In return for a constant source of carbohydrates, the fungi help plants absorb nutrients and maintain local soil chemistry.

For a Mutant Lord, these four biological structures provide an embarrassment of riches. By using the *animate seed* mutation, a ML can create larval plants on the run. Mutating the seed with *aberrant form* (*xenomorphism*) can produce two monsters (embryonic plant monster and monstrous endosperm), or a monster that protects a normal plant. An abnormal flowering plant or conifer could have parts of the flower or cone be separate, dangerous organisms. Using the same mutation on a flowering plant can create three monsters (endosperm, gametophyte, and sporophyte) — each with its own stat block. A single plant could have so many forms that no one could tell how things are related without a great deal of observation. Freaky, but potentially very useful in monster design.

The plants below show these terms in practice, providing examples of what can be done. In the first pair, the howling

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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).

birch is a sporophyte and the knife fly is a gametophyte. The sea elder/sand sprout pair has a sporophyte and endosperm combination. The slime wheat demonstrates how mycorrhizae can go wrong in a big way. The remaining entries present a *valuable* plant, one with *drones*, and a vegetative kaiju — just when you thought it was safe to go back into the woods.

Howling Birch

No. Enc.: 0 (1d4)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 0'
 Armor Class: 4
 Hit Dice: 25
 Attacks: 1 (scream)
 Damage: 3d8+8
 Save: L12
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: XII

Mutations: *animate seed (variant), natural armor (plants), shriek (plants).*

Knife Fly

No. Enc.: 1d8 (1d8)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: Fly 240' (80')
 Armor Clas: 5
 Hit Dice: 1/2
 Attacks: 1 (stab)



Damage: 1d4
 Save: L1
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: None

Mutations: *complete wing development, free movement, increased dexterity, natural vegetal weapon, reflective cellular structure (sonic).*

Reaching up 50'-80', howling birch are large trees with a simple defense — if they take more than 5 points of damage, they scream. A scream that can shatter bone. Years of this gradually erodes the surrounding soil and stone in the hilly and mountainous areas where they live, so it's easy to tell where they grow. When the birch cut loose, everything within 100' vulnerable to sonic attacks must save versus death. Those who save take half damage.

This defense tends to scare people away, but in birch groves, the flowers are the real threat. Called knife flies, the flowers have wing-like petals that let them fly up to a mile. The flies are 6" long with a 3' wingspan, so they might look whimsical, but they constantly hunt for seed hosts. Any animal between 50 and 300 pounds, including humans, is a viable target. Those hit must save versus death or be injected with a seed, which germinates almost immediately and does 1d3 points of Constitution damage to the host. The loss cannot be recovered until the seedling erupts in 6 weeks, when the host takes 3d6 hit points of damage. After this the host can start healing both types of damage at the normal rate.

The resulting seedling has the same stats as a giant rat (but without disease), and tries to flee so it can find some place to root itself. It gains the standard *shriek (plants)* mutation within a few minutes of rooting.

Sea Elder

No. Enc.: 0 (5d10)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 0'
 Armor Class: 7
 Hit Dice: 6
 Attacks: Special
 Damage: Special
 Save: L3
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: VI

Mutations: *animate seed, special.*

Sand Sprout

No. Enc.: 3d6 (0)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 90' (30')
 Armor Class: 5
 Hit Dice: 2
 Attacks: 1 (root)
 Damage: 1d6
 Save: L2
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: None

Mutations: *free movement, full senses, natural armor (plant), natural vegetal weapon, unique sense.*

Drinking in the sunlight along temperate ocean shores, these dune grass descendants make a day at the beach into a hazardous experience. Above the sand, sea elders resemble 8' tall, shrubby bamboo, with stalks up to 2" in diameter. Below the surface, the plants grow land mines for defense.

The mines are an outgrowth of the elders' extensive root system and lie 4"-6" deep, staggered around the plant up to 30' from the stalk. Creatures weighing more than 50 pounds that step on one take 4d6 points of damage and get knocked prone. A save versus energy weapons halves the damage and allows a victim to remain standing. The mines have a 5' blast radius, making it unlikely anyone but the victim will be hurt, unless a group is packed tightly together.

Some people have learned how to remove the mines for use elsewhere. The organic explosives have a unique odor that can be easily detected by those with *increased smell* or an appropriate artifact. Lacking these, mine hunters use small breeds of specially-trained dogs, pigs, or rats to find them safely. Once disconnected from their parent plants, the mines remain dangerous for several months before the explosive decays and becomes inert.

Slithering about banks of sea elder seedlings, protecting them from herbivores, are the endosperm mutants called sand sprouts. These 12' long roots have a few leaves and a pointy end, used to stab any who would harm their defenseless charges. When the seedlings first emerge from their casings, the sprouts use rootlets to carry them away from the explosive elder roots (which they can detect even deep underground). The mutants then search for ground uncontaminated by pollution where they can plant the seedlings. Once these take root, the sprouts begin to die, a process taking 1d6+2 days.

Slime Wheat

No. Enc.: 1 (0)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 90' (30')
Armor Class: 6
Hit Dice: 25
Attacks: 1 (slam)
Damage: 4d8
Save: L15
Morale: 12
Hoard Class: None

In the *Mutant Future* world, mycorrhizae can occasionally go bad, a condition some call slime wheat. When the fungus mutates, it merges with similar fungi beneath the stalks of an entire field, creating a 25-ton (or larger) tan blob monster spread over hundreds (or thousands) of square feet. Then it goes rampaging, consuming everything in its path, with wheat stalks poking out the top and victims sticking out the sides.

Fungicides can kill the slime and return a field to normal, though if the slime were on a hillside when it died, the wheat



may not continue to grow on a precise vertical. Should a well-intentioned group destroy the wheat riding around on top, thinking to starve the slime, they will be surprised to find the creature is not affected, as it feeds the wheat. Because a well-fed slime can boost grain production by at least tenfold, some communities will allow their fields to eat their enemies before harvest. This can be a risky tactic, though — unless the farming community is walled, since the slime does not climb well, or has access to electrical fences to control/direct the slime's rampage.

Mutations: *special (blob form).*

Cliff Chickweed

No. Enc.: 0 (1d4)
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 0'
Armor Class: 8
Hit Dice: 9
Attacks: 1 or 1 or 3 (lightning or touch or slivers)
Damage: 4d6 or 4d6 or d6/d6/d6
Save: L4
Morale: 12
Hoard Class: None

Originally descended from the small mouse-ear chickweed, these high-mountain vegetal terrors are now sprawling vine masses 150'-200' across. Within each plant's centermost tissue hides the source of their threat: a huge metallic sphere, 5'-10' in diameter and weighing at least a ton, which the

chickweed forms with minerals leached from the ground.

The core functions as a generator, letting the plant throw lighting up to 500' every three rounds and electrifying its leaves so any touch causes damage. In desperate times the plant can also fragment parts of the sphere, firing flechettes and spikes at targets 50' away (treat as the *spiny growth* mutation). In addition, the core allows the chickweed to detect pure metals within 500'. This helps the plant replenish and expand the sphere, but any moving metal draws a blast of electricity.

To the right buyers (machines and high tech races), an intact core is worth up to 25,000 gold pieces, while fragments can fetch as much as 5000 gold pieces. The metal mixture is a unusual super-capacitor, one that does less damage to the parts of power cells. Robots and other mechanical entities using the material can extend their power cell life span by five times. But, those desperate enough to try for this fortune are among the many corpses strewn at the base of any cliff the chickweed claims.

Mutations: *abnormal size, energy ray, energy-retaining cell structure, spiny growth, unique sense, valuable (new).*

Ice Lichen

No. Enc.:	1 (0)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	10' (3')
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	3 (and see description)
Attacks:	1 (shattered ice)
Damage:	2d6
Save:	L2
Morale:	10
Hoard Class:	Incidental

Found almost exclusively above the tree line and mostly stationary, these 3'-8' diameter brown disks of algae and fungi are opportunistic predators, reacting to heat or sound and attacking any animal under 200 pounds. Ice lichen live at altitude because they cannot survive being shaded, but are otherwise hardy with several defenses. When threatened, they usually sit still and encase themselves in ice blocks tainted



with chemicals drawn from the local groundwater. This gives every disk an extra 50 hit points and provides protection while they telekinetically throw and shatter chunks of ice, an attack similar to the *grenade-like fruit* mutation.

The lichen can also split off small, animated sections, which scout or run interference. Each disk has 2d4+10 *drones* (see below), with larger patches having more. Once spawned, drones remain separate entities until dying; they cannot rejoin the parent. Although both are unintelligent and unable to communicate with other species, an ice lichen can interact with its drones using pheromones. Should it be badly damaged and fail a morale check, a lichen directs its drones to distract enemies while the parent mass blends into the landscape and effectively becomes invisible.

Although ice lichen are dangerous, some cold-dwelling sapients have occasionally “domesticated” the plants. They clean water supplies, leeching out impurities, accumulating heavy metals or other toxins within their bodies. The lichen are carefully maintained to avoiding shading, and well fed because they attack when hungry.

Mutations: *abnormal size, chameleon epidermis, drone (new), free movement, grenade-like fruit, special (ice creation).*

Master Maple

No. Enc.:	1 (1)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	90' (30')
Armor Class:	-1
Hit Dice:	600
Attacks:	1 or 20 (mental attack or roots)
Damage:	Special or 2d12 X20
Save:	L21
Morale:	12
Hoard Class:	XXII

Although these hill-like monsters do not seem like individual creatures, master maples are 200' tall, 1,000' wide single masses of interconnected roots, trunks, and leaves. They have an intelligence, but are focused on hunger, consuming almost all life they encounter and any infrastructure made from stone or metal (not plastic).

To find the best food, each master uses a more potent form of the *familiar* mutation to take over some intelligent being or creature that can act as a scout. When the master begins to attack a community, the familiar tries to sabotage the most obvious escape routes, allowing its master to eat the most people possible. Many familiars hate being enslaved but cannot rebel against the mental commands they receive, and the master's control ranges out to 500 miles. Most of these kaiju have only the one familiar, but there are special, more powerful or older masters who control several.

These creatures terrorize temperate and tropical lands, 8 million pound gorillas that eat everything possible and go where they want. Except for when they run into another master. Then they fight to the death. In these contests, the masters use their roots for direct combat, but their familiars

usually tip the balance — so the plants enslave the most powerful creatures possible. Then the master induces a mutation (perhaps something like *psionic flight* and/or *energy ray*) to give its slave more power.

Mutations: *abnormal size, familiar (new), free movement, full senses, increased intelligence, induce mutation (new), natural vegetal weapon.*

NEW MUTATIONS

Drone

The mutant can bud small monsters from its flesh. One can be produced per week and up to four can be controlled at one time. The parent and all controlled drones within a mile of one another are linked telepathically (so the creator could set up a relay chain 4 miles long if needed).

When created, the drone's appearance depends on the parent's wishes and intelligence level. If the creator is intelligent, then he can choose what the drone looks like, with a little bleed from his personality. If the parent is not sapient, then the drone is a small copy of the parent. The drone also develops one mutation the parent possesses. See the drone stats below for more information.

Drone

No. Enc.: 1d4 (1d4)

Alignment: As creator

Movement: 90' (30')

Armor Class: 6

Hit Dice: 2

Attacks: 1 (variable)

Damage: 1d4

Save: L1

Morale: N/A

Hoard Class: None

This entity is created by the *drone* mutation. Its appearance depends its creator's desire, species, and personality. The drone has one mutation that its creator possesses (selected at the time of budding), and can be controlled telepathically with a range up to 1 mile. Drones are living beings, but extensions of their creator: they do not grow or make their own buds, and their death stuns the parent for 1d4 minutes. See the *drone* mutation for more information.

Mutations: *special.*

Familiar

The mutant has a specialized, mental form of *parasitic control*. It only works on non-sapient animals (or plants, if the mutant is a plant), has a range of 30', and is permanent. The affected creature, which can be anything with fewer hit dice than the mutant (though the ML may limit this), acts like an obedient pet and will even die for the mutant if things become grim.

Induce Mutation

With a touch, the mutant can cause a mutation or drawback in others, the effect lasting one day. The mutation is selected during character creation.

Valuable (D)

The plant is desired for its flowers, coloration, or some other reason. Bounty hunters will follow it, attempting to capture the plant alive so they can sell it.



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