

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #36:
Plant Mutants II

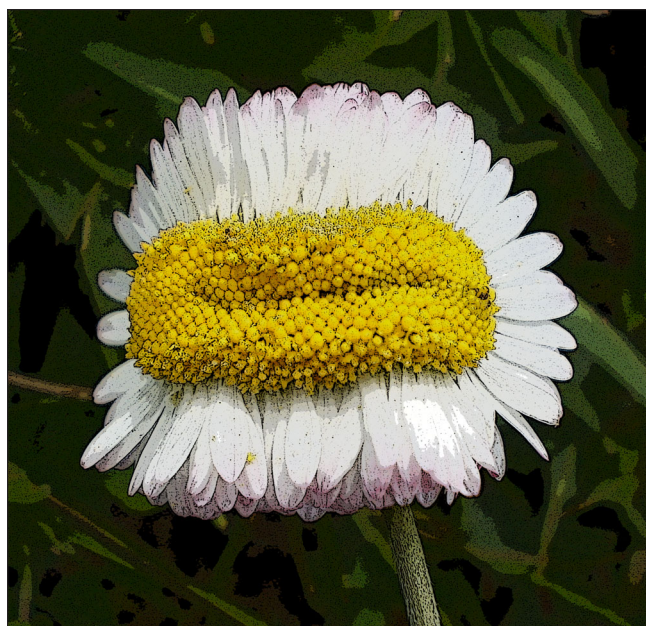


By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

In real life, we take plants for granted. Stretching out on the grass on a summer's afternoon, leaning back against a gnarled oak with a good book (or your favorite appliance), watching the kids twirl the tire swing slung from a sturdy branch — these things don't happen in *Mutant Future*. The grass spits acid, the oak bites, and ... it is better not knowing what's going to happen with that tire. Continuing from issue #34, our first installment in the Plants series, this article provides a little more variety to fill the leafy gaps in your post-apocalyptic herbarium. We'll start with a few other real-world botanical concepts to help Mutant Lords design their own hazardous greenery and include some examples of these in the main body.

Pre-germination mutations are based on real biology, where organisms have organs that appear and then vanish before birth or germination, like the tail bud that disappears in most humans. A more fanciful example might be a telepathic fetus, able to communicate with its mother. These abilities are active only before the creature "sprouts," either developing embryos from their wombs or endosperms from their seed coatings. Nearly all these mutations are mental, and some parent plants might be able to activate them for their own uses, but this is unusual. The Leather Tree is an example, for although the seedlings cannot access the power on their own, the mother tree can. Animals with this adaptation might have embryos or fetuses with some control over their mutations, which makes the egg or mother a hazard to all in the area.

The **chimera** of Greek mythology was a fire-breathing monstrosity with body parts from a lion, a goat, and a serpent. In real-world biology, two or more embryos sometimes grow together into one organism. *Mutant Future* has animal/plant chimeras, represented by the *animal limbs or organs* mutation, and composite creatures like spidergoats in the *MF* core rulebook. These genetic wonders (or horrors) typically resulted from lab accidents or bio-engineering in



the Ancient world, or robotic experimentation and cultivation in the current one. Drool Grass is one of these plant/animal chimera. Waving Lettuce is another, originally genetically-engineered as a terror weapon. Released by the Ancients, it is now a scourge upon the new world.

One possibility, freakish even for *Mutant Future*, is that during chimera development or experimentation some of these animal cells could be mixed with germ cells (sperm or eggs), allowing them to hybridize even further with very different creatures. Most of these results are messy and don't live long — if they come to term at all. But others, like the Bleeding Willow, show how deadly this kind of melded creature can be.

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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).

Bleeding Willow

No. Enc.:	2d4 (0)
Alignment:	Chaotic
Movement:	30' (10')
Armor Class:	4
Hit Dice:	15
Attacks:	2 (branches)
Damage:	1d8/1d8
Save:	L5
Morale:	12
Hoard Class:	None

Descended from black willows, these nasty amalgams grow fast and die young, reaching their mature height of 40' in 15 months and living about 10 years. Bleeding willows get their name from the oozing human cancer tumors covering their bark and older twigs. They have no intelligence beyond animal instinct and a wanderlust that forces them across the landscape. Willows live in groves a few hundred yards in diameter but do mix in with other trees. They grow near fresh water and range mostly in wet temperate zones because they dehydrate easily: tumors riddling the wood react badly to high heat, forcing the plants to take up a lot of water. Because of this, willows can quickly get waterlogged and die from rot in warmer regions.

Despite being photosynthetic plants, the willows are known for spreading death: those tumors burst on impact



and are infected with various contagions. The willows' instinctual behavior causes them to attack anything over 10 pounds moving within 50' (or at least chase it for a hour or two). Their branches have a 10' range, and those hit must save versus death or be exposed to all the diseases the tree carries. The unfortunate victim must then make a save versus poison or disease for each sickness to avoid becoming infected (i.e., three diseases = 3 saves). Each grove harbors 1d6 different contagions shared by all the trees, but the group infections can change over time. Although some diseases can be found in the *MF* core rulebook, MLs are also encouraged to create their own.

As a note, if a ML should have a ... flying, one-eyed, three-clawed, radiation-shooting mutant fungus monster in their game, the bleeding willow would be a perfect associated species. The fungal monsters would be immune to the diseases (usually) and their radiation would mesh well with the tumors and evolving diseases. Just saying.

Mutations: *animal limb or organ, frailty, free movement, full senses, natural armor, natural vegetal weapon, toxic weapon.*

Crimson Yew

No. Enc.:	0 (1d6)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	0'
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	10
Attacks:	Variable
Damage:	Variable
Save:	L5
Morale:	12
Hoard Class:	XII

The crimson yew was developed before the final wars, engineered by renegade bio-technologists trying to transmitting information via engineered bacteria. The end results were shrubby, 10'-15' diameter computer analogs, with tall, multiple stalks, using bacteria as software and plants as hardware.

Originally, the plants were used to contain the microorganisms and act as growing vats, where the bacterial genomes could be altered with chemicals. Now, these mutant pacific yew consume bacteria, including diseases, and use them as symbionts. Each microbe species absorbed provides a physical or plant mutation; an individual yew can have 1d4+2 of them at a time. Every week or so, the plants dump 1d2 of their symbionts and take up new ones. So over time, encounters with these trees can be very different.

The plants are not intelligent, but they can 'talk' to one another, and their programming gives them a great deal of leeway regarding what is and is not good for them, so they are unlikely to pick up defects. Robots can make use of the plants' abilities and have transmitted stored information to people in the *MF* era. Crimson yew are found mainly in Western Europe and places trading with that region.

Mutations: *natural armor (plants), special.*

Drool Grass

No. Enc.:	1d4 (1d4)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	30' (10')
Armor Class:	2
Hit Dice:	1/2
Attacks:	1 (acid spray)
Damage:	1d3
Save:	L0
Morale:	12
Hoard Class:	None

On the plains and “wetter” deserts (e.g., Arizona) grows a green terror engineered from Kentucky blue grass. Unlike other grasses, this plant grows as beefy individual stalks, each 8" tall and 3/4" in diameter. Several holes on the top half connect to digestive glands and allow drool grass to spew acid in a 5' diameter burst. Everything within range must save versus energy attacks or take 1d3 points of acid damage.

Because the digestive juice is strong enough to dissolve metal, some people cultivate drool grass and harvest the acid for things like etching and lock breaking. The collection is a delicate process and involves using glass instruments, like stills and beakers, to cover the plants and tap them. Each stalk only produces about an ounce of acid per day, but a little bit goes a long way.

Though the plant is tiny, harming it is difficult. Drool grass is immune to acid attacks and has a very tough structure. Creatures stepping on it usually lose their footwear and occasionally a toe or claw. Fortunately, the grass has a very low reproductive rate; greater numbers would mean serious damage to forests and infrastructure.

Mutations: *animal limb or organ, free movement, low fertility, natural armor, toxic weapon, unique sense, special.*

Emerald Creeper

No. Enc.:	0 (1d10)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	0'
Armor Class:	5
Hit Dice:	4
Attacks:	1 (gemstone)
Damage:	1d6
Save:	L2
Morale:	5
Hoard Class:	Special

Money may not grow on trees, but these mutant kudzu vines can make a mutant rich — and kill her whole village. Creepers are found throughout colder parts of the temperate zone, climbing the southern and eastern sides of trees and buildings to catch the most sunlight. Unlike its southern cousin, emerald creepers are (mostly) pretty sedate and not very invasive or destructive: the plants grow in ivy-like patches 8'-16' long, not drowning whole counties in vegetation.



However, the creepers' defense is anything but boring. They defend themselves by creating emeralds and throwing them at anything that moves within 30'. A creeper can produce 4d6 stones per day, each worth about 500 gold pieces — but they are traps. 36 hours after being thrown, the stones emit a class 5 radioactive burst with a 50' radius. Once discharged, the stones remain a class 1 radioactive hazard for several years.

Those who worship radioactive gods believe these plants to be divine creations and keep them safe from harm. In these communities, the stones are used for ceremonies, not personal wealth. Others treat them as hazards or a currency variant — if they have no idea of the danger. Interestingly, creepers themselves are not resistant or immune to radiation, so this attack often backfires. The most successful plants are those near populated areas or colonies of packrat-like critters that take away the stones before they pulse.

Mutations: *alter atomic composition, special.*

Leather Tree

No. Enc.:	0 (1d4)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	0'
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	18
Attacks:	1 or 5 (root or root and mental blasts)
Damage:	3d4 or 3d4/2d6/2d6/2d6/2d6
Save:	L9
Morale:	11
Hoard Class:	XII

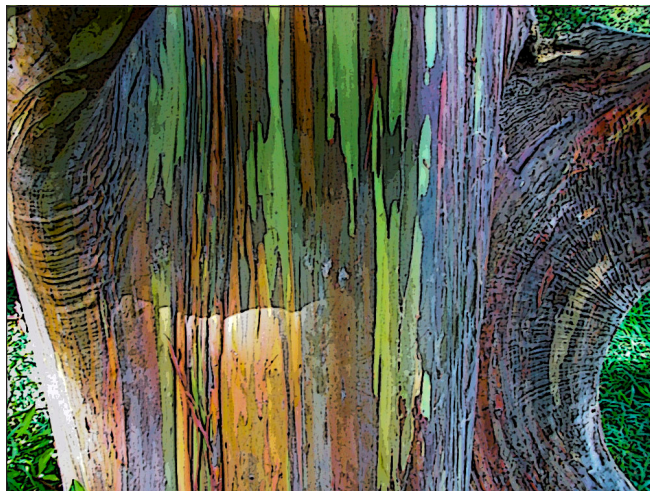
Some Ancients liked to engineer weird plants and animals; leather trees are one type. They might easily be called Franken-trees for the wide range of things seemingly stitched together into each plant. Instead of bark, the trees' outer layer is cow hide. There is no particular breed, so a grove could have tan, brown, black, white, long-haired, or spotted trunks. Scanning toward the foothills and lower mountainsides where they grow, a distant grove resembles a herd of large cattle in the shade, not 75' tall plants with 50' diameter canopies.

The leaves and products are similarly varied. Looking

up from the lower branches, the leaf shapes start as oaks, then appear to be maple, bamboo, ash, dandelion, fir, and finally a pine candle at the very top. The flowers, fruits, and nuts also develop different shapes, depending on which branch they grow from, and there are more than 50 kinds of each.

While this might make the trees popular food sources, they can vigorously defend themselves. In the stat block, attacks are listed as “1 or 5”; this refers to the trees’ two sexes, easily differentiated by the flowers. The males have a single attack, using a mobile taproot to spear interlopers within 50' of their trunks. The females can also do this, but in the late spring and early summer they can also call upon their ungerminated young for defense. Every round up to four embryonic plants can each use a less potent *mental thrust* variant to inflict 2d6 damage out to 50'. After the seedlings germinate, they no longer have the mental attack and must rely on their root defense. Both sexes mature after 25 years and some people have learned to cultivate the adult trees. However, this is a risky venture and veteran farmers have learned to use *possession* or similar mutations to keep the trees from killing them.

Mutations: *animal limb or organ, bizarre appearance, natural armor, natural vegetal weapon, special (embryos' mind thrust variant), special (pre-germination link).*



Manna

No. Enc.: 0 (8d10)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 0'
 Armor Class: 9
 Hit Dice: 2
 Attacks: 1 (touch)
 Damage: Special
 Save: L0
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: None

In an attempt to dominate local biologicals, machine intelligences created a variety of grain-fruit plants, grasses with sugar-rich berries. Although manna comes in many

different forms, it is typically 10' tall, very prolific, produces scores of nutritious fruit per plant (each weighing 2-5 pounds), and has an odor that draws hungry mouths from miles away.

The fruit also host cyborg nanites, machines fused to protozoans. When eaten, the cybernetic microbes invade the victim's gut and manipulate its flora (critters inside the digestive tract that help process food; without them, the entity dies). This change restricts manna to be food only for creatures with a slave implant.

Each machine collective has its own version, each with its own brand of enslaving microbes — which ensures consumers will be slaves for only one collective. Anyone eating manna without having a slave implant or eating the wrong strain cannot digest the fruit, gains no calories or minerals, and may eventually die from malnutrition if they continue to eat it.

Manna presents an awful dilemma for those living in the wastes: scabble and fight for scarce food or become slaves to monstrous, alien, machine intelligences. The latter choice is also fraught, as the machines expect complete obedience. The machines will kill off the gut flora of any who disobey, letting them starve to death over a few weeks as an object lesson to others.

Mutations: *special.*

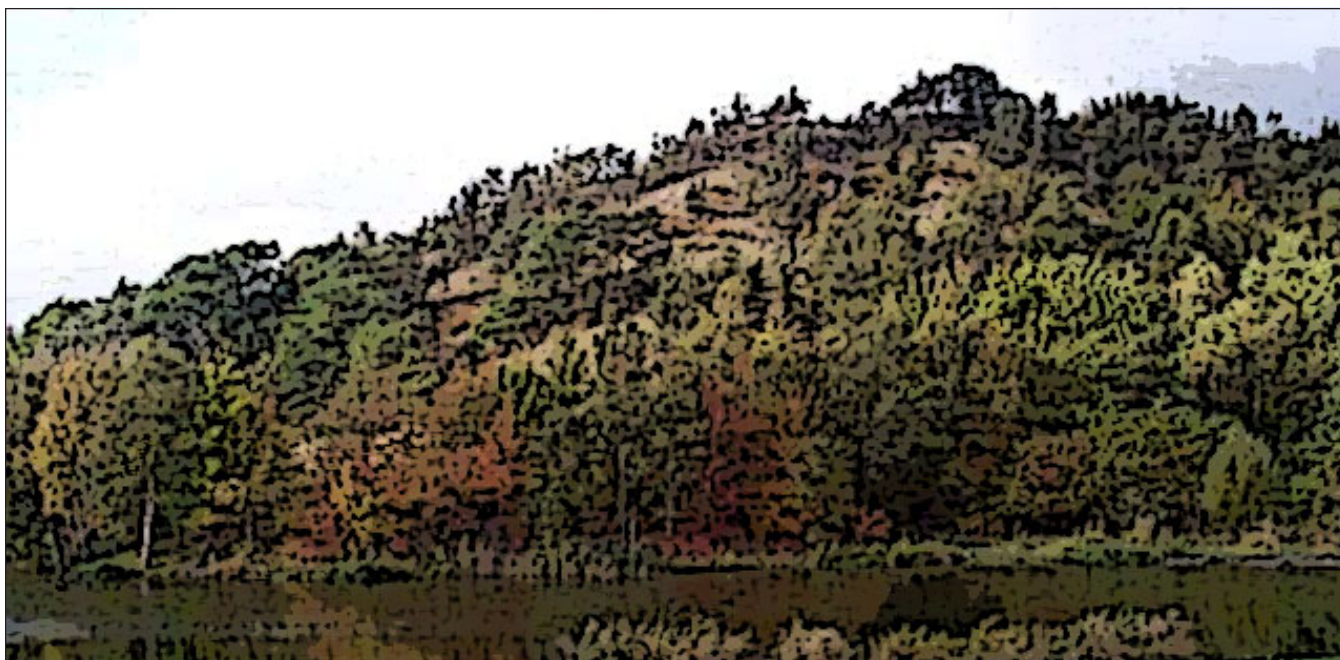
Tree Mound

No. Enc.: 1 (0)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 30' (10')
 Enraged 150' (50')
 Armor Class: 2
 Hit Dice: 450
 Attacks: Contact
 Damage: 4d6
 Save: L21
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: XII

Sometimes kaiju are *really* obvious, like giant reptiles stomping from the waves to create trouble for Tokyo. Others are like the tree mounds, almost invisible unless angered. Throughout the growing season these 150' tall, 600' diameter hills of vegetation crawl across temperate and subarctic lands on root-legs of their lower layers. Some mounds like to be near water so they can submerge for short periods, to put out fires or take a drink, but this is not a universal behavior.

Each mound is made up of many individual plants from a single species, with most mounds being ash, maple, or oak. Like living bridges in rural Asia, a mound gets its strength from the intertwined individual members, a structure that also helps evenly distribute its great weight. When a mound encounters good soil, it creates a small grove of trees, offspring that may, after a few decades, grow into a mound. They also reproduce using dandelion-like seed and thus mounds are slowly expanding their territory.

For the most part, mounds are fairly harmless and most



creatures simply avoid or ignore them. A mound will crush anything in its path, but does not do so out of spite or hunger, as they are photosynthetic. However, killing a young tree from the small groves will enrage the kaiju, if it finds out. Tree-killers are chemically marked when they touch the seedlings or saplings, but a save versus poison will negate the trace. This tag lasts for 2d4 weeks and can be detected from up to 500' away. If a parent mound discovers one of these killers, it chases down the creature and kills it through root constriction.

Mutations: *abnormal size, free movement, full senses, natural vegetal weapon, unique sense.*

Waving Lettuce

No. Enc.: 1 (0)
 Alignment: Chaotic
 Movement: 90' (30')
 Armor Class: 3
 Hit Dice: 9
 Attacks: 2 (slams)
 Damage: 1d8+4/1d8+4
 Save: L8
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: None

Waving lettuce is a vegan weapon of terror. With an innocuous-looking lettuce head the size of soccer ball, and extended leaves up to 3' long — that wave even when there is no wind — it is hard to believe the plant was created to kill meat-eating humans and still does with astounding violence.

If barely a single leaf is eaten with some meat, the plant material combines with not only the offensive animal flesh, but also a great deal of the victim's innards. Within minutes, the host must save versus death. If she succeeds, the victim takes 4d8 damage; if she fails, she dies. Either way, a monster

erupts from her abdomen and attacks humans with meat on their breath.

The gut critter attacks until slain and will also go after meat-eating mutants. It is mainly muscle, which explains the large number of hit dice and the amount of damage it inflicts, but its appearance depends on the victim. For a standard human host it is 4' long and very slender, like a meaty javelin or flayed snake. Others hosts might breach moving gut piles with leaves sprouting all over the bodies. Should the creature kill every meat-eater in attendance, it will stay active/alive for another 1d4+1 hours.

If waving lettuce is eaten by a true vegetarian (no fish, eggs, or the like), there is no reaction. The plant material stays dangerous for up to three meals following, so slipping with that midnight bacon cheeseburger is a really bad idea.

Mutations: *animal limb or organ, special.*

NEW MUTATIONS

Alter Atomic Composition

The mutant can change one material to another, both randomly selected at character creation. Only (1d4 x Willpower) pounds can be affected per day. If the result is undesirable, then this mutation is considered a drawback. Roll twice on the following chart:

Roll	Material
1	Soft metal
2	Hard metal
3	Rubber
4	Plastic
5	Stone
6	Wood
7	Ceramic (including glass)
8	Flesh (mindless)
9	ML's pick
10	Player's pick

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