

Wisdom from the Wastelands

Issue #48:
Unique
Superscience
Artifacts IV



By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

Volume four in our continuing series on superscience artifacts, these unique items are so advanced they appear magical to post-apocalyptic peoples. Although intended for use with *Mutant Future*, these items could easily be used in other science-fiction or fantasy games. In a recent review, one perceptive writer noticed a guiding theme behind these items, something we probably should have mentioned previously: there are usually eight to ten items per issue, but they are all so detailed, each can become a central plot point or continuing idea for a whole gaming session — or even an entire campaign. They aren't one sentence, throw-away items; each has a history that will hopefully enrich, inspire, possibly even drive your own gaming story. And we hope you enjoy them.

All the items below have multiple powers, and unless otherwise stated, every power takes an hour to recharge. Each ability must be discovered individually, using a separate technology roll. The artifacts' powers are described using spells from the *Advanced Edition Companion* and mutations from *Mutant Future*. For easier reference, spells are **boldfaced** and mutations are *italicized*. These appear in parentheses, and have the same ranges, effects, damages, etc. as the original craft or ability (unless noted). However, MLs are encouraged to customize items or powers to suit their games. Because comparing objects would be vegemite versus alligators, the Caster Level gives the harried ML a relative scale for each item's potential or strength.

Arena (Caster Level 20)

Some of the Ancients' wealthiest and most corrupt elite, individuals with few morals and a taste for blood sports, had these small metallic discs created for their amusement. Activated by pushing its single button, the device warps space, cutting off all access to and from the outside world. It affects an area up to 250' in diameter, but if triggered within a



building or other enclosed space, the extra-planar "bubble" only expands to fit the available volume.

Although it appears to be stone from the inside, The Arena's perimeter barrier is really a one-way force wall, transparent from the outside and indestructible to anything player characters might get their hands on (**Wall of Stone**). For variety, and to present a visual obstacle, the combat field is separated into quadrants of light and dark (**Continual**

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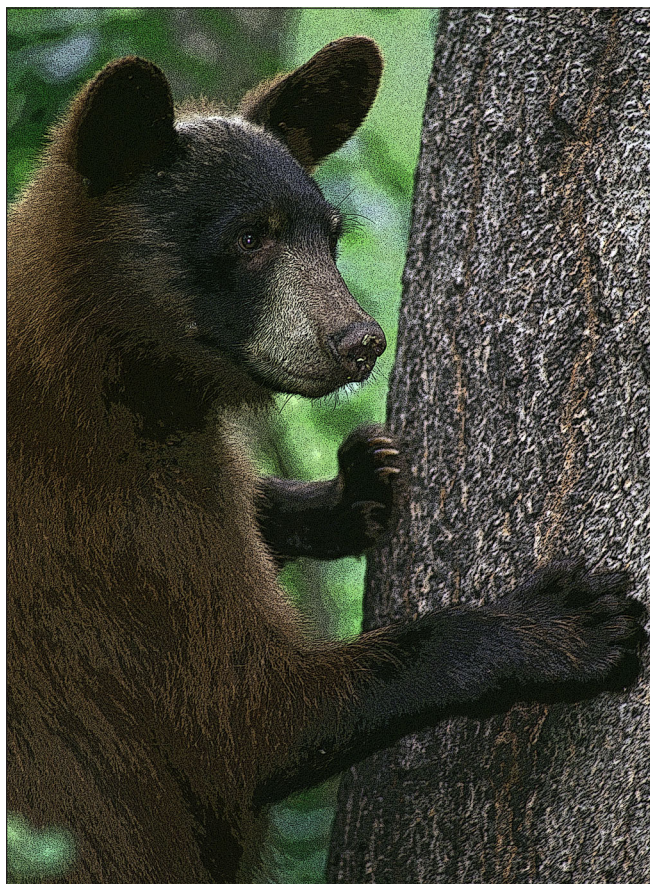
This publication is dedicated to providing useful information, game content, and ideas to players of modern, science fiction, and post-apocalyptic table-top and role-playing games in general and to fans of Goblinoid Games' *Mutant Future* RPG in particular. The material contained herein are compatible 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).

Light, Continual Darkness). There are a variety of weapons hanging from the walls, lying on the ground, and suspended from the ceiling by cables (**Fabricate**). Beings within the field are enhanced through a variety of means, becoming nearly superhuman “contestants” (*increased strength, combat empathy, Haste, Spider Climb*, and a -6 bonus to AC). Unless the disc is verbally instructed before activation, The Arena does not consider robots or plants to be contestants, and they are not enhanced.

When there is only one human or animal survivor, The Arena turns off, the entire construct vanishes, and the survivor returns to his normal, unenhanced state. Until this time, there is no communication or other access — except by using other superscience artifacts, which are not included. The Arena does not communicate its intention to contain a fight to the death, so contestants may starve to death within its walls. For those thinking to release themselves by breaking the disc, it “disappears” upon activation; in actuality, it sticks to the outside of the perimeter wall. Because of the retaining wall’s warped space, there is no way to break it down or *teleport* through; only the *plane shift* mutation or an appropriate superscience artifact allows escape.

Bear Eye (Caster Level 12)

Just after the cataclysm uplifted bear scientists created this sensor to help their people survive attacks by invisible shatterbots (see *WfiW* issue #18). The Eye is a 2" diameter sphere designed with the bear in mind: covered in barbed spines, it is meant to remain securely tangled in thick fur,



leaving the wearer’s forelimbs free, or enabling those with less dextrous paws to easily attach it to themselves.

Should the Eye detect an invisible robot or creature within 20', it releases a quiet chirp every round. Unfortunately, long years of hard use have introduced a couple slight malfunctions. First, the Eye will occasionally (25% chance) chirp for any robot; this is not serious, but it can sound off at “inconvenient” times. Second, 5% of the time the faulty mechanism releases an ear-shattered blast (*shriek*), forcing all within 20' to save versus death or be *deafened* for 1d6 turns (see *WfiW* #47 for more information). Because the bears had learned not to trust them, should a human touch the Eye, it zaps the person for 1d8+4 points of damage per round (**Shocking Grasp**).

Golden Branch (Caster Level 6)

A nondescript length of dull metal with some attached plastic bits, the Branch doesn’t look like much. But it belonged to a fascinating product series designed to make plants more useful by turning each organism into a hybrid data node, minor factory, and sensor net. There are many Branches, each unique; this one is corrupt, hit by a virus back in the lightless days.

To work, the artifact must be spliced into living plant tissue and left for one day while it integrates with the host. Once operational, the Branch acts as an interactive AI (*dual cerebellum*), giving plants without communication the ability to talk with other sapient beings; it also lets the nice people direct its functions. Whenever more light is needed (at night, inside, underground, etc.), the Branch can activate either its illumination (**Light**) or light enhancement (*night vision*) functions, depending on whether others need to see, or just the plant. The artifact can also produce an energy field useful for a variety of tasks (**Repulsion, Feather Fall, Reverse Gravity**).

Given enough time and the right conditions, The Branch can wipe viruses from other machines (**Remove Curse**). First, it must be able to communicate with the infected unit, usually by IR beam or radio link, but physical links will also do the trick if the necessary cabling is available. When in contact, the Branch scans the other machine’s memory and automatically purges standard viruses. It doesn’t do well against high quality military viruses, but those are fairly rare these days. Sophisticated AIs are also a bit of trouble, as they take much, much longer to clear than simple robotic units.

The Branch’s oddest feature, making it different from other Branches and most other computers, is its ability to communicate with the environment’s ever-present nanites (**Stone Tell**), no matter the swarm’s function, programming, or origin (for more information on nanites, see *WfiW* issues #28, #30, and #31). It can, with diplomacy and often with difficulty, *sometimes* direct nanite function. However, this is often a moot point, as most *Mutant Future* beings have no idea that nanites are the things behind the environmental change or that sometimes eats them, and so don’t know to ask for the Branch’s help.

Some of these swarms contain uploaded memories of

the Ancients (**Trap the Soul**), allowing the artifact access to knowledge of the world before the cataclysm. Depending on the ML's whim, these could be anything from merely memory streams (i.e., blogs, version 5.0) up to Uploaded Intelligences (for more information on this new character race, see *WfiW* issue #40). Because of the nanites' capacity, some swarms can allow access to multiple sets of memories or personalities. Many, many people tried to escape the wars by translating their mental selves into the nanite clouds. Some merely needed an escape or release; others had hopes for their bodies being recreated when peace returned to the planet — and had the money, or access to technology that gave them a greater chance for realizing this dream. The Branch, accidentally, provides them a sort of resurrection.

Skinshifter (Caster Level 15)

Many of the Ancients were obsessed with remaking their bodies, correcting imperfections both perceived and genetic. Unfortunately for those without access to skilled staff orchestrating a network of complex machinery, the apex of cosmetic surgery easily became a potentially deadly dream. The Skinshifter is a case in point. Entering one of these properly-operated devices was a (literally) transformative experience, but a technician could, through ineptitude or system error, also turn a patient into a gooey sludge pile. Although also “transformative,” goo was not often the desired result.

The Skinshifter looks like nothing more than an unremarkable stasis tube with an extra control panel. But this near-miraculous device can change a patient's appearance, sex, size, apparent age, and even species — but not race — to a degree (**Reincarnate**). Mechanically, these alterations have a few effects and restrictions. Appearance is purely cosmetic, unless the desired (or inflicted) result is so extreme a patient gets the *bizarre appearance* mutation. A character's size can be altered by up to 50%, larger or smaller. Apparent age can be changed down to toddler and up to senior. This could be merely cosmetic or it could also affect the character's physical statistics if patient were made into a child. Either way, the character's actual age and mental statistics/abilities remain the same. Changing species requires Mutant Lord discretion and imagination: the machine's programming does not allow it to change a human into a plant or animal, but a human could become one of the new humanoids described in *Wisdom from the Wastelands* issues #4 and #40; or, a chipmunk could become an eagle.

Most of the time adjustments happen flawlessly, but there are occasional errors. In 25% of procedures, the change shatters a patient's mental architecture, and a new personality emerges (**Polymorph Other**). Massive brain damage occurs 5% of the time, causing the patient to lose the drive to live (*weak will*). The least common, but perhaps most unusual, error happens 1% of the time, when a duplicate emerges from the machine 36 to 48 hours later (**Clone**, but without the insanity). The ML should make three separate percentile rolls to determine if any of these rare errors happen, as all three could.



More common “malfunctions” take place when an unintended patient enters the machine. Plants are always reduced to larvae (*animate seed*), though the ML could be kind and decide the character becomes a seedling. Should anyone try to resuscitate a corpse (**Animate Dead**), the body rises to become one of the Walking Dead from page 101 in the *Mutant Future* rulebook. Synthetics and basic androids remain unchanged by the machine, but replicants are always reduced to goo. Depending on the ML's decision, this means the character is either dead or has been turned into an ooze creature (**Polymorph Other**). **Note:** there are no saves against anything this machine does.

Snail Ring (Caster Level 18)

Currently embedded within the head of a 25' long, highly intelligent telepathic snail, the ring is a self-contained device for inducing and studying mental mutations. The gastropod was unlucky enough to poke its eyestalks in the wrong place: while investigating a surgical machine designed to implant these rings in patients, it activated the device. Fortunate to get away alive, the snail was able to extract itself with only a raging headache and a new piercing.

The ring provides several powers by strengthening the host's mind-body link and stimulating her sensitivity to, and control over, various energy fields. Consciously boosting adrenal and neurotransmitter output gives the host increased reactions and speed (**Haste**). She can also bend light waves to make herself and her gear vanish from view (**Greater Invisibility**), or create a distant image of herself (**Project Image**).

This heightened connection to energy fields also lets the host affect other beings. She can sense and/or manipulate another's cerebral pulses (*empathy*); subtly adjust the strength of their molecular bonds, causing them to shrink or grow



(*density alteration [others]*); or drain their energy for her own benefit (*vampiric field*).

For a moment, the ring host may treat one intelligent being as a puppet, compelling him to use the *mind thrust* mutation on another target. The puppet must be within 100' of the host, and the final target must be within *mind thrust* range of the puppet. This mental coercion works even if the being does not have the mutation, however it is better (and less painful) if he does. Those without *mind thrust* take 2d6 points of damage as their brains get lightly scrambled enabling the attack. Unfortunately for the puppet, this pain earns little gain: the mutation is only bestowed for the one round of compulsion, not permanently.

When commanded, the ring can use its companion nanites to produce similar, but much less powerful rings. These have only 1d4 functions selected from the Snail Ring's abilities. The process takes one day per ring and requires pure iron. Although the component metal might seem a trivial concern, in the wastes this can be very hard to get, for after only 10 minutes in normal air, oxidation renders an iron chunk useless.

Snake Rifle (Caster Level 8)

This unusual long arm was built by gate-traveling serpent people banished to this universe from a similar one. The rifle's current owners, a colony of asps, were recently attacked by mutant eagles. Unfortunately, those snakes fully trained to use the weapon were all killed, and much expertise was lost. The snakes' *poor long-term memory* drawback does not help.

Most frequently, gunners use the rifle to shoot masses of sticky fibers, entangling targets or clogging passages and doors (**Web**). But the weapon can also protect its wielder from frigid conditions (**Resist Cold**), translate spoken languages (**Tongues**), and detect humans within 300' (*unique sense*). As a defensive measure, the rifle can emit dazzling

light displays that entrance creatures with full-color vision (**Hypnotic Pattern**). A more reptile-specific function gives scaled creatures a 2-point AC bonus when activated.

The rifle's last and most powerful ability is one forgotten by the asps: it can fire a 50' long "death ray." Everyone hit by the beam must save versus death or be killed instantly; those with a successful save take 3d8 points of damage.

Because their physiology is so similar to the weapon's creators, snake beings native to the *Mutant Future* world find the rifle's controls intuitive. This gives them a +35% bonus on tech rolls to study the rifle's functions.

Spark Putty (Caster Level 8)

An experimental design thrown into the cataclysm's desperate fighting, this artifact was a DNA-shredding battle gauntlet that brought screaming death to thousands. Now it looks like a small lump of burnt clay.

To activate it, a wielder shapes the putty around his forearm, where the material forms an interface with his nervous system. Spark putty projects a hologram around the user, helping him blend into the background by making him appear to be an object appropriate to the area. Although it has little of its original power, upon command the putty can protect the wearer from mental attacks (*mental barrier*), and project a psycho-affective beam able to terrify one creature within 20' (**Scare**). Its remaining signature attack is a blast of flame that reaches out 50' and burns for 3d4 rounds (**Wall of Fire**). The wielder had better be fleet of foot, because the fire can easily burn him. Such is the danger of using old, damaged weapons.

If the user is feeling artistic, the putty can be shaped: little animals, weird objects, anything from his imagination — but it cannot be cut. When manipulated like this, the putty gives off sparks. These do no damage, but do draw the eye, increasing the chance of a wandering monster encounter by 1. Should the putty ever fail its save versus an energy attack (e.g., being hit by a photon grenade), it is destroyed and it explodes, doing 5d12 points of damage to everyone and everything within 250'.

Splatter Gun (Caster Level 20)

During the cataclysm, this device was a frantic attempt to help many people quickly escape dangerous areas. Now, the Gun is seen as either a unusual weapon, or a mechanism of transcendence. In simplest terms, it's a quantum teleportation device: it breaks down targets, moves them, and then build them back up again — hopefully, way the hell out of Dodge. Vaguely rifle-shaped, but bulkier than most long weapons, the device has touch-sensitive panels for monitoring and controlling power, location, filters for dangerous technology, etc., which the wielder can use to designate landing zones for his targets.

Unfortunately, the Gun's teleportation matrix is ... faulty, which might be putting it too mildly. Everyone within the target area (a 30' diameter sphere, centered up to 150' away) hit by the beam is broken up and shot-gunned into the local biomass. Targets (or victims) are fused with each other, their

gear, and the nearby flora and fauna (**Teleport, Transmute Metal to Wood**). Strangely, everyone survives this process — without taking any damage — and slowly rebuilds their bodies over the next 1d4 weeks (*regenerative capacity*). However, very few people subjected to this process retain their original personalities. Those that do will go insane after a few minutes of brain-splattered existence.

Affected animals and mobile plants stay in the immediate area during the reconstruction period, prompted by some unexplained pull. Good thing, because it prevents important parts (like hearts and brains) from wandering elsewhere. Much like bees with pollen, these creatures move between the different areas of dispersed biological material. First they absorb it, then they disgorge it into a plant or animal large enough to hold one or more of the reforming bodies before rebirth. The exact absorbing and disgorging processes are left up to the ML's delicate sensibilities. And for those who might be wondering, yes, predation from critters entering the area after "the event" is a serious problem for all involved.

Beyond the odd behavior, affected creatures may grow or shrink (50/50 chance of either *dwarfism* or *gigantism*), while trees and shrubs with people bits in them are strangely deformed (**Warp Wood**). Anything capable of movement (not the people bits) experiences a pulse of speed for 1d4 rounds after the teleportation effect (*quickness*), and the entire target area begins to glow with the energy of biomass and mini-biome fusion (**Continual Light**).

When the people have finally oozed back together, and the fused plants/animals are free of people bits, both suffer

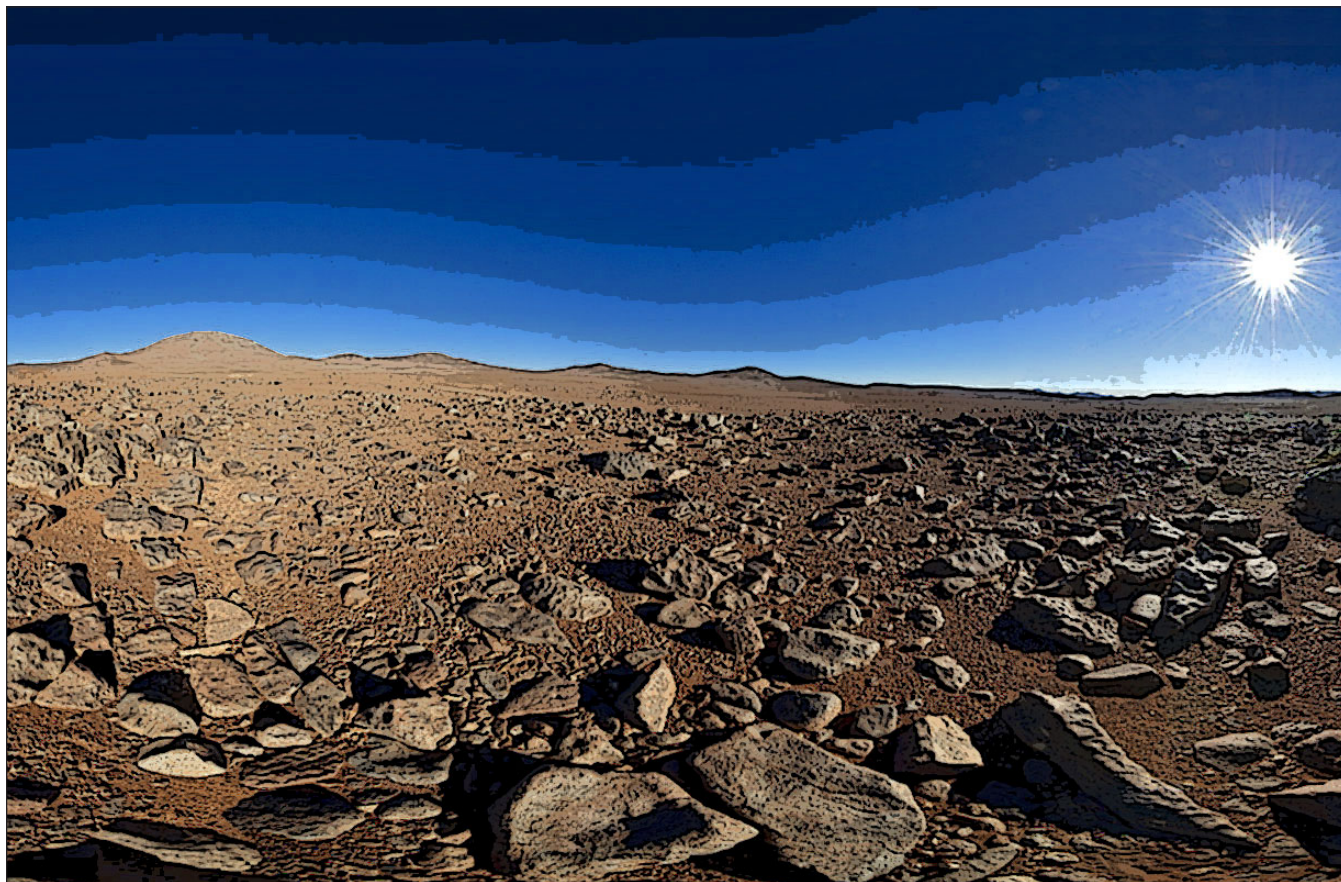
automatic mutation cascades (**Reincarnate**), and must re-roll all their mutations. There is a 30% chance pure humans may remain in their original stock, but most will become mutants of some kind and must roll mutations as if they were newly-created characters. No one or thing gets a save versus these effects, but all receive a new mutation, *environmental adaptation*, described below. Depending on the ML's ruling, this may be added to the characters' new mutations or replace one of them.

NEW MUTATION

Environmental Adaptation

These mutants are well adapted to a local environment or habitat. Depending on the ML's setting or ruling, this could mean a specific area or a terrain type, from a few hundred square miles of plains to the few acres of a ruin containing some unique stressor (e.g., toxins, radiation, or predators) that forces creatures to evolve in a specific way.

While in this preferred habitat, the mutants gain a +4 to all saves and take reduced damage from environmental hazards such as radiation, temperature, corrosive rainfall, etc. The specific reduction is up to the ML, but a recommended mechanic is one-half damage for a failed save and one-quarter for successful save. If the environment changes, mutants will adapt but this takes 4d4 weeks; in the mean time, they suffer a -4 to all saves and suffer increased damage from hazards (i.e., a failed save does double damage, while a passed save inflicts full damage).



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