

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #32:
Shapeshifters



By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

Changing shape is a fascination crossing time, culture, and genre: Greek gods and mythic Indian monsters, vampires, were-creatures, spirit and shadow beings all captivate and intrigue with their metamorphoses. Shapeshifting in *Mutant Future* is no different; one of the most interesting and useful powers, it provides a player character with new abilities and opportunities a single body cannot. And if a Mutant Lord, it gives you two monsters for the price of one!

Animals and plants take other forms using *metamorph* and *chameleon metamorph*. But shapeshifting can be expanded using two new mutations provided here: *animal form*, which allows plants to take the form of an animal, and *robot form*, which allows both plants and animals the ability to look like machinery. Mutant Lords should note a discrepancy between the two canon mutations: conservation of mass is mentioned in *chameleon metamorph*, but this limitation is not part of *metamorph*. As a work-around, MLs can use *density alteration* in concert with *chameleon metamorph* (or the two new ones). Extreme size changes (e.g., clover to redwood) probably should not be allowed, but a giant rat changing into a bear would be reasonable. Also, because of how the mutation is written, it seems plants cannot keep aggressor mutations when changing from combat to non-combat forms. To give these creatures appropriate stat blocks, their entries were written “backward” — so it appears the combat form is the one most commonly encountered. See the Swamp Sedge entry for an example.



Bad Bunny

No. Enc.: 1 (1d8)
Alignment: Chaotic
Movement: 180' (60')
Armor Class: 7
Hit Dice: 1
Attacks: 1 (bite)
Damage: 1d3

Save: L1
Morale: 6
Hoard Class: None

This unusual descendant of foxtail grass lives mostly in areas of extreme drought. When it has sufficient moisture and decent soil, the grass is 6"-18" tall — and harmless. But during the worst water shortages, 3' diameter patches change into cannibalistic rabbits.

These beasts are the size of a 10-20 pound hare and have red eyes, short brown fur, and visible fangs (possibly dripping green drool). They eat whatever unchanged bunny grass remains nearby; if this is not enough food, they turn on each other or whatever else is at hand.

Being so small, bad bunnies are rarely a threat to human-sized creatures, but this does not stop them from attacking anything if starving. When the rains return, remaining bad bunnies revert to grass form, with each becoming a 4'-5' diameter patch.

Mutations: *animal form*.

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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).



Cheese Worm

No. Enc.:	0 (1d6)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	90' (30')
	Burrow 60' (20')
Armor Class:	7
Hit Dice:	10
Attacks:	1 (spines)
Damage:	3d8
Save:	L7
Morale:	10
Hoard Class:	X

Although occasionally hunted and eaten, these mutant earthworms are not named for their flavor, but for the holes they make in their home plains and meadows. Because the worms are 60' long and 3' in diameter, the holes are massive — which is a huge headache for area hunters, cattle herders, and the herds themselves. The problem is particular to cattle because cheese worms can change shape, usually found above ground in the form of grazing bovines and having joined herds of real cows. Unfortunately, more than one cow has fallen into a sinkhole created by the worms. Locals call these “burger pits” and watch them in hopes of finding fresh meat at the bottom.

The altered cheese worms and real cattle get along relatively well; even though the worms eat meat, they do not eat the cows. Instead, the worms use the cows to lure in predators, taking worm form and attacking the carnivores from below. Problems between the two species usually arise during mating season, when bulls try to mate with worm-cows. Then the worms kill the bulls. If attacked, a cheese worm will return to its normal form over a single round and grow huge spines on the last 5'-8' of its head. The spines are 3' long and cannot be thrown, but the worm will readily puncture anything trying to kill it.

Mutations: *aberrant form (natural weapons), density alteration, gigantism, metamorphic.*

Desert Spark

No. Enc.:	0 (3d4)
Alignment:	Chaotic
Movement:	30' (10')
Armor Class:	8
Hit Dice:	1
Attacks:	1 (shock)
Damage:	4d6
Save:	L0
Morale:	9
Hoard Class:	I, II, and III

Normally a non-combative, 5'-8' tall cactus, the desert spark becomes a much smaller (6"-8" tall) sage plant when water runs low. In this form, the plant uses electricity generated in its epidermis to start fires, burning other vegetation and attracting creatures it can draw more water from. Once the plant kills enough to provide a few months worth of water, it transforms back into a cactus. Attacking the cactus form (to get at stored water) will cause the target plant and the others in its grove to transform.

Mutations: *chameleon metamorph, energy-retaining cell structure, full movement.*

Forest Elephant

No. Enc.:	0 (2d8)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	90' (30')
Armor Class:	5
Hit Dice:	6
Attacks:	2 or 1 (tusks or trample)
Damage:	1d4/1d4 or 2d8
Save:	L3
Morale:	9
Hoard Class:	None

These denizens of the temperate forests are about half the size of the tropical species. Normally, they are quite slow but can surprise hunters by taking the form of a chickenwolf (see the *Mutant Future* core rulebook), which is much faster and can be used to kill persistent predators. Although the



creature gains the chickenwolf's speed and mutations, it retains the forest elephant's hit dice, and also its diet: the animal is not a carnivore and will not eat its kills.

Mutations: *metamorph.*

Kelp Turtle

No. Enc.: 3d6 (10d10)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 30' (10')
 Swim 90' (30')
 Armor Class: 3
 Hit Dice: 8
 Attacks: 1 (bite)
 Damage: 2d8
 Save: L6
 Morale: 5
 Hoard Class: None

The kelp turtle lives in cool temperate and tropical waters, growing where giant kelp is found. Besides looking like kelp, the creature's plant form can also grow to over 100' long. This species is unusual because it only reproduces in its animal form. During mating season, the plant takes its 25' long, 15' wide leatherback turtle form, crawl onto a quiet beach, dig a hole in the sand, and lay 30-50 eggs. After a month, the eggs hatch into little turtles. These head for the water and look for a place to put down roots, then change back into kelp form. If attacked in kelp form, the plant will change into turtle form and use its powerful beak to rend the offending herbivores. If unable to drive off the creatures grazing on them, the whole population of kelp will turn turtle and move elsewhere. Should a significant portion of a kelp frond be eaten, the plant will not be able to change shape; the animal would bleed out.

Mutations: *animal form.*

Killer Palm

No. Enc.: 0 (3d10)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 0'
 Armor Class: 4
 Hit Dice: 10
 Attacks: 1 (special)
 Damage: 4d6
 Save: L6
 Morale: 12
 Hoard Class: VI

A threat to beach-goers throughout the tropics, killer palms are one of the most obviously dangerous plants. Their normal, non-combative form is that of a 60' tall coconut palm. But when anything comes within 30', the tree absorbs its leaves, shrinks to half its size, and sprouts 5'-8' long spines down its trunk. Then it attacks: lying flat and spinning around, the palm rolls to hit everything with 30'. Since it destroys even its own seedlings and small plants like grass, killer palms are always surrounded by 60' diameter bare spots of soil or



sand. Even smaller, less mature palms react like this, but have smaller bare spots around them. When its coconuts are mature, the palm throws them into the ocean with great force, allowing the species to spread by water. These nuts are edible, but no one in their right mind collects them straight from the tree.

Mutations: *chameleon metamorph, aberrant form (natural weapon).*

Meat Fox

No. Enc.: 1d4 (8d8)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 60' (20')
 Armor Class: 8
 Hit Dice: 1/2
 Attacks: 1 (bite)
 Damage: 1d3
 Save: L0
 Morale: 4
 Hoard Class: None

Meat foxes are unusual food animals, but often favored by herders because the creatures can take almost every scrap of food from a grassland. The 3' long fox form is carnivorous and first strips an area of smaller animal life: insects, birds, and rodents are its most common prey. Then the creatures transform into 4' long, 3' tall goats that begin devouring all the plants. Unless the herders step in, when a flock of meat foxes finish grazing a location, the only things left are trees and bare soil. These animals might become an ecological disaster, turning large areas into veritable deserts (since a few will occasionally escape), but they are so slow predators catch them sooner or later. They are usually slaughtered as foxes, because the meat is much sweeter and more tender than the goats'. Also fox pelts are much more valuable than goat skin. The animals do not have a set form: they change back and forth depending on the available food supply. But they prefer being foxes.

Mutations: *metamorph, immunity to poison.*

Oartaker

No. Enc.:	0 (1d6)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	0'
Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	8
Attacks:	1 (vine constriction)
Damage:	1d12
Save:	L4
Morale:	11
Hoard Class:	X

Like its milfoil predecessor, oartaker is a freshwater hazard. But rather than clogging boat motors and choking waterways, this vine is a killer. From the surface, the resting plant's 15'-30' long stems look a bit like clumps of supple evergreen needles waving innocently in any current or eddy. But this is deceptive, for when there is a great deal of motion nearby, every 10' diameter patch of milfoil within reach changes into a large vine which grasps and crushes or drowns large fish, aquatic mutants, and swimmers. The vines are powerful enough to destroy a rowboat on the surface, or take down a hippo underwater. Victims are buried in the bottom so the milfoil's roots can feed on them. Finding the remains of the dead is a winter job, when the plant dies back from the cold.

It should be noted that only significant motion will trigger the oartaker's change; many small invertebrates (under a few pounds) like grazing shrimp and caddisfly larvae safely feed on the plants. Humanoids can digest the plant, but most consider it poor eating — starvation food, at best. There are some reptilian and amphibian mutants (with specialized mutations that prevent the change) who harvest the plant with some success. Because oartaker reproduces and replicates from seeds, fragments, and root suckers, it regrows rapidly and is nearly impossible to permanently eliminate from a body of water.

Mutations: *abnormal size, chameleon metamorph, constrictive tendrils, epidermal susceptibility (cold).*



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Rain of Death

No. Enc.:	1 (5d20)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	Fly 1/2 wind speed
Armor Class:	5
Hit Dice:	40
Attacks:	Special
Damage:	10d10
Save:	L21
Morale:	12
Hoard Class:	None

Foggy, wet locations around the world face a terrifying threat from above when these 200'-300' tall redwoods begin to reproduce. The plants have adapted a method of providing good soil and full sun for their seedlings: a tree transforms into a massive wooden blimp (the hydrogen inside is contained by a 4'-8' thick shell), rises 1500' over the terrain, and floats on the winds until it senses a promising forest or grassland. Then it carpet bombs all the vegetation out of existence.

From a distance, the sight is spectacular; from the barrage area, it is a different story. Every hour, everything within a 500' diameter area takes 10d10 points of damage (save versus poison for half damage), and the bombardment lasts for 1d6 hours. The tree then sprinkles its seeds on the newly-formed landing zone. The resulting pulp and shattered wood becomes fertilizer and mulch for the seedlings, while the Rain of Death floats off to find another 2d6 areas for its offspring. Once the tree finishes its dispersal, it lands a few miles away from the final area and regains its non-combative tree form. These plants have few natural enemies because their wood is quite insect-resistant and few animals are large enough to threaten a full-sized tree. Local humanoids with sufficient technology will seek out these redwood and cull them whenever possible. They use the wood for building construction, and hopefully minimize the chances of an aerial attack.

Mutations: *abnormal size, chameleon metamorph, flight, grenade-like fruit, unique sense.*

Rooting Cow

No. Enc.:	4d10 (4d10)
Alignment:	Neutral
Movement:	90' (30') Swim (see below)
Armor Class:	7
Hit Dice:	4
Attacks:	1 (gore) or 1 (bite) (see below)
Damage:	1d6 or 1d8 (see below)
Save:	L2
Morale:	5
Hoard Class:	None

The rooting cow is a popular livestock in wet regions. Usually, these creatures appear as normal cattle, grazing grasses and forbs (small, herbaceous plants that are not grass — e.g.,

dandelions and clover). But if the cattle find themselves in a marsh or swamp, they transform into something like a giant muskrat, and eat the roots of underwater plants instead. When in muskrat form, the attack changes from the bovine gore to the rodent bite, and the animal gains a swim movement rate similar to its land movement. Prey to anything enjoying beef and/or rodent, rooting cows of either form are rarely found in the wild; without their ranchers' protection, they would quickly get taken any time they left the barn/lair to forage.

Mutations: *metamorph.*

Shell Root

No. Enc.: 1 (1)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 120' (40')
 Armor Class: 5
 Hit Dice: 4
 Attacks: 2 or 1 (branches or shock)
 Damage: 1d6/1d6 or 3d6
 Save: L3
 Morale: 9
 Hoard Class: VI

These mutant blueberry bushes are boogie men to artificial entities, hunting androids and roughly human-sized, flightless robotic units. Shell roots are crafty predators, observing and stalking targets for several days, using their plant form to remain inconspicuous. When the time is right, a plant changes into its robot form and strikes. But it must be careful, because intelligent robots may pick up on the plant and destroy it before it can attack. After demolishing a robot, the shell root consumes the wires and motivators, incorporates part of the metal exterior into its bark, and drains the power cell. It leaves the computer and other internal bits like offal after an animal hunt, so some humanoid scavengers follow the plants, hoping to pick up useful parts.

The plant takes only a portion of the robot's exterior so it can hide in the rest. Although normally 6'-8' in height/diameter, the plant can compress itself into machines half that size. This is especially useful if a shell root lives in an area prone to rain, as a downpour or emersion (e.g., dropped into a lake) will cause the plant to short out (it takes the full amount of electrical damage every round). Having a hideout is also helpful because some mutant bugs, deer, and other herbivores immune to electrical attacks find the shell roots delectable. If attacked while still in plant form, the shell root can defend itself with a pair of flailing branches and a nasty shock, but if attacked in robot form, it only retains its shock attack.

Mutations: *energy-retaining cell structure, free movement, full senses, metallic bark, natural vegetal weapons, robot form (special).*

Swamp Sedge

No. Enc.: 0 (1d4)
 Alignment: Neutral
 Movement: 30' (10')



Armor Class: 5
 Hit Dice: 18
 Attacks: 2 (branches)
 Damage: 2d8/2d8
 Save: L10
 Morale: 8
 Hoard Class: None

This plant is normally is found as patches of sedge, a grass-like plant about 1'-3' tall. It grows well in wet terrain, usually in marshes and swamps, or along rivers, lakes, and canals, but a town might well might have a patch growing beside it. If threatened by cutting or eating, a 20' diameter patch of sedge will merge into the form of a black willow tree. The tree is slow but very powerful, with a 10' reach, and few herbivores are willing to take it on. People occasionally use patches as a form of defense, because the tree will attack anything nearby: it cannot tell the differences between moving objects. The locals damage the sedge, forcing the change, while drawing invaders close to the soon-to-be tree.

Mutations: *chameleon metamorph, density alteration, sensory deficiency (sight), special.*

NEW MUTATIONS

Animal Form

The plant can take the form of one specific, animal-based creature, which must have approximately the same mass as the plant. The plant does not gain any of the creature's mutations.

Metallic Bark

The plant draws heavy metals from the soil and incorporates them into a series of mesh layers within its bark. This reduces energy damage, including radiation, by half.

Robot Form

The mutant can take on the appearance of any machine with the same approximate volume. The mutant retains its mutations in the new form but the appearance of their effects may change.

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