

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #39: Unique Superscience Artifacts I



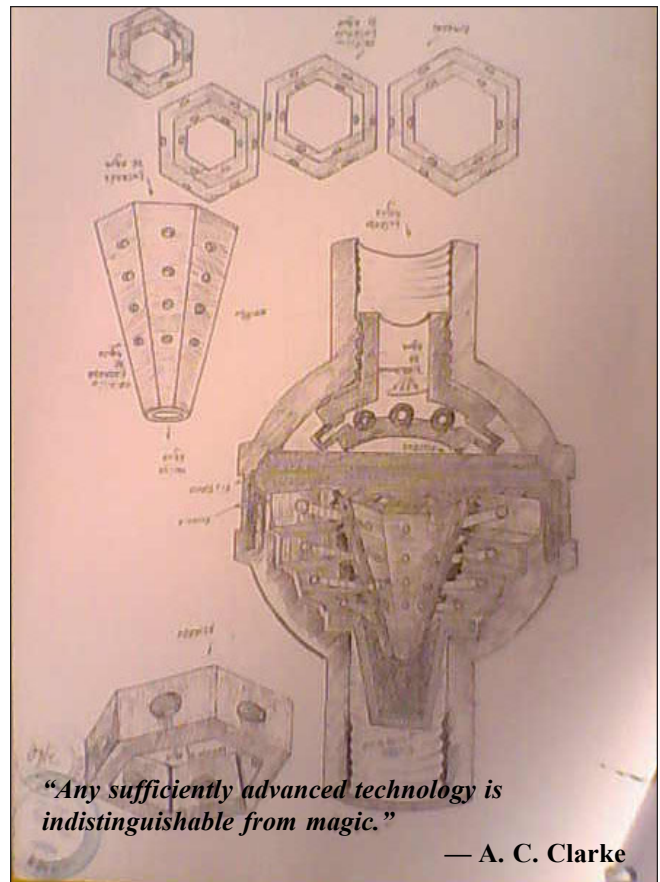
By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

Imagine — barely 50 years ago — pulling out your smart phone in Dallas to take a selfie as the President passed by. The technology people casually sit on today might have gotten you disappeared by an alphabet agency (for possessing alien devices and/or photobombing by the Grassy Knoll gunman). One hundred years ago, talking into your hand could have landed you in an asylum. Three centuries ago, they would have burned witches for catapulting surly birds at petulant pigs.

This idea, Clarke’s Second Law, is a powerful philosophical/imaginative concept and a very useful tool for Mutant Lords. In *Mutant Future*, it translates into superscience: Ancient equipment so advanced it seems supernatural, able to break the laws of physics and engineering. (Machines so wondrous even the author can’t explain how they work.)

The mythos artifact design in Goblinoid Games’ supplement *Realms of Crawling Chaos* partly inspired the following devices. All are unique; many copies were made before or during the final wars, but the surviving items’ histories and experiences (e.g., viral corruption, jury-rigged repairs, exposure to radiation, etc.) have altered them, made them individual.

All items 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 apples versus radiators, the Caster Level gives the harried ML a relative scale for each item’s potential or strength.



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Armor of the Flame Master (Caster Level 12)

Though similar to standard-issue scout EMA, this suit was adapted to fight fires. Its force screen is only effective against heat and flames, stopping the first 50 points of thermal damage per round. The helmet AI’s sensors can evaluate object flammability within 150’ (*unique sense*) and provide long-range infrared sensing out to three miles (*thermal vision*).

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).

The suit also has an adjustable flash incineration feature, allowing the wearer to deny a fire its fuel. Depending on the situation and strategy, a user can initiate localized controlled burns from a distance (**Fireball**), or conduct closer, larger-scale back burns (**Wall of Fire**).

Due to a glitch in the communication array, the armor flickers with blue flames. Originally, this system allowed the operator to direct those nearby, even when a fire's roar made speaking impossible, projecting text like a holographic marquee. Now it looks either angelic or demonic. It is also very distracting. Anyone within 200' must save versus stun or suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws until they look away. Any writing in the flames is intelligible out to 50'.

As a safety measure, the suit is highly magnetic. This allowed rescue teams to more easily find a downed or trapped operator among the rubble following a building collapse. The field is not strong enough to jerk a sword from an attacker's hand, but the wearer could pick up small ferrous objects (under eight ounces) up to five feet away. This could also pose a hazard to archaic computer systems using magnetic drives, but more advanced crystal or biological storage devices are unaffected.

Assassin Robot Right Head (Caster Level 12)

If removed with care, the right-hand head of this hulking robot can be used as an artifact. The name might seem odd, but assassin robots were designed with two or three heads, depending on the model. An imaginative ML could also create powers for the remaining head(s).

Assassin robots killed in an unusual manner: altering victims' atomic make-up with a transmuting ray, turning them into 2" wide cubes. Targets were then transported back to the robots' masters for reconstitution by another artifact, or

simply destroyed. Each robot also had a tractor beam with a 150' range (**Hold Monster**). Targets save versus energy attacks to evade the tractor beam completely, but once held they are secure and automatically hit by the transmuting ray. Victims then save versus energy attacks to resist being transformed.

In an emergency, such as approaching police, the cubes could be merged into nearby stones for safekeeping (**Transmute Rock to Mud**). When the trouble passed, the robot would vaporize the minerals surrounding a cube without harming it (**Passwall**).

The head does not seem to have a power source when found, but it inflicts one point of heat damage per round to anyone touching it without gloves. Its systems lie dormant until the characters do connect an energy source, but the actual powering unit is left up to the ML and whatever the characters can scrounge up.

There are a few other problems using this artifact. All who touch the head while it is active suffer from visual and auditory distortions (*vision impairment*, **Ventriloquism**). Also, each time it is powered up, the head makes a ghastly, deafening sound (*shriek*).

Blobber (Caster Level 20)

Before the final wars, this smooth metal disc was cutting-edge medical technology — by making cutting obsolete. The blobber appears simple: a tiny round shield, 3" in diameter, marked only by a few touchpad controls. But when placed on a patient, the device transforms the entire body into a putty-like, transparent goo. Surgery became more like sculpting in clay: wounds could be fused with just pressure, bones reshaped by hand, and diseased tissue easily removed and replaced with cloned structures in much less time and with far less trauma. When a procedure was finished, the



device was removed and the patient returned to normal, but better off than before.

Passing time has made the blobber only more powerful. Instead of being merely a surgical aid, the device learned to heal wounds, neutralize toxins, and cure disease — both physical and mental (**Heal**). This ability can be used once per day and will also cure radiation damage/poisoning and parasitic mutations. Two areas are beyond the blobber's capabilities: it cannot detect nanites, and genetic engineering is outside its purview, so it does not treat defect mutations.

The blobber has also expanded its flesh-transforming power, now allowing a user to form new limbs while in ooze form (*aberrant form*). One limb per level can be created (e.g., 5th level: 5 limbs), and each can make a slam attack doing 1d4 points of damage. Unfortunately, the limbs are too soft and gooey to hold a weapon. Lastly, the user's ooze-skin forms unusual neural connections; oddly, this allows communication with any non-sapient animal the user touches (**Speak With Animals**). Both of these powers can be used at will.

Despite the blobber's miraculous abilities, there are some down sides. While a patient is in the ooze-state, its transparent skin is very vulnerable to UV radiation, including bright sunlight (*epidermal susceptibility*). Every round exposed, the patient suffers 1d4 points of damage. The device's powers have also made it one of the most fought over artifacts in the region, as large numbers of people want to control its healing gifts.

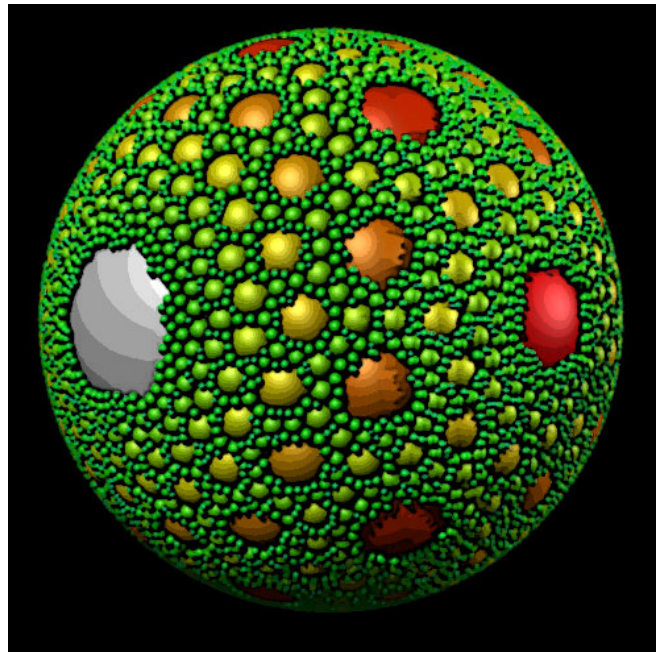
The blobber can treat pure humans, mutant humans, and mutant animals, but does not work on plants or artificial life forms, like synthetics or cyborgs. The device runs off a minifusion cell.

Bot Slayer (Caster Level 15)

The Ancients created this rifle to destroy wild machines. It has a range of 300'/600' and fires a beam that converts metal into nitrogen molecules (**Polymorph Any Object**). Any machine struck takes 5d8 points of damage; normal gear (e.g., chain mail or swords) is usually destroyed in one hit. The beam converts only one item at a time, so while a container could be transformed with one shot, its contents would not be touched, unless shot again. Basic androids and cyborgs with metal implants (some have plastic gear) are affected by the weapon, but synthetics are not.

The rifle also has two manually-activated defensive features. The first generates a field that surrounds the firer and absorbs all radiation, including light (*reflective epidermis*, **Darkness Globe**). If the user believes she is about to be overwhelmed by a close assault, she can also trigger a pulse that pushes all metals back 50' (**Repulsion**).

The beam weapon and the defensive pulse can be activated once every three turns. The absorption field lasts for up to one hour, but has a six hour recharge period. The Bot Slayer radiates in the the UV spectrum and has such a fearsome reputation among artificial life that robots with UV sensors usually flee the area when they detect it.



Cat Marble (Caster Level 4)

Before the cataclysm this little orb was a pet toy. Millions of similar devices were made, in many forms, all designed to attract the attention of most any animal — and even some uplifted plants. Time, neglect, and war destroyed most, and many that still function are faulty: instead of bringing pleasure, these misfit toys rouse hostility toward the carrier (*negative empathy* drawback).

The cat marble runs off zero-point energy and constantly emits radiation able to trigger a response similar to catnip. Should the user meet any feline-based creature, the orb provides a 3-point bonus to encounter rolls. Once per day it also allows for some control over one target, the closest cat (**Charm Monster**). The effect lasts 1d12+24 hours. However, once freed the cat may turn on the artifact bearer (depending on a modified reaction roll).

The 1/2" diameter orb is currently part of an amulet's gem setting, used as one of several smaller stones surrounding a large quartz crystal. The marble is silvery, but the radiation it emits distorts reflections in its surface, much like a funhouse mirror. A damaged emitter causes this effect, and also makes the radiation released much more intense. Anyone directly touching the marble for more than four per day loses all hair and grows scales from their skin. Depending on the ML's decision, this effect can be permanent or merely last for several months after the marble has been dropped.

Dark Juju Cup (Caster Level 8)

Ancient scientists designed this container as a lab instrument, which runs off a plutonium clip and boils any liquid poured inside. It has several built-in sensors and can detect nutrients, molecular composition, and even radiation (*unique sense*). A display on one side describes what the beaker holds.

A dry and empty cup is inert, seeming a fairly nondescript 500 mL metal beaker. While it does not conduct heat to a holder's hand, the cup transfers a great deal of energy into

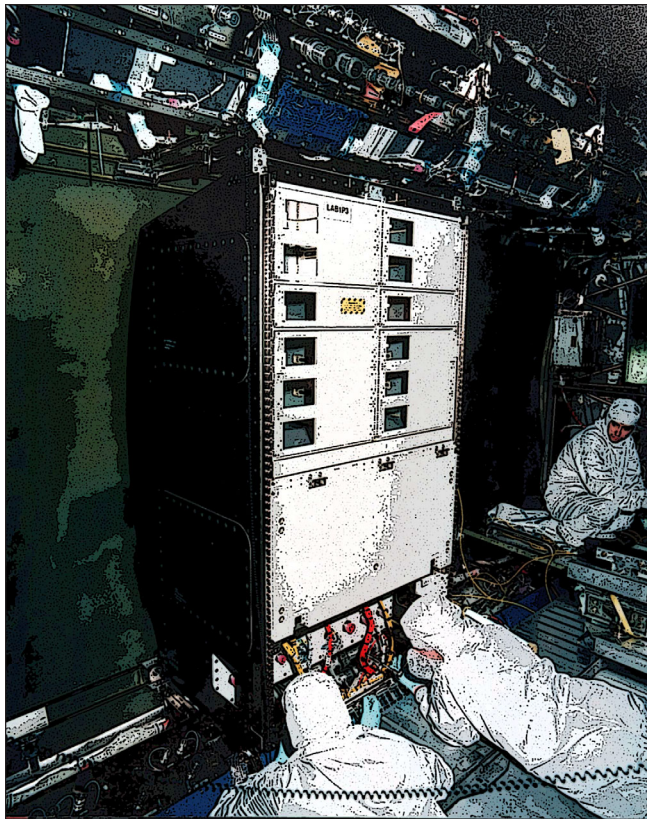
its contents. Sticking your finger into the liquid, or splashing it on someone can cause anywhere from a single point of damage to 2d10, depending on the contents and its boiling point.

The dark juju cup's real power is revealed when something is added to water boiling within — sometimes yielding almost magical results. Possibilities could include vegetation, which expands to 500 times the initial sample size (**Minor Creation**); flowers producing a wondrous odor (*fragrance development*); and flesh becoming a duplicate of the original creature (**Clone**, without insanity). Combining multiple samples of animal and/or plant genetic material produces chimeras (see *WftW* issue #36, Plant Mutants 2 for more information and ideas). Even simple distilled water can create a mist (**Fog Cloud**).

When first discovered, the cup is full of powder: a concentrate of 80 stimshot A doses. The previous, and very dead, owner tried using the cup to make a supercharged version of the drug and succeeded far too well. Anyone eating the powder is likely to end up the same way, as they must save versus poison or die. Those who pass take 6d4 points of damage. Dissolving the powder in water reconstitutes the drug, but drinking the entire mixture acts as an 80-strength stimshot A. Characters who recognize the liquid can divide it into smaller doses.

Datalink (Caster Level 12)

A good example of using technology for good or ill, datalinks were first designed by data thieves to “blow open” information vaults. Police and government agencies quickly adopted the devices for investigative and espionage work.



Encircling a powered-up computer (including robots and basic androids) with this 30' long, 1" thick cable allows complete and immediate access to all information within. The datalink runs off power leached from the target unit and is operated using its 2" by 4" display screen and several buttons with odd symbols. These controls allow data to be downloaded to an external storage device or AI. Data can also be modified within the target's memory unit, or more rapidly changed by uploading new programming from an external source.

As permanent procedures, the operator can wipe a target's memory (**Amnesia**), rewrite directives/install behavioral compulsions (**Geas**), or destroy viruses (**Remove Curse**). Only while the artifact is on, the operator can also disrupt motor functions (**Fumble**), scramble neural links (**Feeblemind**), disconnect sense relays (*sensory deficiency*), or enhance mental defenses (**Globe of Invulnerability**). Each of these changes can be applied to any computer; because of this, only basic androids will be affected — synthetics and replicants are immune to datalink alterations.

Due to glitches in the device's data transmission module, android controllers may suffer an aggressive counter-response from an unwilling subject. There is a 5% chance that any hostile AI within the datalink circle may try to take over an android controller's body (**Possession**).

Demon Eye (Caster Level 18)

Aliens developed the Demon Eye gem to conquer humanity. When they arrived on Earth (several decades too late) and found the residents had done an excellent job of destroying themselves, the aliens dumped the Eye and forgot it: the weapon only works on humans.

The fist-sized stone immediately fuses with the first human touching it. This process lasts 48-72 hours, as the new host endures an excruciating paralysis. If the transformation takes more than 65 hours, the host must save versus death or die as the Eye shreds her internal organs.

When completely merged, the host develops several new powers. At will, she can shapeshift into three alternate forms (*metamorph*), or grow a chitinous carapace (*natural armor*) and claws (*aberrant form [natural weapons]*). The alternate forms are left up to the ML's imagination.

The host can also quickly grow massive spines (*spiny growth*, 1d8 damage), generate a blanket of toxic vapors (**Cloudkill**), and enhance any melee weapons with organic structures (**Striking**). If necessary, she can slough off small portions of her skin, which grow rapidly into massive, though short-lived, monsters under her command (**Summon Monster VI**). Once their lifespan ends, the monsters do not return to the host; they die and rot or turn to dust. These four abilities have a three-turn recharge rate.

'Demon Eye' is an apt name, as the host wakes from the change Chaotic and destructive. Whenever combat is possible, she must save versus stun at -4 or attack everyone who is not an ally. She even attacks allies 25% of the time.

Eller's Eye (Caster Level 6)

Poor Eller. He used this found cybernetic implant to replace a lost eye, and it drove him quite mad. Though still alive, it isn't necessary to describe Eller. If possibilities are useful, he could be a mutant human pirate, a mutant moss with many eyes, the leader of a wolf pack, or a sparrow/crocodile hybrid (in honor of "The Chicken from Hell").

The implant runs on a sealed internal power source and looks like a glass eye with an iris of slowly swirling colors. Should someone else claim and install it, the implant's iris changes color to permanently match the other eye (if one exists) when the new host looks into a reflective surface for the first time.

Once activated, the eye allows its user to see through 5' of organic matter, and emit a 10' long blast of class 2 radiation (*optic emissions [gamma eyes]*) that can knock an opponent flat (**Fumble**). If the host loses more than 80% of his hit points, he can play possum and appear to die (**Feign Death**). The eye can also access nearby data networks and retrieve information on objects, creatures, and terrain the host can see (*unique sense*). Activating this function requires the host to focus on a target for more than three seconds. The delay prevents the eye from triggering on everything within the host's field of view. There was an 'off switch' for this function, but it no longer works.

Because it can see through the host's eyelid, the implant receives no protection against bright light (e.g., direct sunlight, lasers, explosions, etc.). Any exposure overloads the host's nervous system and he takes one point of damage per round (*frailty*). Eventually this weakness drives the host insane (**Feeblemind**). This usually takes 4d4 weeks and there is no save because it is gradual. The only preventions are to cover the eye with an inorganic patch (e.g., titanium, aluminum, etc.) or remove the implant.

Fiber Optic Bundle (Caster Level 15)

The fiber optic bundle is a softball-sized, many-sided mass of strange, silvery metal with glass tentacles emerging from more than half the facets. At some point, the artifact was exposed to other-worldly energies and partially thrown into the future. Now, those willing to take a risk can gaze into one of the metal surfaces and see what is to come (*precognition*). But all who look must also save versus stun. Any who fail experience a period of altered consciousness lasting 1d4 rounds (**Confusion**).

Upon command, the bundle can also discharge a brilliant flash of light (*optic emissions [bright eyes]*) or broadcast a hologram of the wielder (**Project Image**). Some unknown quality of the mirrored surfaces does not permit them to reflect other holograms and illusions (**True Seeing**). The temporal gradient might provide the bundle's energy, as it has no obvious power source.

Golden Eater (Caster Level 15)

This oddly-shaped golden object is about 18 inches in diameter, with a flat bottom and several lumps on the upper half. It was named the Eater because all who touch it seem



to be consumed. In reality, it is a gate device, sending the "disappeared" to another universe, where they appear within 10' of one another. The Eater has only one other function: creating 3" diameter metallic plates covered in symbols. Each traveler arrives with one in hand.

They may not look it, but the plates are survival tools. The alternate universe is a fiery place, and a plate automatically (no tech roll needed) projects a field wherein heat heals the possessor an amount it would normally inflict, and cold does double damage. The plates respond to present conditions, so if one is somehow returned to Earth, healing from cold and harm from heat is possible. (The difficult part is returning home. Hopefully someone has **Plane Shift** or an equivalent artifact, or the campaign is heading in a different direction.)

Besides this, each device works like a backpack and a Swiss Army knife, with the symbols activating various functions. Each plate has an extra-dimensional space filled with survival gear, which can be accessed by pressing the correct symbols (**Instant Summons**). The items and storage amount are up to the ML, but recommended limits are two tons and 500 cubic feet. This may seem large, but the space contains both terraforming/survival gear and personal items.

Touching other symbols releases invisible drones (**Arcane Eye**). They have a range of 1/2 mile, a melee attack, and can be set to defend the plate holder (**Faithful Hound**). The plate can create as many drones as needed, but only one can be active at any time.

Anyone or thing can use a plate, however any human losing hers will quickly be cooked. For quick access, a traveler might affix the plate to her forearm with cloth strips. Each plate has a sealed power source that lasts long after the holder dies.

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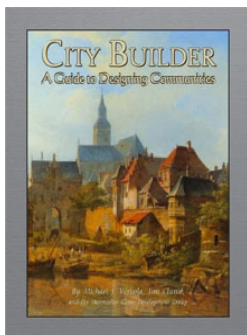
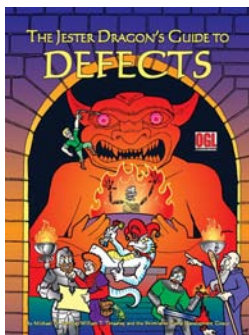
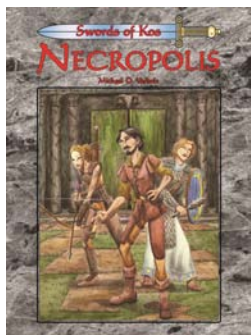
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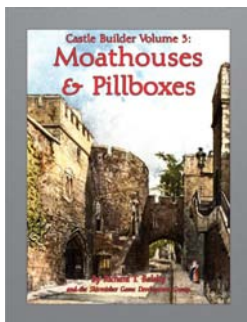
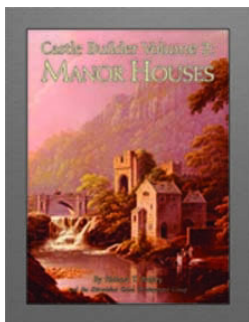
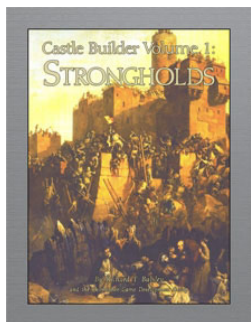
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