

WISDOM FROM THE WASTELANDS

Issue #42: Unique
Superscience Artifacts II



By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

Excalibur. Mjolnir. Aegis. The Millennium Falcon. The Eiffel Tower. A red shirt. A sonic screwdriver. The Horn of Roland. The Spear of Destiny. Whether from myth, history, fiction, fantasy, or actual real life, weapons and armor, personal objects, vehicles and buildings all can become iconic, even legendary. *Wisdom from the Wastelands'* first installment on superscience artifacts (issue #39) introduced the idea of creating these unique and amazing devices using Clarke's Second Law and Goblinoid Games' supplement *Realms of Crawling Chaos*. This time around, some of the artifacts get a little bigger. Maybe a little weirder. But, again, all use such advanced technology that they appear to be magical.

Each item described has 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 pomegranates versus radiators, the Caster Level gives the harried ML a relative scale for each item's potential or strength.

Green Stone (Caster Level 16)

Whatever this strange object's original purpose, it has changed greatly since being created: now the 1" diameter green stone spews mucus from time to time. Anyone touching the stone must save versus stun or be compelled to place it against their shoulder or neck. Where it makes contact, the stone secretes a green goo; in 1d4 rounds, this grows into a slimy copy of the host's head and neck with the stone centered inside. The new appendage cannot communicate, but it does



mimic the host's head (performing the same actions).

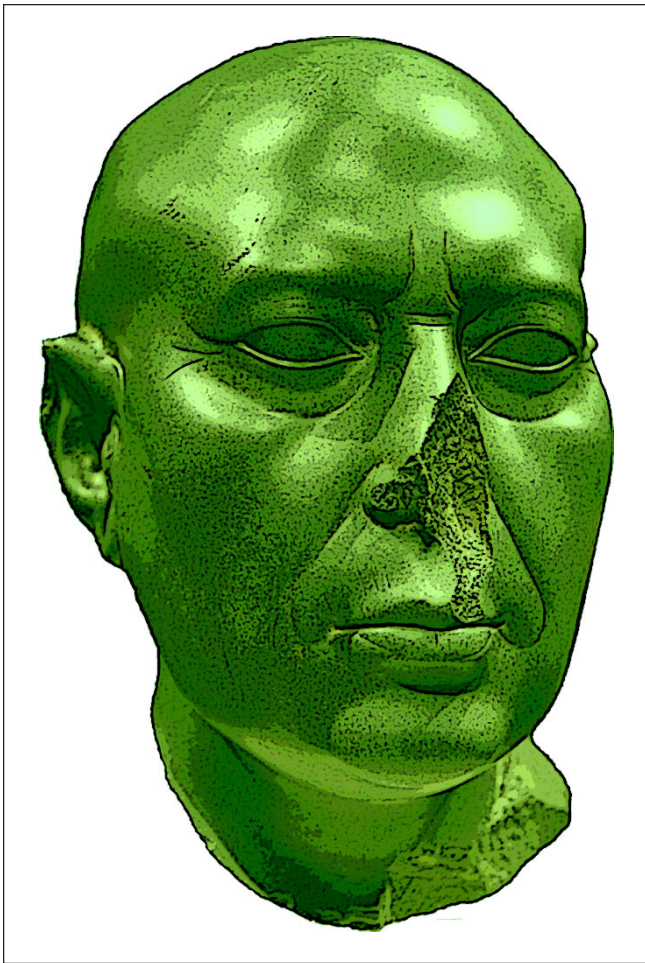
As the host moves, goo continually oozes from the head, dripping down his body to the ground. Where it touches concrete, the slime transforms some of the organic content into strange fungal forms that look like melting mushrooms. These are slightly toxic (class 1 poison), but very tasty; the exact flavor is up to the ML, though it should be good enough that people follow such a food source, like a mucus-y, fungus-y Pied Piper. The fungi are also highly nutritious, with each fungus equivalent to a meal. Every day, 5d100 are produced, with the exact number dependent on the size of the concrete piece infested.

With time and effort, the host can get the head to perform amazing, and disgusting, feats. It can spit small orbs allowing

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Hazard Stone, Jimmy's Tube	2
Joe's Diner/Hell's Kitchen, Microsub	3
Mining Rig, Mining Staff	4
Mutated Healing Gel	5

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).



control over others (*parasitic control*), while other ooze projectiles rapidly break down inorganic matter (**Shatter**). The head can also prevent the host from feeling pain (*pain insensitivity*), or spray a mass of sticky, infectious fibers (**Web, Cause Disease**). Feeding the head some ‘coiled daisy’ doubles the mass and area of fiber spray, and makes the disease more virulent (a save penalty of -2). Unfortunately, coiled daisy can be difficult to find and/or expensive to buy, with individual stalks costing up to 500 gp each.

The head is very low maintenance and does not need to be fed, as it survives on the stone’s secretions. However, the constant dripping makes any character wearing the head suffer a +2 reaction adjustment in social settings. If this becomes too much (or just too nasty), the head can be removed fairly easily, much like excising a massive boil. The procedure doesn’t hurt, but the moist noises and the extended sucking feeling are pretty disgusting. Once removed, the head immediately dissolves into a puddle surrounding the stone.

Hazard Stone (Caster Level 14)

Created as boundary equipment for a variety of sports, hazard stones raised and lowered visible force screens to create game fields, obstacles, or shifting mazes. For example, with a few minutes work, a grav-ball pitch could be changed into an equestrian course.

This stone, which looks like a 3" wide obsidian cube,

has been infested with robotic nanites and a clump of mutant crab grass. The nanites try to communicate with anyone nearby, forming red, 12-point font letters and symbols on the stone. Unfortunately the tiny machines don’t know any real language, so the result is gibberish.

The infestation altered the force screen generator, which now creates a force field that protects against fire (**Fire Shield: Chill**). When the shield is active, any attacker striking the cube’s holder with melee or natural weapons inflicts normal damage, but takes twice this amount himself as the shield emits a fiery counter-blast. Unfortunately, this buggy system might also intensify any incoming physical strike (melee, bullet, fall, etc.): there is a 1-in-6 chance the wielder takes double damage and gets thrown into a short-lived extra-dimensional space (**Rope Trick**). The wielder cannot escape or interact with the real world until the space collapses, releasing her 1d4+2 rounds later.

If the mutant grass and/or the nanites are destroyed, the stone explodes, doing 5d6 points of damage to everyone and everything within 25'. The grass can take 15 points of physical or energy damage, but herbicides will kill it in 1d6+2 rounds. The nanites are hardened against EMP and radiation, but vulnerable to electricity and killer nanites (see *WfiW* issues #28, 30, and 31 for details).

Jimmy’s Tube (Caster Level 18)

Moved several times since the cataclysm, this 8'-long, metal stasis tube has been battered by its travels. From somewhere, a red goo smelling of long-unwashed humanity, rotting fish, and red pepper drools toward a small pool already forming on the ground. Any character nearby notices the smell burns his nose and irritates his eyes. The control panels and displays along one side and the clear composite door are covered in grime. Wiping the displays reveals that the tube still functions; wiping the door allows outsiders to see 6-year-old Jimmy Kane held within.

Exposure to various superscience artifacts and environmental factors has made the tube a focal point for mental energy, giving Jimmy’s subconscious some amazing powers. Physically, he can be of any description you like, but mentally/psychologically he’s a child with the capability to control others. So, sometimes, he can be a snotty little brat.

Telepaths within 500' can contact Jimmy; under the right conditions or persuasion, he might help them with several of his useful abilities. He might implant compulsions (**Geas**), paralyze enemies (**Hold Monster**), scramble others’ thoughts (**Greater Confusion**), contact other mutants for assistance (*metaconcert*), or alter perceptions to come across in the most favorable light (**Charm Person**). These are only some concrete examples, dealing with Jimmy is more freeform than the description might indicate: the telepaths ask for help, and Jimmy does what he wants. Should a telepath anger Jimmy in any way, the child can lash out mentally, attacking anyone within 100' with a wide variety of powerful mental abilities (**Symbol [Cleric or Magic-user]**).

Although Jimmy has all this strength, his defenses are weak. His Willpower is 6 and he cannot move the tube. Should

the boy be killed, the tube is useless until he is replaced; changing the occupant will most likely change those powers the artifact can provide.

As a side note, the red goo is a chemical produced by the tube, intended to provide the occupant with medical assistance, if necessary. It could be corrupted now, but has no effect on Jimmy — at least so far.

Joe's Diner/Hell's Kitchen (Caster Level 15)

An art deco Streamliner of neon and steel, a clam shack on the wharf, the corner greasy spoon, a food truck writ large. Toned up or beaten down, a diner has cheap eats done right. That ain't Joe's.

This establishment could be clad in one of those iconic skins (or a future century's vision), but Joe's Diner is no place you'd want to dine. It randomly shifts across the world (**Teleport**), staying in one place for just 1d6+4 days. The building's exterior look might change, but the dimensions remain constant: 50' long, 30' wide, and 15' tall — always enough room to seat a couple dozen customers. A vibrant sign outside draws the eye (**Flame Charm**), enticing people to grab a counter stool and sample the fare (**Suggestion**).

Those who enter find the food familiar yet exotic, made with local ingredients. But there's a reason (or three) for this artifact being nicknamed "Hell's Kitchen". Unfortunately, anyone who eats or drinks here automatically gains one drawback (*increased caloric needs, obese, reduced immune system, reduced oxygen efficiency*) that lasts for 2d4 weeks. Determining which one is left to the Mutant Lord; he might roll 1d4 to select, or decide before the game.

Should dissatisfied patrons attack the diner, portions of the food and drink merge into a terrible creature (**Summon Monster VII**). This construct rampages for an hour, then breaks down into its component parts. Occasionally, in places where no customers appear during the first two days, the diner creates and releases one of these monsters, hoping it transports a tainted feast to some unwary, and unlucky, neighboring community.

Anyone entering the diner's back room finds a horrifying scene as local people are added to the menu (**Fear**). Drones stun and drag these unfortunates back to the diner (**Arcane Eye, Power Word Stun, Floating Disc**), where they are fed into a range of automated processing machines and chemical baths. This isn't just butchery, it's torture: the building transforms still-conscious captives into food. If freed, the victims are disoriented, shocky, and weak (only 1d4 hit points remaining).

Even more troubling, exposure to the transformative cooking chemicals may cause characters to reroll their mutations or even their race (**Reincarnate**), but this is up to the ML. The change can be randomly determined by rolling 1d10 on the table below. If the result is "Mutation only" or the character's current race (e.g., a mutant animal rolls a 1 or 2), the race remains unchanged and the player need only reroll her character's mutations.



Die Roll

1-2
3-4
5-6
7-8
9-10

New Race

Animal
Plant
Replicant
Human
Mutation Only

Microsub (Caster Level 8)

This piece of junk provides easy access to the "drowned lands" — permanently. The microsub is a 3' wide, 3' long, 2' deep, boxy, rounded container that fits over the head and torso, where it locks in place. A window panel allows the rider to see ahead and below (i.e., above the rider's head when moving and in front of her face).

When activated, the machine throws off sparks and spouts a cloud of grey exhaust. Then the sub grafts cyber-gills into the rider's torso. The metal and plastic gills allow a submerged rider to survive by absorbing oxygen from water and transferring it directly into the bloodstream. Unfortunately, a fault in the implantation system simultaneously shuts down the rider's lungs, so the rider can only breathe underwater. The cyber-gills are permanent, but may be removed surgically; this usually involves a lot of pain and the possibility of dying. With the correct medical artifacts or healing mutations, the character's lungs can be brought back into (terrestrial) working order.

However, once the conversion has taken place, the rider does not need the microsub to breathe, and it can be easily removed. But this presents two problems. First, the feathery, bloody-looking gills are disturbing to look at — even most sea dwellers find them disgusting. Without the microsub (which hides the gills), the rider suffers a +2 penalty to encounter checks. Also, wearing the sub allows access to a suite of other functions. The rider can use the built-in depth gauge and compass (**Know Direction**); she can attract, but

not control, aquatic creatures (**Conjure Animals**); and, when on the surface, she can generate a cloud of water vapor (**Obscuring Mist**), which might be handy in combat situations.

Mining Rig (Caster Level 18)

Even after humans began mining asteroids, they continued Earthly prospecting. This behemoth was designed to find and collect unusual or alien rocks from meteorite strikes and planar accidents. A dome mounted on a huge tracked drive system, the mining rig is 60' tall, 40' wide, 80' long, and weighs a couple hundred tons. Battered, scarred, and scorched, the vehicle looks like it has been through the wars and smells like charred flesh and burned rubber.

The current owners do not know the rig's full capabilities and now only use it to produce water. Once fully automated, it now requires a controller: several years ago, a previous owner ripped out some of the rig's AI components. It kept trying to "escape," and a giant, wandering water source is no good for anyone.

The vehicle has four sections: the control box, a humidity condenser, a mineral manipulator, and a seeder. Mounted near the dome's forward end, the control box is the rig's nerve center. It's also set up for human operators/overseers, should they be necessary. In addition to the screens and consoles for manual control and supervision, there are internal system monitors and external sensors used to detect the minerals (*unique sense*).

Mining starts with the humidity condenser, which can supply up to 5,000 gallons of water per day (**Create Water**), even in the desert. The rig uses this liquid to ease recovery, saturating an area of soil where it detected minerals. Next,

the manipulator system uses a tractor beam to move soil, extract target minerals, and shape them for storage (*neural telekinesis*, **Stone Shape**). The beam emitter is centered on the rig's underside, next to a shielded containment chamber where minerals are stored — in case they are radioactive or otherwise hazardous. As the minerals are removed, any encasing soil falls away and is dried in order to recycle the water. Then the seeder replaces any destroyed vegetation (**Plant Growth**).

Despite its bulk, the rig can crawl across the landscape at a stately rate of 60' (20'), but it can only climb inclines up to 45 degrees. In the Ancients' day, other machines would level steeper ground before the mining rig passed through. Because the rig is much too massive to create mine shafts that it could use, the vehicle must stay on the surface. Should the rig ever need a defense, the manipulator can "animate" soil and stone, creating a massive construct (**Conjure Earth Elemental**).

Mining Staff (Caster Level 12)

Before large mining interests developed the Mining Rig, many prospectors and geologists used these devices for the same purpose: to find and collect alien minerals. Given their greater portability, the 6' long mining staffs remained popular on extraterrestrial colonies and asteroid mining operations, even after larger equipment was developed.

Each staff is about 3" thick and made of an advanced plastic that is both lightweight and extremely durable. It's also grey, so yellow and red stripes highlight a staff against background rock and dust. One end of the staff tapers to a point; this must be thrust at least 8" into the ground, otherwise the device won't activate.



Mining staffs have four primary functions: detect minerals (*unique sense*), pulverize stone (**Transmute Rock to Mud**), shift soil with a tractor beam (**Move Earth**), and report their findings to a wireless network (*neural telepathy*). The network might have included research staff, geological survey teams, construction crews, or whatever unit was necessary. Sometimes this meant combat engineers or medics: during the final wars, staffs were occasionally pressed into service detecting land mines and underground bunkers, or finding casualties trapped in air pockets beneath rubble. The staff has a range of one mile and is more accurate and sensitive than the mining rig's sensor suite. Because of this, the staff can mark deep mineral veins for possible mining by burrowing robots, which can also be summoned wirelessly.

If wireless networks are unavailable, the staff also has two displays on the blunt end. The first is a 3" by 2" screen, centered between the staff's two hand grips. This is also the primary control panel, though a remote could have been a standard option. Just below the butt end is the second display, a small holographic projector. The hologram appears six feet away, within an area 10' square. Originally, this allowed results to be read from a distance, if the staff had be set into hazardous ground. Now, due to a communications glitch, the hologram is a stream of patterns and weirdness so fascinating that few can look away (**Flame Charm**).

For its original users, the staff could also project a force field to keep out the weather, or falling volcanic debris (*force screen, greater*). More recently, some unfortunate wastelanders discovered the staff's pulses tend to irritate or attract underground mutant creatures. If left in place for more than 24 hours, there is a 10% per day that a land squid might appear. Other possibilities might include terrestrial sharks and giant aromatic worms.

Mutated Healing Jelly (Caster Level 10)

The last few ounces of this precious material line the bottom of some vat, vessel, or other container large enough to hold a fully immersed human adult. It's not much to look at, a dull yellow goo, but the jelly smells faintly and pleasantly of apples. It also bonds with the first person who touches it, spreading over the skin and fusing with the recipient.

Once started, this process creates a weird quivering sensation throughout the body (like holding a tuning fork to bone), lasts 1d4 rounds, and is irreversible. Contact must be made with exposed flesh; those wearing EMA or other hermetic protection are not affected. The gel can, however, seep through unsealed metal gauntlets, cloth, or leather. It cannot be removed without killing the recipient, and there is only one application (it is a unique artifact). Even though the gel moves to bond with the recipient, it is neither alive nor sapient: the motion is more like capillary action.

The bonded material remains mostly in the host's dermal layers, but it also links with his neural network, allowing him access to interesting and useful abilities. When needed, the gel can extend 1" long tendrils to act as climbing gear (**Spider Climb**, at will). Perfecting this power takes some practice, so early-on the host might sprout tendrils over his

entire body and resemble a sea creature, chew toy, or shag carpeting; or, they might only come out his back, or on his legs. The host gets to his destination, but it might not be a dignified exercise. Also, a significant (and correct) portion of his skin must be exposed; a character wearing full armor feels the wiggling inside his protection, but he's not going anywhere. The host can also alter his skin color at will (*chameleon epidermis*), and, again, this is also subject to armor/clothing restrictions and needs a little practice.

Mutated healing jelly signals various exposures with visual warnings. If the host comes into contact with a sick animal or person (*unique sense*), red stripes appear on the contamination site(s); if the host becomes ill, the stripes spread over his entire body. The jelly reacts chemically with salt (both crystal and salt water) to produce a cloud of purple gas (**Stinking Cloud**). Should the host get hit by a blaster, the ionic damage causes the jelly to extrude a protective gunge (*dermal poison slime*, class 9). This first appears at the wound site, then spreads over the entire body in 1d4 rounds. It can be collected for later use, as it remains potent for at least a day. Anyone touching the slime must save versus poison or fall asleep. The host is immune to both cloud and slime.

Despite a scary introduction for the post-apocalypse host character, healing jelly was once a very common medical substance, the base agent for stimshots and other drugs. Exposure to atmospheric mutagens warped the material and weakened its direct curing power; fortunately, the gel can still stimulate the host's innate regenerative capability (**Cure Light Wounds**) once every eight hours, as needed.

The jelly also retains a more powerful relic of its healing power, and a strange one at that: it allows the host to graft limbs from a recently slain creature onto his body. The parts must be from a similar being and dead no more than an hour. But 'how similar' is left up to the ML; if the character wants to go Dr. Frankenstein, that's the ML's call. Grafted limbs may be placed anywhere on the torso or upper legs, and last 1d4 days before rotting off.

The host gains one attack per additional arm or forelimb, but these parts add weight and throw off the host's balance. Each upper limb gives a cumulative -1 to hit and a 1-point AC penalty. Legs can be grafted on for additional movement, up to the maximum of the donor creature. If a limb is associated with a mutation (e.g., some versions of *energy ray* are linked with the hands), the jelly allows the host to activate these powers. But, because so few cultures appreciate the finer points of sticking dead things onto one's person, the character suffers a +4 reaction penalty in social situations. Also, trying new kinds of limbs, like turtle flippers or wings, requires much practice; humorous (perhaps disgusting) failure will result until the host gets used to his add-ons.

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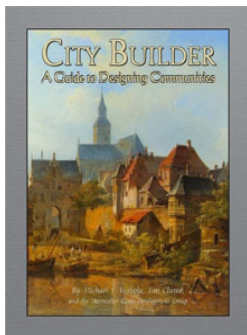
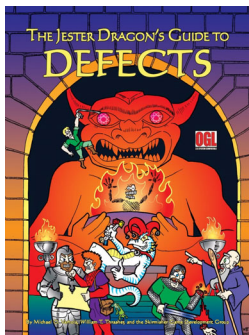
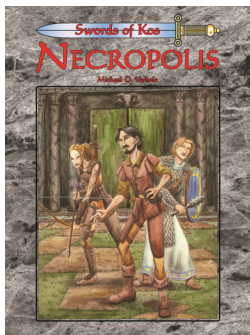
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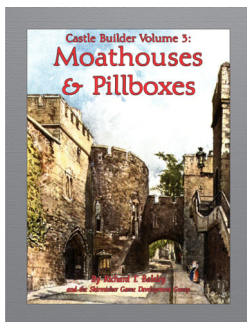
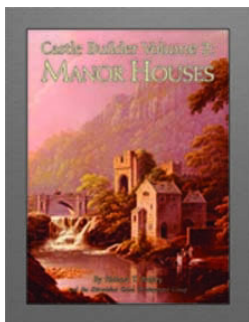
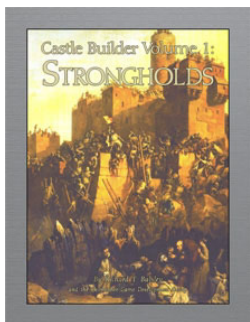
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