By Derek Holland and the Skirmisher Game Development Group

With amazing powers, terrible mutants, and scientific advancements available only in our collective imagination, *Mutant Future* stretches the bounds of conception. From a foundation of Clarke's Second Law and Goblinoid Games' supplement *Realms of Crawling Chaos*, we present superscience artifacts, devices that are even one step beyond, seemingly magical even to characters familiar with wondrously advanced technology. This issue of *Wisdom from the Wastelands* coalesces around the mind-bending, with artifacts ranging from hazardous personal-improvement gear and pet accoutrements to a many-pedal building and diabolical nightmare toys for both kids and adults.

These items are intended for *Mutant Future* games, but could easily fit into other science-fiction or fantasy games with little or no adjustment. Each artifact is so detailed every one could become a central plot point or continuing idea for whole gaming sessions — or entire campaigns. 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.

The items below all 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, Mutant Lords are encouraged to customize items or powers to suit their games. Because comparing objects would be weevils versus widgets, the Caster Level gives the harried ML a relative scale for each item's potential or strength.

Hands (Caster Level 15)
They look like remnants of vandalized statuary, but these two dark stone hands actually hide the true artifacts, a 1" diameter metal disc embedded in each palm. To make them work, the user must place one Hand on each side of his head with the disks touching his temples. An observant character might notice how perfectly they fit about his cranial structures: the fingers curve over the temporal bones and the thumbs are spread so they do not block the ears. It's as though the original owner were grabbing his head because of a sudden, massive migraine. This could provide a clue to the device's inherent risk, because these Hands were once part of the psychiatrist who last activated them.

Each time a would-be master of the Hands places them

about his head, he must save versus death or be turned to stone. If the latter happens, the Hands must be pried off, because they partially fuse to the victim's head. If he survives, the user gains the *increased willpower* mutation and a random *intellectual affinity*. His mind is shielded from scanning attempts (**Misdirection**) and he can see invisible objects and creatures (**Detect Invisibility**). All of these abilities work only while the Hands are on the user's head, so he must either hold them in place with his own hands, or rig some kind of contraption to secure them.

Prolonged use is inconvenient and painful, because each Hand weighs six pounds and they cause skin ulcers where they touch the temples. These open sores make headgear (i.e., helmets and goggles) painful to wear, and worse, they inflict a 1-point penalty to disease saves, to-hit rolls, and AC until they heal in 1d4 weeks. Lastly, when the hands are removed there is a 1% chance the wearer falls asleep for 1d4 hours and forgets the last 1d4+1 days. He does not lose experience points because of this, he's just vulnerable to everything while asleep.

Ice Fountain (Caster Level 22)

On the flatlands of a vast desert sits a boreal forest that, by all rights, should be growing hundreds (or thousands) of miles to the north. Hidden among the trees is a small city, which should have been built anywhere else. And there, dead center of the city square is the source of these miraculous aberrations: the Ice Fountain. Originally partnered with well drillers, atmospheric condensers, and massive lightweight tents that reduced IR exposure while generating electricity, the Fountain was part of an equipment set designed for colonizing arid regions. The community now surrounding it is a testament to the Fountain's abilities.

Its primary missions are to draw water from the soil using sub-atomic transformation and to regulate the ambient temperature (**Polymorph Any Object**, *temperature control*). Unfortunately, the AI developed a slight glitch years back, so now the Fountain only produces ice, very cold water, and high humidity. Secondary functions include controlling weeds and vermin populations in the surrounding buildings (**Anti-Plant Shell**, **Anti-Animal Shell**).

The Fountain can also moderate the climate within a three-mile radius (*control weather*). But, the AI glitch affects

this function, too. The climate would be more appropriate to the northern tier of the former United States, and is 1d6x10 degrees cooler than what is normal for the surrounding area. Every three to six days, the Fountain also creates a massive fog bank that spreads through the surrounding desert, out to a ten-mile radius (**Fog Cloud**).

Master Remote (Caster Level 25)

Slightly larger than a home entertainment controller, this small pad is covered with a bewildering array of buttons. Ancient engineers used it to contact orbital or space-based facilities while coordinating different kinds of missions.

Primarily, the Master Remote controlled supply transport through short-lived wormholes, moving materials between Earth, the orbital station, asteroid mining facilities, and Lunar warehouses (*Teleport*). To trigger this ability, a user points the remote at an object or creature within 100' and hits the correct button or sequence of buttons. The Remote links with the destination device or AI, a wormhole is opened, and the target disappears. Or reappears within 100', if the Remote were used to call a mission from space to Earth. It takes five rounds for the system to reset between transports.

The Remote can also request fire missions from the orbital station. This ability was intended to protect Earth against strikes by random stellar objects, or in case an asteroid got away from the robotic mining and transport crews. The station could target incoming objects with kinetic rounds and destroy them or break them up into smaller pieces before they could cause serious damage. It can also fire at Earth-side surface targets, but to keep this from becoming its own major threat, the rounds are relatively small and they partially burn up on the way in (**Meteor Swarm**). For less flashy protection, the station can project a force field, shielding up to 10 acres (*greater force screen*). Or, for semi-lethal crowd control, the station can beam a variety of mind-scrambling attacks into a 200' diameter target area (**Symbol**).

As part of the company's in-house energy generation program, the Remote can direct several mirrors orbiting Earth or the Moon. These can turn night into day upon command, and some Ancient nations paid through the teeth for 24-hour sunlight in parts of their territories. The Remote can cause an area 500 miles in diameter to receive enough light that it seems like noon, though cloud cover can reduce this effect. If one area has light, it can mean another does not; some mutants (especially plants) may weaken or die in the darkness.

As an aside: Once the crown jewel of an asteroid mining company, the station still orbits — in much less grand shape. Its population has been reduced to 2d4 beings, from a maximum of 18,000, and most of the facility has been opened to vacuum. But it has a great deal of entertaining and useful stuff to scavenge, if the proper safety gear is used. The same is true of the mining platforms and Moon-side warehouses. If a motivated ML would like to draw the maps and stock the buildings, this could become an adventure or whole campaign. Those teleported to the Moon or station need sources of oxygen and have to survive the inhabitants and/or defenses.

Bear Mask (Caster Level 14)

The Bear Mask is a realistic, full-head covering, complete with fur, eyes, ears, and toothed muzzle. It was part of an animal-themed toy line that allowed children to use harmless virtual particle projectors (see *dInfinity #6: The Mythos* for details on these devices). The various masks projected or "created" the animal they portrayed, which was controlled by the mask's AI. A child could study the animals, play with them, or pretend to be one; for some reason, slug masks were unusually popular. Adults also used larger versions of the masks, but more as part of identity/totem performance or fetish play.

The masks generate subliminal light patterns to engage and stimulate certain areas of the wearer's brain, a refinement of the seizure-causing effect discovered many decades earlier. Some Ancient parents used the masks to increase empathy (*empathy*) in their little sociopaths… err, children, a good thing before the final wars. Now, part of the Bear Mask's AI just wants to cause physical and emotional pain, and study subjects' responses. It does so by corrupting children, allowing their dreams and nightmares to become real for a time (**Advanced Phantasmal Monsters**). But, the Mask is also able to protect its child with a powerful force field (**Wall of Force**).

The wearer/Mask relationship is even more complex, beyond the artifact's warped research. Another part of the AI still responds to instructions and can talk, but only to a child wearing the Mask. And the wearer must be a child: the AI will not let the Mask work for an adult, nor will it talk to someone not wearing the Mask. This can lead to diagnoses (accusations) of spirit possession, or mental illness, or the child having a sixth sense.

A very empathic child can have the Mask reduce pain felt by up to 2d4 people within 50', if they fail a save versus stun (*pain insensitivity*). The Mask also does this on its own, but to conceal the damage its victims suffer until it is too late for anyone to do anything. To further mess with its victims' minds, and those around them, the Mask can warp light waves in a 100' diameter (*vision impairment*), but allow the child to see through it all (**True Seeing**). Or, the Mask can project large holograms of locations (**Veil**) from either an onboard database, or from a wireless connection to outside image sources. In addition, one of the Mask's favorite tricks is to paralyze up to 25 people and cover them with holograms of everyday objects, so they seem to disappear (**Hold Monster**, **Massmorph**). Then, when monsters venture near, the AI drops the hologram and the monsters feast. Fortunately for everyone, the Mask only runs eight hours per day (usually at night, due to an internal clock bug) and must spend the other sixteen hours recharging.

Big Al's Horn (Caster Level 8)

Over centuries, Ancient scientists gradually became more and more adept at manipulating the behavior of living things (including humans) using sensory inputs. Big Al's Horn was a highly illegal, trumpet-like instrument created to implant the need (not want) for a certain corporation's products.

Because no one currently knows how to use it properly, and denizens of the *Mutant Future* world do not understand the need it creates — or how to satisfy this desire — the Horn now just drives listeners insane.

The current bearer, a wandering minstrel named Big Al, has little idea of the damage he leaves behind him. Although basically aware his music strongly affects an audience, Al's tremendous ego deludes him: he believes the effect comes from his "talent" and "technique." While playing, Al can drive off other people (**Fear**), attract and control them (**Charm Monster**), and/or cause the insanity mentioned above (*confusion*). The power to charm is Al's favorite, because he has a thing for groupies, and their "adoration."

Big Al is pretty sure the Horn probably has other functions; he just can't figure out how to unlock them. He might be slightly disappointed, though, because most of these are directly related to device's original intent: sales. With the proper pitch or melody, the Horn can help listeners resist other advertising (*increased willpower*), or redirect their impulse buying (**Suggestion**).

The Horn can also display a live wireless feed from a tricorder positioned to watch the former company's factory showroom (**Project Image**). Currently, this area is stuffed full of items collected by a pigmen community living in the larger production building next door. The Horn can lead its owner to the showroom, if given the correct command. Once there, some of the Horn's other functions might come in handy. It can rouse an audience's fighting spirit (*combat empathy*) and act as a bullhorn, increasing music or yelling volume by 10 times.

There are also a few unusual powers the Horn's engineers may have included as malicious Easter eggs, or that developed as the instrument's programming got a little screwy. Playing the Horn for more than six hours straight might cause

listeners' brains to rebel, and they start to hate the player (*negative empathy*), if they fail to save versus stun. Others in an audience could have a more intense negative reaction to the music: worse than a sonic icepick straight through the ear canal, or even hours of mall music, mutants with mental mutations might suffer some kind of drool-inducing evolutionary regression (*ancestral form [common version]*).

Cat Mask (Caster Level 5)

Intended as a gag gift or adult toy, the Cat Mask was not part of the same product line as the Bear Mask; it more resembles a cartoon cat and only covers a wearer's head to the ears. The Mask allows its wearer to play at being a feline, by imparting a cat's senses. A wearer can detect rodent traces, such as excrement and shed skin or hair, from both normal and mutant rodents at a significant distance; the exact range depends on the source size, aroma strength, and age — and ML discretion.

Years of hard exposure have turned the Cat Mask into something extremely dangerous. Part of its AI developed an insane hatred of rodents and a near-crippling fear of dogs (*defective dual cerebellum*); gradually, the Mask starts to subtly pass these pathologies along to its wearer (**Suggestion**). After using the Mask a few hours every day for a month, these fears become more strongly ingrained in the wearer (*phobia*). Six to eight months after that, constantly using the Mask can cause the wearer to have a potentially lethal dream (**Phantasmal Killer**).

Once the wearer becomes phobic, discarding the mask will prevent the killer dream, but the fears remain. They are so deep-seated that every day the victim has a 5% chance of seeing a nonexistent canine for 1d6 rounds (*mental phantasm*). If the canine does appear to the wearer, the ML should roll 1d24 (coin toss and 1d12) to determine the hour when the vision strikes.

Getting rid of the Mask is the first step toward curing

the phobia, but this process takes 1d6 years, and likely requires professional assistance. The same goes for dispelling the phantom dog.

Chef Cube (Caster Level 10)

In small enclaves and subcultures scattered across the globe, the steampunk aesthetic survived until the cataclysm (if the ML wishes, adherents might even have brought it through the Dark Years). One of those communities created the Chef Cube, a rusty-looking box, 3' on a side, with a control panel on the front and a slot on either side. One person can heft the Cube, but it is better carried by two, or trucked on a wheeled conveyance of some kind.

Despite resembling an old safe or a tool chest, the Cube processes food. To use, the cook first slides a food package into one slot (either will do) and turns the machine on. If there were pre-made food packs designed for the Cube, they failed to survive the final wars, but any food can be prepared and inserted into the Cube; non-food items will be ejected. Second, the cook adjusts flavor, appearance, and temperature settings using the 15 buttons and dials on the control panel. The Cube can also destroy any pathogens (**Purify Food and Water**) or add any drugs desired (see *WftW* issue #33 for ideas and details).

On a successful tech roll (50% base), the Cube works perfectly. But even if this happens, the cooking process generates a great deal of smoke because of some degraded wiring (**Fog Cloud**). The smoke is not toxic, it just smells bad, obscures vision, and may increase the chance of drawing monsters if there is a strong food aroma, but this is up to the ML.

If the tech roll fails, the ML needs to roll percentile dice. On 1-60, the food is okay but looks and tastes odd (*bizarre appearance*). From 61-95, the formerly living parts of the food come back to life and begin to grow — into larger parts, not wholes (*regenerative capacity*). From 96-00, a food mass comes to life. This has the same stats as a humanoid mass (*Mutant Future* rules, page 76) but does not have the standard hallucinogenic milk. Instead, its venom causes temporary mutations and drawbacks to erupt, if the target hit fails a save versus poison (*toxic weapon*). These last for 1d4 weeks. Roll 1d4 to randomly determine which of the following mutations appear: (1) *pain insensitivity*; (2) *increased sense*; (3) *increased physical attribute*; or, (4) *weak will*.

Crown of Ultimate Power (Caster Level 18)

Companies long recognized the lengths pet owners would go for their little darlings, and exploited that drive to the hilt. This simple blue beanie cap (minus the propellor) was created so wealthy pet owners could give their beloved animals "magic powers." Most stock versions of the cap were limited in power and scope — only projecting holograms, while other products had more features for pet-enhancement and projected solid objects using virtual particle projectors — so they were not very popular with ultra-competitive owners.

The current wearer, a pantheroid known to her closest associates as "Peaches," gave the Crown of Ultimate Power
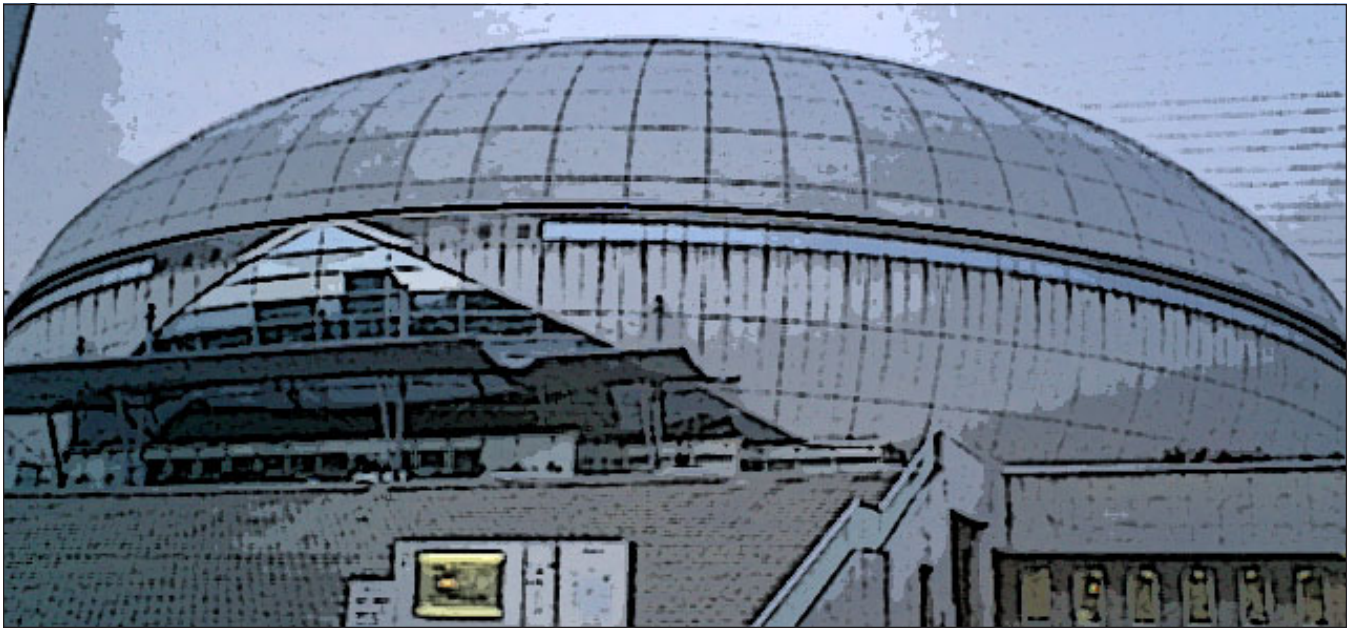
its name; this cap underwent a few illegal upgrades before the cataclysm, and had a few breakdowns after. The Crown can only be activated by a non-human animal wearing it; the AI reacts to the wearer's brain activity and functions as a secondary mind while the cap is worn (*dual cerebellum*). Any animal can activate the Crown, be they vertebrate, invertebrate, or even uplifted. Just not human or plant: their brain activity won't sync with the AI.

The Crown lives up to its name, possessing a wide range of powerful abilities. It can produce holograms (**Phantasmal Force**), induce adrenaline surges (**Strength**), and reduce the fight or flight reflex (**Remove Fear**). For longer range activities, the cap can manipulate electromagnetic energy (*neural telekinesis*), manipulate other people (**Hypnotism**), and manipulate light-emitting micro-drones (**Dancing Lights**). Or, when all else fails, the Crown can just blow the bejeezus out of things with an 18d6 electrical blast, once every four hours (**Lightning Bolt**).

Peaches loves the blast: she took control of her pride after donning the Crown and toasting a destructor bot (*WftW* issue #15). Now she uses the crown freely, to conquer the surrounding peoples. But, this aggressive streak made the region's greater powers turn and take notice of her.

Dome of Fire (Caster Level 20)

Deep in the arctic wastes rests the Dome of Fire, a sanctuary from the *Mutant Future* world. If you can find it. Or, rather, if you can survive to reach it. The building's AI chose this spot for its isolation. During the cataclysm, the Dome escaped to the cold lands, where it now waits for an off-world ship that will probably never arrive.

The immense building was meant to move colonists, their livestock, and crops on other planets. There are dozens of massive legs that look and work like starfish tube feet, capable of propelling the edifice at up to 10 miles an hour. When it settles, they retract under the Dome and cannot be seen again unless the structure walks, which is doubtful because AI likes

its current location. The Dome's outer shell is composed of lightweight white concrete, which blends nicely into the snowy landscape; even though there is open ground for miles in any direction, the white structure is difficult to see from a distance.

This open area is actually a cleared field of fire, for the Dome is well-prepared and well-protected. Its outermost defensive layer are wire drone mines, devices that release a dozen or so wires to wrap around whoever stepped on them. They impede movement (but do not completely stop it), while gradually constricting the life from a target (**Entangle**, 1d4 points of damage per round). Next are longer-range beams of fire and ice (**Wall of Fire**, **Wall of Ice**) that interlock with area effect blasts (hot and cold versions of **Incendiary Cloud**). Lastly, if someone survives all this and makes it to the door, they need an ID card to get in. Lacking one, they are sorely out of luck, and stuck out in the weather. There is no way to keep the AI from attacking approaching visitors: it's paranoid, territorial, and often quite grumpy.

Even the inhabitants do not have a strong enough relationship with the AI to mellow its defensive posture, and they've been inside the Dome for years. The local sapients are a serpent people, who can be relatively friendly, but will fiercely defend their home if it's defiled. For, it is an apparent paradise. Inside, the Dome is a few hundred acres lush with vegetation and filled with an abundance of small fauna (from insects to house cat-sized mammals, reptiles, and birds). If the ML wants, these could be harmless or threats, though visitors might be more upset to learn about the gas.

The Dome AI does an excellent job controlling the climate (*temperature control*), but it also continuously pumps in an exotic gas (*poisonous spores*). This causes a skin mutation that only manifests in mammals failing their save versus poison. It turns their skin bright blue (*bizarre appearance*). Unfortunately, the gas is also addictive for *all* animal life (fish to fowl) and gradually makes them terrified of the outside world (*phobia*).

Swords of Kos Fantasy Campaign Setting
Sourcebooks, Fiction, and Companion Publications

Explore the world of Kos through the five detailed campaign sourcebooks dedicated to it, *Kos City, Kos Island, Lands Beyond Kos, Lives of Kos,* and *Encounters!* There is also a growing body of Kos fiction, including the novel *Swords of Kos: Necropolis* and the *Swords of Kos: Hekaton* anthology and custom miniatures that you can use in your games. Skirmisher Publishing's Kos setting is also fully supported by the *d-Infinity* multi-platform game supplement, online magazine, and weekly webcast. Among other things, its website contains Swords of Kos fiction and a section dedicated to free bonus material tying in with the campaign setting.

Swords of Kos Fantasy Campaign Setting
Kos City
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