

GAMMA MARS

The Outer Limits of the GAMMA WORLD® Game

by Roger E. Moore

As noted in "Before the Dark Years" (DRAGON® Magazine, issue #88), much of the solar system had been explored and colonized by the time the Social Wars destroyed 23rd-century civilization. The remains of Tycho Center, the former human settlement on the Moon, were developed for adventuring in issues #86 and #87 of DRAGON Magazine. But, the fate of the rest of the solar system still lies cloaked in mystery. What happened to the rest of the colonies? Did any of the inhabitants survive after the Social Wars cut off communications with Earth? If so, how have they adapted to their environments? What kind of societies have evolved? And how can a mutant get there from here?

Below is some general information for referees willing to make a big leap by expanding their GAMMA WORLD game adventures into deep space. Several years ago, Jim Ward and I discussed the possibility of creating a special GAMMA WORLD® module pack for the planet Mars. The project was not approved, but some of the notes were later developed for use in one of the CRIMSON CRYSTAL™ books (*Renegades of Luntar*).

Hopefully, this material will generate some interesting ideas for high-tech scenarios. If it proves popular enough, future articles may offer notes for developing a "Gamma Mars" campaign. With that, here's a new world for your mutant legions to explore. Good luck to them — they'll need it!

Martian History Since the Year 2000

Numerous colonies had been established on Mars before the Social Wars. The first manned landing on the Red Planet took place on the western end of Vallis Marineris, or Mariner Valley, in A.D. 2002. The United States spacecraft *Ares I* and *Ares II* established a permanent settlement there, rotating the crews back to Earth after a 1-3 year stay. Over the next fifty years, the base grew to a population of over 2,000. Several other bases were established by North American, British, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Australian, and Soviet spacecraft. The largest of these were in the volcanic Tharsis region, at Mount Olympus and Mount Arsia.

The Federation of Mars was peacefully established in 2076, when the Martian colonists became angered over the slow shipping of goods and supplies from Earth. The colonies declared themselves indepen-

dent and established a General Council at Ares Base. The colonists were assisted by the independent space colony *Atlantis*, which had left Earth orbit in 2046.

In 2085, the remains of an ancient alien culture, not native to Mars, were discovered not far from Ares Base. Subsequent exploration revealed that Mars had previously been colonized by a reptilian race from elsewhere in the galaxy (see below), but that colony had been destroyed in an interstellar war. Although survivors of the old reptilian colony were recovered from suspended-animation chambers, they were never able to restore their community to its former size. Humans established numerous bases in the ruins of the previous culture's cities across Mars and on the two Martian satellites, Deimos and Phobos, often rebuilding the old cities completely.

The Martian colonists were engaged in a massive terraforming project at the time of the Social Wars. With the aid of recovered alien technology and the cooperation of the reptilian race, the colonists transported enormous masses of ice from other locations in the solar system to Mars, to alter the atmosphere and warm the climate. Broad areas of Mars were seeded with special plant life that could survive the harsh conditions and still slowly produce the gases necessary to make the air breathable while preventing mass soil erosion.

At the height of the Social Wars, however, a terrorist group sabotaged one of the processed-ice asteroids and caused it to impact Mars at high speed, near the old *Viking II* landing site at Utopia. The subsequent blast produced earthquakes that rocked the planet, and caused a major duststorm that isolated all the colonies from one another for eight Earth years (a little over four Martian years).

Since that time, the colonies that survived the blast have developed into independent city-states, each with its own laws, government, and ways of life. Contact between the city-states has been sparse for a number of reasons, one of which is the fierce competition for resources. In addition, the colonies have split along many political and religious lines, and the presence of mutants has been a touchy factor. On Mars today (in A.D. 2450), the city-states play the same role that the Cryptic Alliances do on Earth.

Mars Data

Mars is a small, desert world, orbiting about one and a half times as far from the Sun as the Earth does. Any standard astronomy textbook has some basic infor-

mation on Mars, but additional game data relevant to running a GAMMA WORLD game campaign on the Red Planet will be given here.

At the time of the Social Wars, a terraforming project was underway on Mars. To increase the atmospheric pressure, the colonists mined ice and snow from the asteroid belt, passing comets, and the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, then spread the frozen H₂O on the planet's surface. Not only did it increase the air pressure as it slowly sublimated into the atmosphere, but it also created weather patterns and small ice pockets which resulted in the formation of several small seas — one in the Hellas basin in the southern hemisphere and several around the Boreal Plain, which encircles the North Polar Cap. An assortment of lakes appeared in various craters across the planet, few of them larger than a hundred kilometers across. Nearly all of the lakes and seas remain frozen over during the Martian year, melting only for short periods during summer days in areas near the equator.

The Martian air is not breathable by humans, though it has become thick enough for colonists to discard their pressure suits. A face respirator with air tanks to supply the necessary oxygen is usually sufficient for breathing outdoors. However, due to the incomplete terraforming, the air is still quite cold. Surface temperatures average -100°C at night, and -10°C during the day, reaching a high of 25°C in the summer. Therefore, insulating garments such as heavy coats, boots, and gloves must be worn outdoors throughout most of the year.

Martian gravity is only .38 times that of Earth (less than 1/2), so a character can carry about 2.6 times as much weight on Mars as he can on Earth. Maximum walking and running speeds only increase by half again, however, as characters accustomed to Earth gravity may lose their balance if they move too quickly on Mars. Maximum vehicle speeds are not affected.

The Martian day is 24 hours, 37 minutes, 22.7 seconds long (in Earth standard time units). Only someone with an extremely accurate time sense will notice the difference between a Martian day and an Earth day. (Note however that when it is night at the Martian end of the Hermes transmitter (see below), it might be daytime at the Earth terminal.)

The Martian year is 686.98 Earth days long, or 668.6 Martian days long. Each city-state has its own calendar system, and many have different zero-year dates, holidays, and so forth. Mars has the same sorts

of seasons that Earth does, though the only apparent difference between them is the change in temperature.

Life on Mars

Numerous types of intelligent life exist on Mars, scattered across its surface in city-states, independent colonies, or even remote lairs.

Humans

The most prevalent life form on Mars is humanity, which exists in both Pure Strain and mutant forms. (Although Mars was not a primary target for radiation and dimension-warp warheads during the Social Wars, the few that did detonate there caused several nuclear accidents which contributed to the appearance of a small but stable mutant population in later years.) Pure Strain Humans outnumber the mutants by about 4 to 1, and the total human population on Mars is about 5 million.

Animals

Among the many species of animals brought to Mars by human colonists were some experimental types genetically engineered ("geneered") for high intelligence to be used as servants or co-workers. Chimpanzees, gorillas, dogs, and (fertile) mules (fitted with specially designed respirators) were introduced, along with numerous other less intelligent species. Several mutant animal species developed in the aftermath of the Social Wars. Some of these continued to help humanity; other turned wild and escaped into the vast deserts.

Luntarians

When the first human colonists landed on Mars, they discovered the remains of an ancient alien civilization on the planet. The alien beings, known as Luntarians, had come from an interstellar civilization in another part of the galaxy. Following a civil war in their home empire, a number of renegade Luntarians fled to Mars and continued their fight against the empire's forces from afar. About 22,000 years ago (Earth time), the empire attacked the colony and destroyed all of the major rebel bases on the Red Planet.

The few live Luntarians that were rescued from suspended-animation chambers in one of the damaged renegade bases chose to remain on Mars and rebuild their old colony with the help of human technology. The Martian Luntarians managed to survive the Social Wars without serious loss, and about 10,000 of them exist on the Red Planet today. Mutant Luntarians are extremely rare, and those that do exist are regarded with distaste by others of their race.

The typical Luntarian appears to be a 2-meter-tall lizard-like humanoid, with six fingers on each hand and numerous sharp teeth in its short, broad snout. Normal Luntarians have rich maroon scales; mutants are frequently speckled with lighter or darker blotches, or may even be albino. Their eyes are catlike and have golden irises. Luntarians have life spans of up to 38 Martian years. Although they prefer meat to other foods, they are fully omnivorous.

Because of their long exposure to human culture, Luntarians think and act much like human beings, though they tend to be more aggressive and do not seem to suffer as much guilt. Their social systems are roughly patterned after those of the various human societies on Mars.

Male and female Luntarians are equal in size and power, but both sexes undergo frequent, prolonged neuter stages. The neuter stage lasts for 40-45 Martian days, then the Luntarian assumes its proper sex again for 2-3 days. During this time, it may find a mate and start a family if desired.

Female Luntarians bear their children live (1-2 at a time) after a gestation period of .3 Martian years. Most of the young are now raised by professional communal-care facilities in Luntarian communities.

Currently, most Martian Luntarians are living at the Ares Base, Mount Olympus, and South Cap Delta city-states. They tend to segregate themselves from the human population, though rarely to the extreme. At least one or two small, wholly Luntarian city-states exist, but the locations of these are unknown.

Though they are six-fingered, Luntarians may use most equipment built for humans with little effort. Most equipment on Mars is designed for easy use by either race.

Much information on the old Luntarian Star Empire has been lost over the years, and the empire is assumed to have fallen apart millenia ago. Two human-crewed starships were sent to the reported location of the Luntarian empire, but neither ship ever returned.

Other Aliens

No other intelligent alien life forms were known to exist on Mars prior to the Social Wars, though a few alien plants and animals were brought to the Red Planet from other star systems and placed within zoological exhibits at Mount Olympus and at Ares Base, near Mariner Valley. Whether any of these life forms were actually intelligent beings in disguise is uncertain. Some of these life forms mutated during the Social Wars and gained intelligence, but these cases were extremely rare.

Native Martians

The theory that Mars itself may have given birth to a native race of intelligent life has never been proven, though bizarre tales of strange cities hidden in underground caverns continue to circulate. Much of the planet's surface is still unexplored today, and what may lie in remote areas or beneath the surface remains a mystery. The ancient tales portray the legendary native races sometimes as monstrous and hostile to all surface dwellers, sometimes as beautiful and kind, and sometimes as some other combination. There is no evidence to support any of these notions as of yet.

Constructs

Intelligent robots, think tanks, PCIs, androids, and cyborgs may be found in most city-states, and often in isolated areas where they were in use when the Social Wars occurred. Such individuals may be valuable sources of information about deci-

mated areas, or they might be deranged and hostile. Some might even be developed as player characters by willing referees, although their freedom of action might be limited. Jim Ward has produced some guidelines for robotic PCs, but these have not yet been published.

Martian Player Characters

Martian human, humanoid, and mutated animal player characters may be generated according to the standard GAMMA WORLD Game rules. Luntarian characters are generated as follows. These statistics may be used for both PC and NPC Luntarians.

Statistic	Die Roll
MS	3d4 + 2
IN	4d6*
DX	2d6 + 1
CH	3d6
CN	4d6**
PS	2d6 + 9

*Roll all four, but drop the lowest die score.

**Use 8-sided die to determine hit points.

(Mutant Luntarians use 6-sided dice for hit points. The maximum possible score for constitution is 18.)

Luntarians obviously do not react to situations as quickly as humans do, and they are not as accurate when firing weapons. However, they are quite intelligent, strong, and healthy.

Luntarians have a base armor class of 7. Their scales are small and soft, almost like human skin in texture, though there are tough muscles below the skin.

The movement rate for Luntarians is 12/900/18. NPCs will have 12d8 hit dice and a morale level of 1d6 + 4. Luntarians have no claw attacks, preferring to use weapons instead, but they can bite for 1d6 hp damage when engaged in close meleé combat.

Importing PCs From Earth

Though high-speed spacecraft served as the most important link between Earth and the Red Planet, research was just being finished on a top-secret project known as *Hermes* when the Social Wars occurred. The *Hermes* Project researchers had developed a fast and effective means of interplanetary matter transmission, and had built test transmitters on Earth and Mars. The range of each transmitter was limited to something less than a hundred million kilometers, but that was close enough to reach the Martian colonies whenever Earth and Mars were on the same side of the sun. (This event, known as opposition, occurs every twenty-five or twenty-six months.) A "window" for transmission is available for two months during opposition, and materials and passengers could be instantly and safely shipped between worlds as fast as they could be carried into the transmitter chambers.

Before the project could be made public, the Social Wars intervened and the entrance to the project headquarters disappeared, buried in the Rocky Mountains of southern British Columbia. Few traces of the project remained, but if anyone were to discover its location and figure out how to reactivate the transmitter, it could open up the frontiers of a second world, the likes of which can scarcely be imagined.

GAMMA MARS

The Attack!

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by James M. Ward

The quality of life on Mars was just starting to improve. After the Restorationists' on Earth recovered the first matter transmitter, trade routes were reopened between Earth and Mars. Goods and knowledge flowed both ways, and the inhabitants of both planets benefitted. Earth made extensive use of the existing Martian sciences, and those living on the red planet found uses for many of the mutated creatures which had grown up in the more barren areas of Earth.

Then the attack came! Erupting from extensive tunnels beneath the surface of Mars, huge insect beings attacked Luntarian and Human inhabitants alike. Garbled communications from the besieged city-states talked of insect life forms eating through solid steel and absorbing energy attacks. Reinforcements arriving from Earth found only ruins to mark where the Martian cities had been and large tunnels leading into the bowels of Mars.

That first group of reinforcements refused to follow the enemy into those holes. Later, it became necessary as the attacks increased in number. Soon, it was all out war between the above and below ground races of Mars.

NAME: The Shortel

NUMBER: 1d100

HIT DICE: 3d10

ARMOR: 4

LAND SPEED: 3/900/18

BURROWING: 4/300/12

MS: 5d4 **IN:** 5d4

DX: 5d4 **CH:** 5d4

CN: 5d6 **PS:** 5d4

ATTACKS: See Description

MUTATIONS: 1 good mental and 1 good physical, plus *Telekinetic Mandible*

DESCRIPTION: A typical Shortel stands two meters tall and looks like an Earth wasp with a slimmer body and longer legs. Although they prefer to use weapons in combat, each Shortel is also able to inflict 1d10 points of damage with its mouth pincer and inject intensity 11 poison with its stinger.

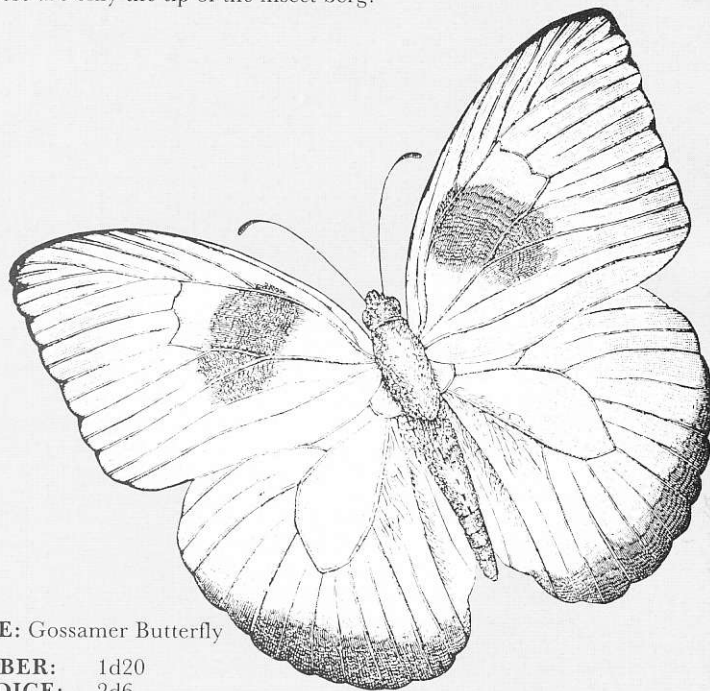
In addition, each Shortel has the power to cause a shimmering mandible to materialize anywhere within a range of 18 meters for up to a 10-minute duration. The user can cause it to move within range at up to 6 meters per Action Turn, and to do anything that such an appendage could normally do, including a crushing attack (PS equal to the user's MS). The mandible cannot be damaged, but it disappears if the user is killed or knocked unconscious, or if it is moved out of the user's field of vision. The *telekinetic mandible* may be used twice per day.

All Shortel are supreme biologists, living and working with other creatures in relationships that outsiders would find disgusting. Over the centuries, they have painstakingly bred beneficial abilities into numerous smaller insects, which are then allowed to infest the bodies of the Shortel. The numerous mites, flies, moths, worms, beetles, and larvae which swarm over each Shortel serve a wide variety of functions, from protection against mental attacks to the detection of radiation and its intensity. For obvious reasons, the Humans and Luntarians refer to the Shortel as "carriers."

The Shortel are the original inhabitants of Mars — and they want their planet back. Years ago, they observed the Human and Luntarian races settle on Mars, but they chose not to act immediately. Instead, they studied the invaders and began to breed creatures that could be used to defeat the new technology their enemies

had brought. When all was ready, the Shortel struck, completely destroying one city state of each race as an example of their powers. Then they pulled back, waiting for the odious creatures who infested the surface of Mars to leave. But the invaders stayed, so the Shortel had no choice but to begin the war in earnest.

Their long study of the surface races has enabled the Shortel to operate most enemy machinery and weapons without penalty. In addition to Human and Luntarian weaponry stolen in raids, the Shortel use their insects before and during combat to cripple the enemy and to protect themselves. Some of these creatures are listed, but these are only the tip of the insect berg.



NAME: Gossamer Butterfly

NUMBER: 1d20

HIT DICE: 2d6

ARMOR: 8

LAND SPEED: 0/60/6

AIR SPEED: 6/900/18

MS: 3 **IN:** 3

DX: 1d8 + 4 **CH:** 3

CN: 1d10 + 2 **PS:** 1d4 + 2

ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Energy Absorption*

DESCRIPTION: The gossamer butterfly is a large insect with huge, transparent wings which measure almost 2 meters at full extension. It does not eat, but instead absorbs raw energy directly through its wings. At night, it curls its wings tightly and rests in a suspended state, conserving its energy. At sunrise, its wings slowly unfurl as it recharges itself, reaching their full extension after several hours of direct sunlight. However, the use of energy weapons within 100 meters instantly activates the wings, causing the mutant insect to expand to its full size and fly toward the weapon, absorbing all energy bolts fired in its direction into its wings. Once it reaches the weapon, it will continue to fly around it for hours, hoping to absorb more energy bolts.

The Shortel carry gossamer butterflies in small skin sacs on their arms, and release them into the air as a shield when attacking installations armed with energy weapons.

NAME: Glow Mites

NUMBER: 1d100
HIT DICE: 1 hit point each
ARMOR: 10

LAND SPEED: Fractions of a centimeter

MS: None **IN:** None
DX: None **CH:** None
CN: None **PS:** None

ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Physical Reflection (Nuclear)*

DESCRIPTION: A glow mite is a herbivorous insect which measures less than a fingernail in length and which glows if there is radiation of any type within 100 meters. The greater the intensity of radiation, the brighter the insect shines.

Before entering combat or scouting unknown terrain, each Shortel places several glow mites in a crystal medallion, which is worn in a headpiece or a necklace as jewelry.

NAME: Energy Moth

NUMBER: 1-2
HIT DICE: 1d6
ARMOR: 8

AIR SPEED: 6/600/12

MS: 3d8 **IN:** None
DX: 3d8 **CH:** None
CN: None **PS:** 3d4

ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Energy Negation*

DESCRIPTION: An energy moth is one meter wide and one meter tall. Its wings are completely impervious to all types of energy.

The Shortel have learned to preserve the wing membranes of these moths and to make them into cloaks of protection. These moths are unusually hard to find, and only the most important Shortel can afford cloaks made from their wings.

NAME: Brain Mites

NUMBER: 1d100
HIT DICE: 1 Hit Point
ARMOR: 5

LAND SPEED: Fractions of a centimeter

MS: None **IN:** None
DX: None **CH:** None
CN: None **PS:** None

ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Mental Attack Absorption*

DESCRIPTION: These dark red mites are one centimeter long, and feed once per day on flesh of some type. Though mindless themselves, they have the unique ability to partially absorb mental attacks.

Each Shortel allows 1d100 brain mites to swarm on its skull case at all times to provide protection from mental attack. Each mite absorbs 1% of any mental attack directed at the Shortel. Attacks that control the body can be completely negated by 51 or more mites. The number of mites determines the number of damage points taken away from any other attack. For example, 50 mites negate 50% of a successful *life leech* or *mental blast* attack.

NAME: Mist Spider

NUMBER: 1
HIT DICE: 1d8
ARMOR: 9

LAND SPEED: 0/300/6

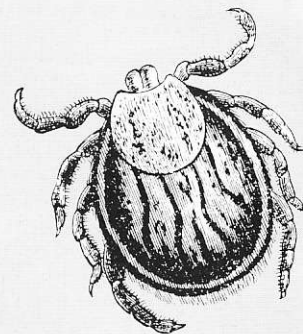
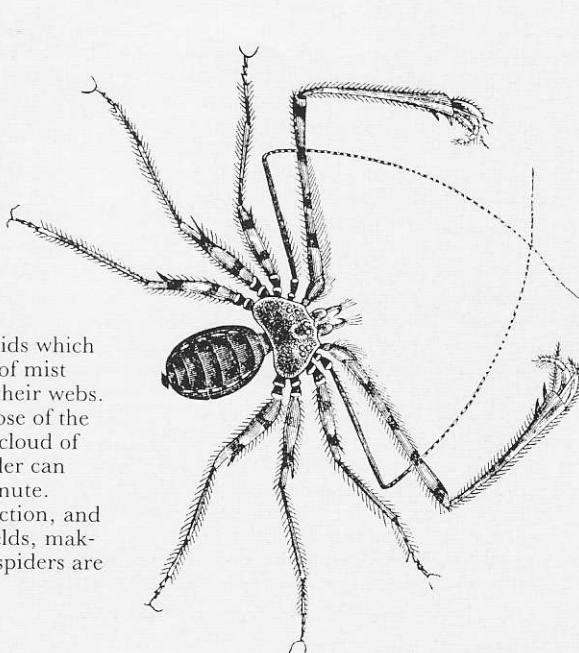
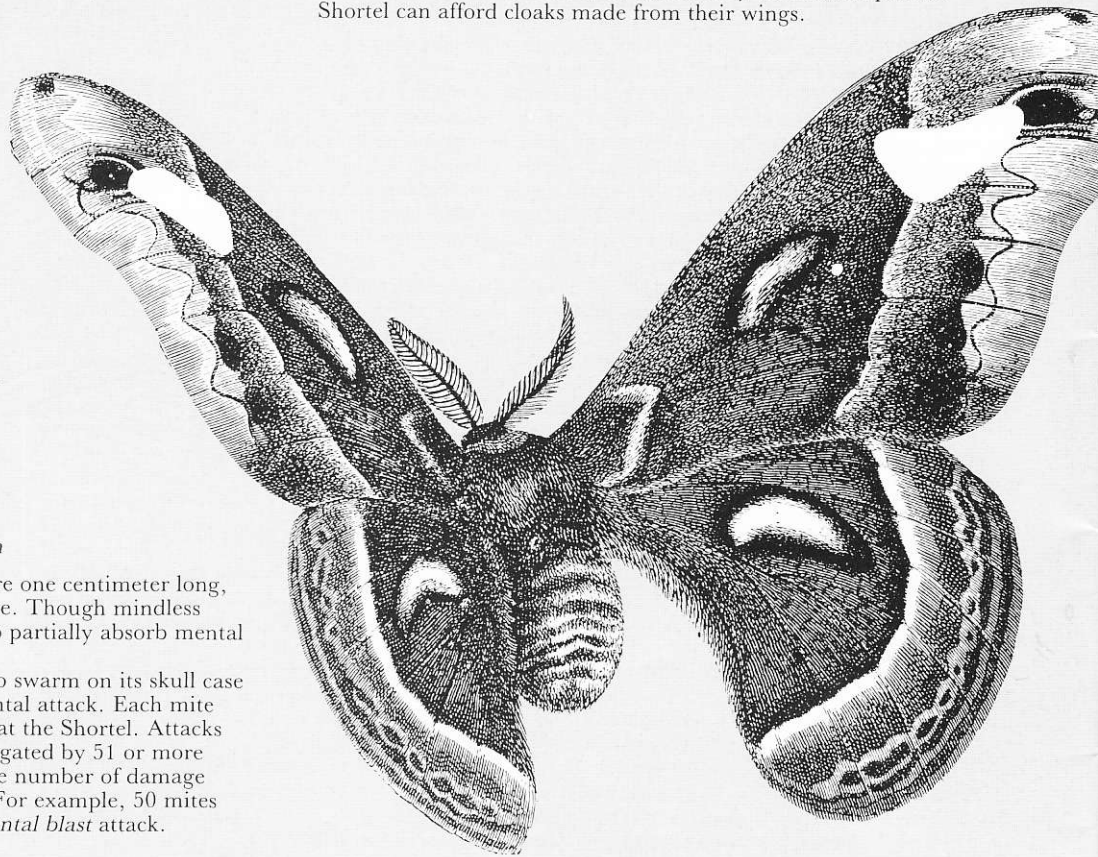
MS: 1d10+2 **IN:** None
DX: 1d10+2 **CH:** None
CN: 1d6+2 **PS:** 1d4+2

ATTACKS: 6 intensity poison bite

MUTATIONS: *Mutated Web Strands*

DESCRIPTION: Mist spiders are .3-meter-long arachnids which spin webs of unusual properties. The two known strains of mist spiders (white and black) differ only in the properties of their webs. Those of the white spiders absorb all cold energy, and those of the black spiders absorb all heat energy. Mist spiders eject a cloud of webs which adhere readily to solid surfaces. A single spider can cover 10 square meters with webbing in less than one minute.

The Shortel know how to stimulate the web building action, and they use the gossamer webs to cover their cloaks and shields, making them completely cold- or heat-proof. Sometimes the spiders are even carried into combat, though this is rare.



NAME: Communa Larva

NUMBER: 1d6

HIT DICE: 1d4

ARMOR: 10

BURROWING SPEED: Centimeters at a time

MS: 18 **IN:** None

DX: None **CH:** None

CN: None **PS:** None

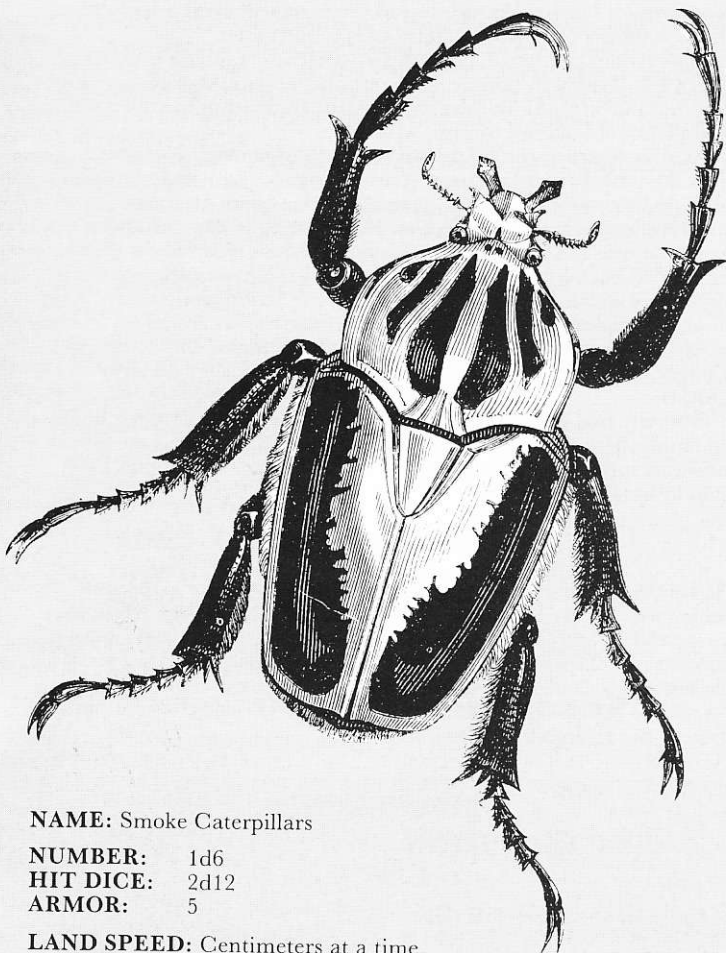
ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Heightened Telepathy*

DESCRIPTION: Each green communa larva is one meter long and is in constant mental contact with all other communa larvae in a 2-kilometer radius.

Each Shortel wears a larva around its neck and can communicate with other wearers in that same radius through the mental link of their larvae.

Constant exposure to heat causes the larva to metamorphose into a rather nasty beetle after a short pupal stage. These beetles are a problem in Shortel warrens, but the larvae are too valuable for the Shortel to exterminate them.



NAME: Smoke Caterpillars

NUMBER: 1d6

HIT DICE: 2d12

ARMOR: 5

LAND SPEED: Centimeters at a time

MS: None **IN:** None

DX: None **CH:** None

CN: None **PS:** None

ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Smoke Generation*

DESCRIPTION: This .5-meter-long caterpillar generates huge clouds of inky black smoke when threatened or while feeding.

The Shortel have learned how to artificially induce a feeling of danger in these creatures, and they carry them into battle to envelop groups of their enemies in thick blankets of smoke.

NAME: Metal Microbe

NUMBER: Swarms

HIT DICE: 1 Swarm 1d100

ARMOR: 10

LAND SPEED: None

MS: None **IN:** None

DX: None **CH:** None

CN: None **PS:** None

ATTACKS: Metal Disintegration Capacity

MUTATIONS: *Acid Secretions*

DESCRIPTION: Metal microbes spawn only in special fungus puffball formations that grow deep underground near mineral deposits. When a puffball breaks open, the microbes expand to a one-cubic-meter area and begin mindlessly eating any mineral materials they can find. The microbes can eat through one meter of steel in 5 minutes; a thin sheet of duralloy takes 60 minutes. They will continue to eat for 120 minutes, then crawl into nearby puffballs to multiply, fighting each other to the death for the available fungi.

The Shortel harvest fresh puffballs filled with these microbes and use them as weapons.

NAME: Life Leech

NUMBER: 3d20

HIT DICE: 1d4

ARMOR: 10

LAND SPEED: Contact

MS: None **IN:** None

DX: None **CH:** None

CN: None **PS:** None

ATTACKS: None

MUTATIONS: *Life Leech Absorption*

DESCRIPTIONS: Life leeches can sense the presence of mutants with the *life leech* ability within a 100-meter radius, and will immediately swarm upon such creatures, inhibiting their ability to use this mutation against others by absorbing the *life leech* themselves. Every two leeches negate one of the six Hit Points the victim could normally *life leech* from individuals in the area.

The Shortel carry containers of these leeches with them when attacking known mutants. One container is usually sufficient to infest an entire base, since the leeches reproduce each time a *life leech* attempt is absorbed, and are impervious to radiation, poison, and most normal forms of extermination.

NAME: Intensity Beetle

NUMBER: 1

HIT DICE: 2d20

ARMOR: 5

LAND SPEED: 0/300/6

MS: 18 **IN:** None

DX: 18 **CH:** None

CN: 18 **PS:** 1d4 + 2

ATTACKS: Bite for 1d4 points

MUTATIONS: *Intensity Gland*

DESCRIPTION: This 9-centimeter-long golden beetle is a parasite that feeds on the blood of its host. When the beetle feels threatened, an unusual gland in its body activates, doubling its reaction speed and the effects of its powers for 60 seconds.

The Shortel have discovered that the secretions of this gland are injected directly into the bloodstream of the host if the beetle is disturbed while feeding, which causes the host's reactions and powers to double for 60 seconds as well. Therefore, each Shortel allows one or more intensity beetles to infest its body at all times, and can stimulate each beetle to inject the secretions up to 5 times per day, though only one injection can affect the host at a time.