

AN OLD BONE GNAWER named REFALLON Dwells-in-DUMPS once told me that if you Can't CUT A Tumor out with a Scalpel - Try HACKING it out With an AX

Well-I DON'T usually Give A GOOD GODDAMN what any piece of shit Werewolf has to SAY BUT ol' REFFY was wise - so when it came to World views, His Dog Breath JIBBER-JABBER made A Whole lotta sense to a TWITCHER like Me.

O'TOLLEY'S

I'M A HAVOC-REEKING Rat-in-the-aintment FOR RATKIN FOE AND SCREW ANYBODY that GETS IN MY way. NOBODY'S innocent - Especially Anyone frequenting AN A-CLASS WYRM-STINK Eatery LIKE O'TOLLEY'S.... AND this particular one HAS AN EXCEPTIONAL STINK

a Gorged Throat full of MURDER

STORY & ART BY STEVE PRESCOTT

The city around it is a **WEAVER-RIDDEN CROCKPOT**. The buildings are full of **PAPER-PUSHING ZOMBIES** that do **BUSINESS** so detached and abstract that they are **BLIND** to its **UTTER MEANINGLESSNESS**—

ON THE STREETS ARE **HORDES** OF **BIG FAT ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BUFFET BAR PIGS** CONSUMING **OVER-PACKAGED DISPOSABLE BULLSHIT** and **YELLING** at their kids to **SHUT THE FUCK UP**.

AND THE **WEAVER'S WEB** MAKES THE **WYRM** EVEN **MORE INSANE**—

WORD IN THE ALLEYS AND SEWERS CLAIMS A **WYRM BEAST** LIES BENEATH ALL THIS **CONCRETE-SOWING** AND **CONTROLLING** THE CITY'S **EVIL** THROUGH **AMBIENT OSMOSIS**. WHAT BETTER PLACE TO RUN THE SHOW THAN THE **BASEMENT OF THE LOCAL EAT-N-SHIT: O'TOLLEY'S**

So when the **WEAVER** and the **WYRM** get this **COZY**, it's TIME to get out the **AX**

WHY DO I BELIEVE THE RUMOR? BEAST OR NO BEAST, THIS PLACE WAS **LOUSY** WITH **SERVANTS**. THAT AND I WAS GETTING REALLY **FUCKIN' NERVOUS** AND **REALLY FUCKIN' TWITCHY**.

ONLY TWO OTHERS ARE WITH ME. **WEIL YELLOW-TOOTH** WAS A **WARRIOR** FROM THE **RATRACE**—A **TOUGH BASTARD** AND A **GOOD RAT**.

MY **WOMAN** WAITS **COOLLY** A **BLOCK AWAY** IN AN **IDLING CAR**.

YERSINIA

I'LL TAKE A **GUTBUSTER** AND A **SMALL DR. CAFF**

TO GO.



Weil gives me the Green light with a NOD - then LEAVES.



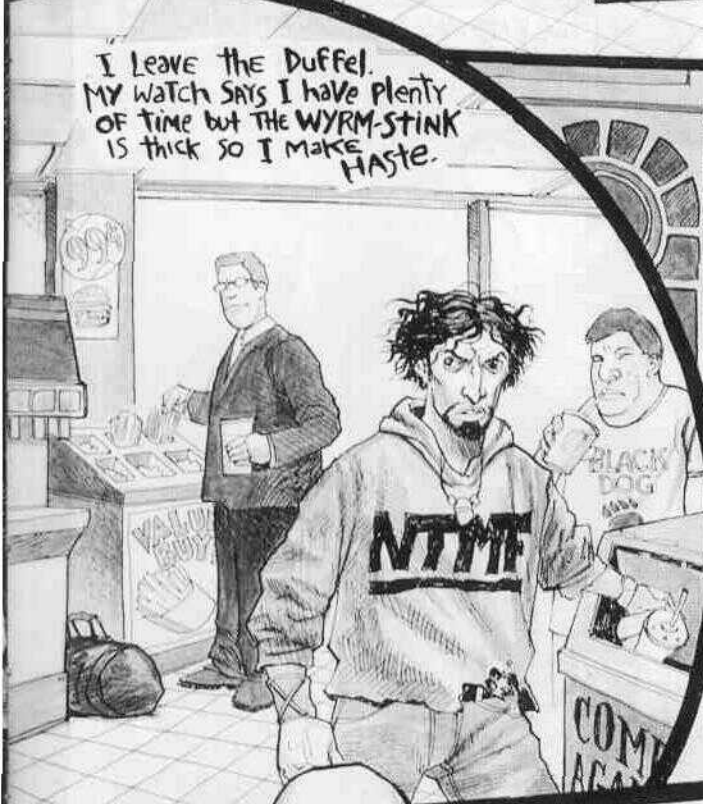
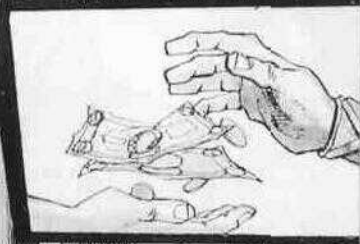
OK, SIR. HERE'S YOUR DRINK...



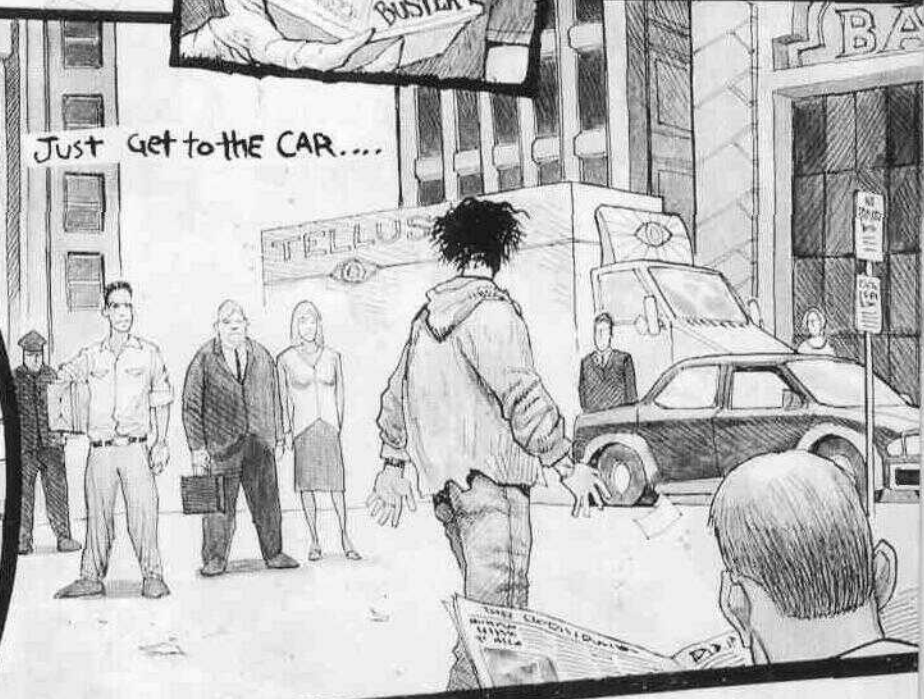
...AND HERE'S YOUR GREASE-LADEN GROWTH HORMONE PATTY ON A SESAME SEED BUN. LIGHTLY TAINTED, OF COURSE. ANYTHING ELSE?



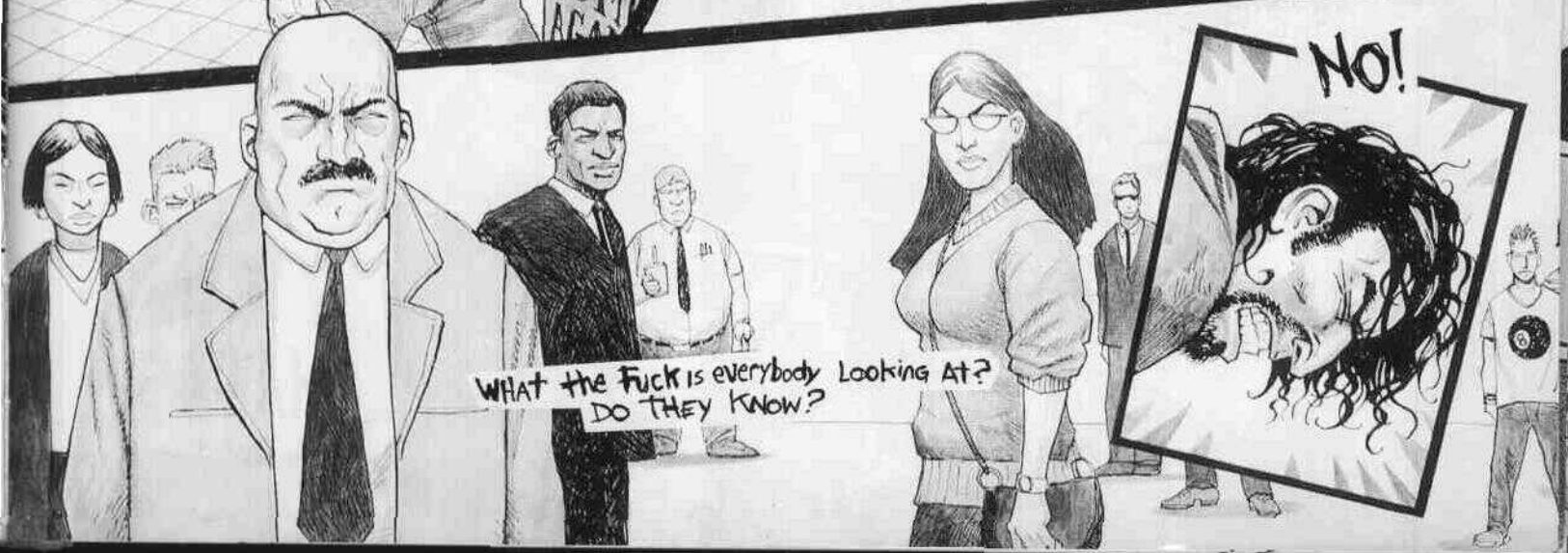
NO... NO, THIS'S ALL



I Leave the Duffel. MY watch says I have plenty OF time but THE WYRM-STINK IS thick so I make HASTE.

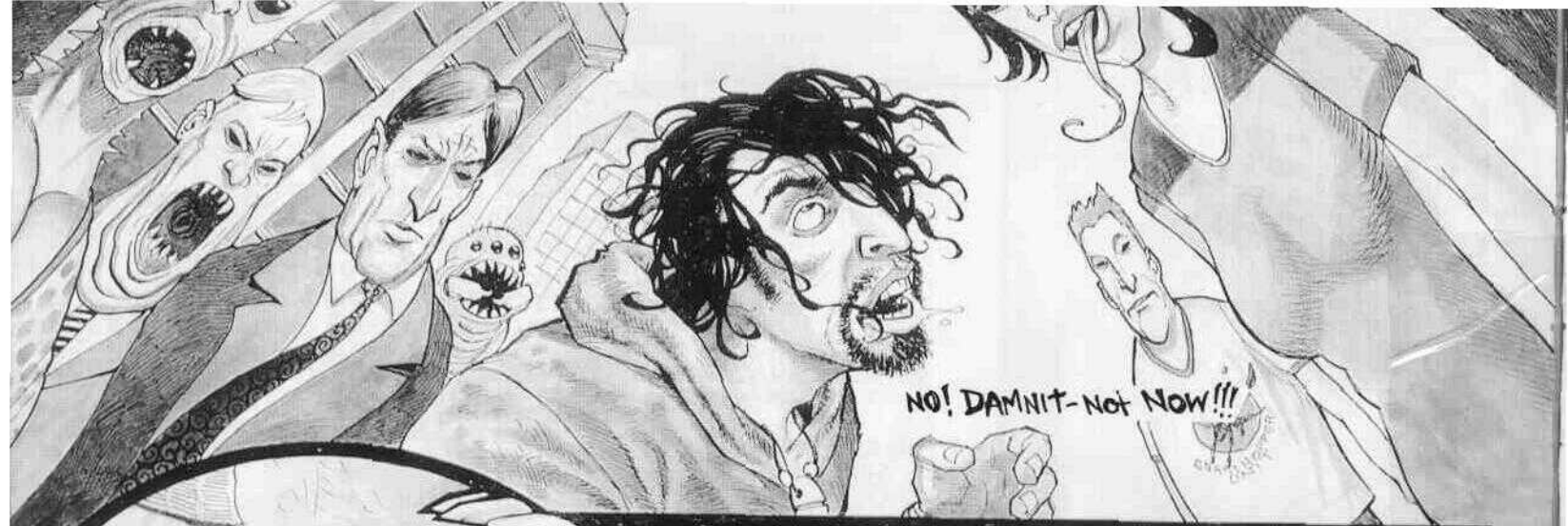


Just get to the CAR...



WHAT the Fuck is everybody Looking At? DO THEY KNOW?





NO! DAMNIT-NOT NOW!!!



MY VISION SHOWS ME A RAVAGED CITY. LIKE WEIL SAYS: THE RATS RULE THIS ENVIRONMENT.

THE END HAS COME AND IT IS CHAOS



I'M FIRING ON PATHETIC VAMPIRE REMNANTS. BUT IT'S NOT ME - IT'S...

...YERSINIA?

WHO'S SHE WITH? IS THAT MY.....MY SON?

CHAGAS?

CHAGAS?



CHAGAS, GET UP!
COME ON - LET'S GO!



YERSINIA?
WE... WHAT..?



HOW MUCH
TIME...?

NOT...



SIR?

...MUCH

SIR?



I THINK THIS
IS YOURS.



THIS IS WHEN
MAINTAINING THE
VEIL GOES STRAIGHT
OUT THE WINDOW



YERSINIA,
GET IN THE CAR
AND PICK US UP
OUT FRONT!



RIAM

WEIL'S ALREADY IN MOTION,
FROM UNDER HIS COAT COME
TWO DOUBLE CLIP AK'S.
HE FLOATS ME MINE.

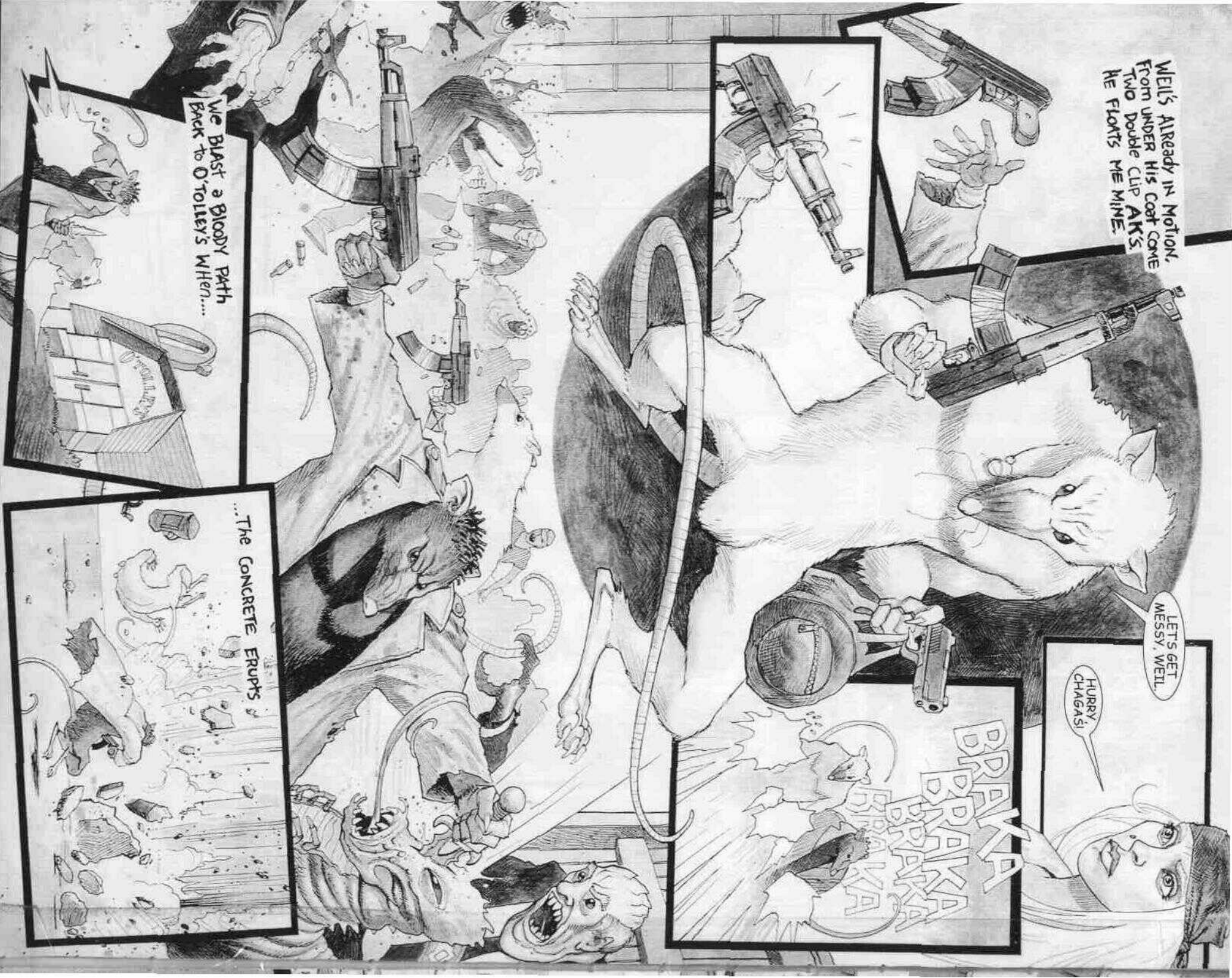
LET'S GET
MESSY, WEIL.

HURRY
CHAGASI

BRAYKA
BRAYKA
BRAYKA

WE BLAST A BLOODY PATH
BACK TO O'TOLLEY'S WHEN....

...THE CONCRETE ERUPTS



The Monster DOESN'T
HESITATE.....

And WEIL is Slaughtered
LIKE A COW

IF There WAS A SPECK OF DOUBT
IN ME About A SUBTERRANEAN
MONSTER FUELING The LOCAL
FUCKFACE POPULATION—
IT WAS NOW LONG
GONE

...SWEET MOTHER GATA...

WEIL!

I FARE no better

A Ratkin has A SHITLOAD OF
RAGE, Sure. But it's OUR
BRUTAL tenacity that
TRULY DEFINES US.



Despite the MORTAL WOUND, MY RABID ZEAL Empowers me to Deliver A VERY Special Farewell FUCK YOU

HANG ON GUYS...

SCREEEEEEEE

Well, Zeal And A Nice LONG TAIL

CHAGAS, NO!

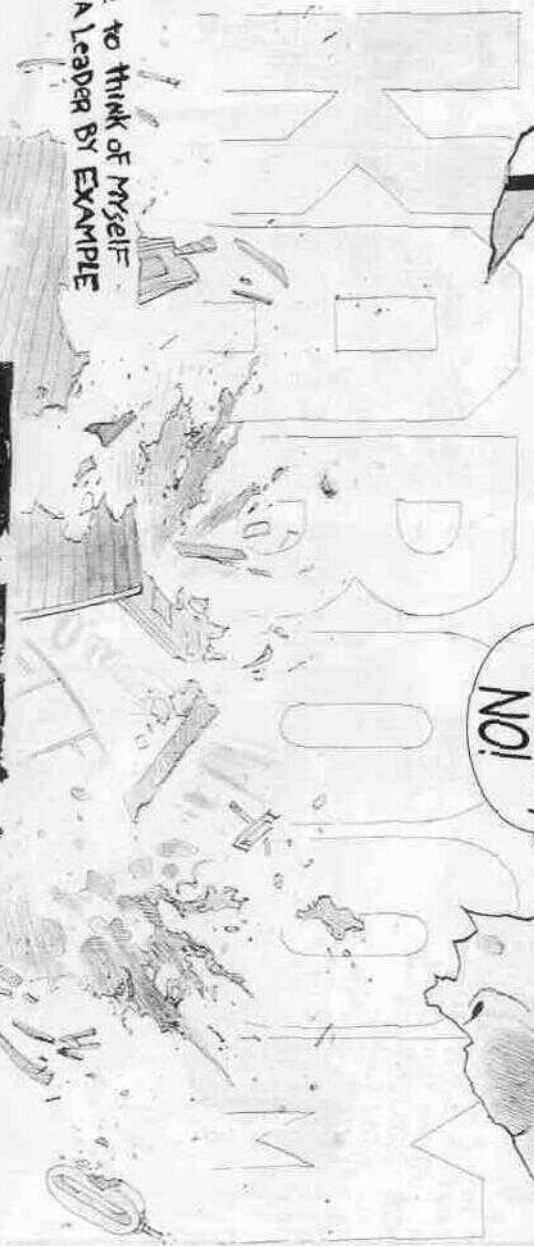
I LIKE to think of myself AS A LEADER BY EXAMPLE

I DIDN'T have time For Political BULLSHIT BECAUSE I SPENT IT MAINTAINING AND KILLING MY ENEMIES and their SCHEMES.

The CHAGAS CRUIZi class Syllabus has been Wrought Now whos gonna Pick UP the AX?



NINE



PAORUM™

Summoning the Armies of the Apocalypse



By Brian Campbell

Credits

Author: Brian Campbell
Comic Book Story & Art: Steve Prescott
Developer: Ethan Skemp
Editor: Aileen E. Miles
Art Director: Aileen E. Miles
Art: Mitch Byrd, Joe Corroney, Brian LeBlanc, Larry MacDougall, Steve Prescott, Jeff Rebner, Ron Spencer
Back Cover Art: Steve Prescott
Layout & Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles
Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles
Playtesting (The Scooby Cthulhu Troupe): Fred Annet, Jr., Ahna E. Blaker, Shawn Conrad, Zack DeLong, Peter James DuBois, Phillip Granner, Alan Holmberg, Bjorn Maier-Ellison, Lars Michelson-Hubbel, Mari Michelson-Hubbel
Scumdangle Elfbiter: Justin Achilli.

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Ethan "UNDEADUNDEADUNDEAD" Skemp, for entirely too much excitement about lurching, dessicated corpses at the local cinema.
Mike "Dying Breed" Tinney, for finding a place that still does karaoke.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30021
USA

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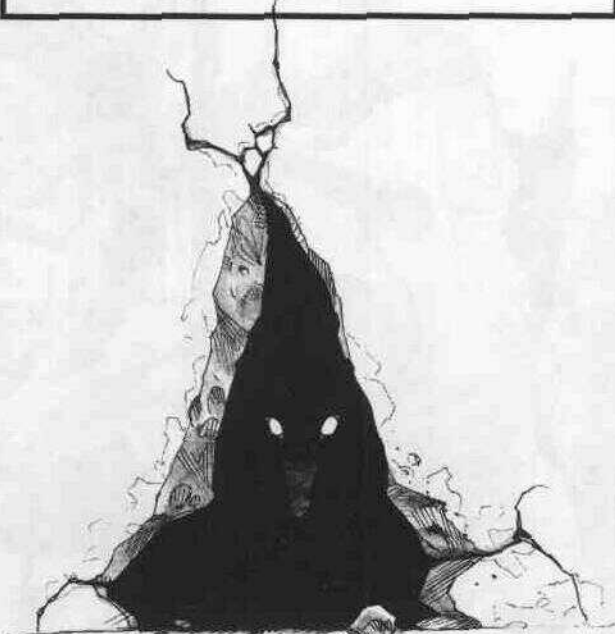
Danger! Rat!

There are a couple of things about this book that just... aren't right. Please remember as you read that we White Wolfers really aren't in favor of terrorism and don't want to exterminate the human race. We're just writing about a bunch of crazed wererats with an entirely different set of principles. We don't expect you to go out and start emulating Twitchers, really (at least we hope you won't!), but consider this a note to pacify whomever's mother might have picked up the book.

Thank you. Drive through.

"The ansur lize in never giving up even when you are all beet to hell and you only have won guy buT DAMn us Rat Thraptors have fiting spit i Mean spirit."

—Scumdangle Elfbiter



RATKIN™

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Introduction: The Shadow of the Rat

*We are the Little Folk — we!
Too little to love or to hate.
Leave us alone and you'll see
How we can drag down the State...
Mistletoe killing an oak —
Rats gnawing cables in two —
Moths making holes in a cloak —
How they must love what they do!*
— Rudyard Kipling, "A Pict Song"

A World of Rage

The shadow of the rat, crossing into power, never to be buried.
— T.S. Elliot, "The Wasteland"

Long before the dawn of human history, shapechangers walked the Earth. The world was honest and brutal then — monsters had no need to hide their true forms. Legends speak of the *Changing Breeds*, shapeshifters who served as the guardians of the Earth. First and foremost among the shapechangers were the *Garou*, a race of werewolves entrusted with the safety of mankind. For three thousand years, the Wolves watched over hordes of humans. The worst of them exploited the humans as slaves, culled them as breeding stock, and sacrificed them to fulfill carnal urges. Loremasters who know the old stories call this time the *Impergium*, an era when the unrestrained force of chaos reigned supreme.

Surrounded by a primal world of rage, humans lived in fear of violence in the night, especially when the moon was full. Werewolves stalked the darkness, inspiring terror through

sheer atrocity. Monsters bred in the darkness, but the Children of Wolf protected mankind from the savage horrors of the night. Racial memories of *Garou* violence have been buried in the human subconscious ever since. To this very day, the mere sight of a werewolf in its *Crinos* form is enough to drive all but the staunchest humans beyond the fragile limits of their sanity, overwhelming them with the madness of *Delirium*. The terror of the *Impergium* will never be forgotten.

Nonetheless, the story ends badly. It's said that the *Garou*'s triumphs were so great that they became proud of their savage accomplishments. Soon, they declared themselves the greatest of *Gaia*'s children, intimidating any who threatened their supremacy. As the Wolves' fury and false pride grew, they exacted their rage on the other shapeshifters of the world. Overcome by hubris, some even demanded that the other *Changing Breeds* serve as their subjects. Of course, the other shapechangers refused, secure in their devotion to the Earth.

The Garou lashed out at human villages that prospered too much, limiting their flocks to strict population quotas. Eventually, they culled the population of any other race that supposedly threatened their supremacy. All of their victims — at least, those that have survived — remember the horrors that followed, though each disagrees on the original cause. It was a dark age in the history of the Changing Breeds: the War of Rage, a holocaust for Gaia's children. Entire species were devastated or driven into extinction. To "protect" mankind, the earliest Garou conducted campaigns of genocide against the other shapechangers of the world.

This would change history forever.

The stories you are about to read are not about the Garou — the victors of the War of Rage — but of one of their many victims. We will not concern ourselves with the greatest of the Earth Mother's children, but with one of the most reviled. The Goddess entrusted them with the power of plague, the sacred duties of disease, and the finer arts of destruction — tasks seen as evil to some, but essential to others. For thousands of years, their offspring lived in the shadows of the world, hiding from the unchecked rage of the Garou, the corrupting evils of the Wyrms, and the madness of humanity. This book is about the last and lowliest of Gaia's servants: the Children of Rat. This is the story of the Ratkin.

Legacies of the Rats

Let us return to the world mankind left behind. To understand the present, we must first understand the past. The Garou speak of their prowess as great hunters, but in the springtime of the world, each of the Changing Breeds had its own sacred duties. The Bastet kept the secrets of magic; the Gurahl acted as the healers of sacred places, and so on. Of all the shapechangers, the wererats attended to the foulest of these tasks.

The Ratkin have always had unsavory reputations, and not just for the strange traditions of their societies. Occultists and mystics still speak of the wererats' affinity for chaos and their single-minded devotion to unspeakable arts. During the Impergium, the Ratkin were reviled because of the responsibilities the Goddess gave them. The wererats always have been, and always will be, defenders of the Wyld in its purest form. Whenever a threat rose against the free-flowing nature of chaos, the Ratkin swarmed to oppose it.

One group threatened this force more than any other: the human race. Human tribes grew faster than their masters, the Garou, could contain them. Once the humans learned how to farm and build cities, the werewolves watched their progress carefully. If the Wolves failed to cull the human population sufficiently, the Ratkin were entrusted to correct their mistakes. With methods ranging from the subtle to the shocking, the wererats restored the balance between the order of the human cities and the chaos of the wild. Their brutal efficiency was well-known to the primal Garou. Since Ratkin successes were based on Garou failures, animosity grew between the Wolves and the Rats.

Overpopulation has always been a chief concern of the wererats. A Ratkin colony can only ensure the survival of a privileged few; the rest must get by as best they can. In the early

days of the world, young wererats would often leave their nests and roam the world to seek their fortune. To survive, they would make dark pacts and secretive contracts with other supernatural creatures. Ratkin had no qualms about undertaking tasks the other Changing Breeds thought too unpleasant to fulfill. Whenever the population of Ratkin surged, plagues of wererats would swarm into the societies of other shapechangers, offering to help them with their direst troubles... for a price.

Not surprisingly, the Ratkin had few formal dealings with the Garou, even before the War of Rage. Only a few aspects of wererat society had cause to commune with them. First among these were the Ratkin bards, the intermediaries between Garou septes and Ratkin colonies. When other shapechangers wanted to make a pact with the rats to carry out some dark deed, the bards used their diplomacy to seal the pact. Though they lived among the elite of wererat society, they brokered and negotiated on behalf of the dispossessed, desperate and disenfranchised of their kind.

The War of Rage put an end to such cooperation. When the Garou declared war on the Children of Rat, the Ratkin bards were the first to die. Colonies scurried for safety, fleeing the genocidal campaigns of the werewolves. The last surviving Ratkin bards performed one last act of desperation on behalf of their race, gathering at a sacred site known as the Field of Nettles. There, they recited the crimes committed by Garou and intoned an epic curse against their oppressors. According to legend, they vowed that their descendants would return from the farthest realms of creation to avenge the deaths of the slaughtered.

Bolting for safety, many other wererats sought sanctuary in the spirit world, hiding within the fringes of reality. After the War of Rage, countless thousands of Ratkin escaped into the spirit worlds of the Umbra. Swarms of Rat Kinfolk, Rat-spirits and other rodent warriors have been breeding there ever since. Distant ancestors of the modern Ratkin became ephemeral, even mythical, through prolonged exposure to the spirit world. There, thousands of years of exposure to chaos in its purest form warped their minds and souls. Cut off from their human Kinfolk, the most dangerous of Rat's children became increasingly feral, developing a loathing for the human world they left behind. Lost in the madness of the velvet shadow, they waited for the fulfillment of the Ratkin bards' shocking prophecies.

As generations bred, prospered and died in the shadows of the spirit world, the werewolves asserted their dominance over the physical world. Showing false contrition for their crimes, they established the Concord, a treaty that brought to an end to three thousand years of terror. The Western Concordiat reached the agreement that humanity had the right to develop its own civilization. The Garou were to stay hidden, watching over Gaia's creation from hidden places. The Earth Mother entrusted them with Her greatest sacred sites... leaving the victims of the War of Rage with undying memories of betrayal. Since then, the werewolves have been at odds with the rest of the Changing Breeds.

While the Garou tried to become more humane by living among humans, the Ratkin remained hidden. The werewolves compromised the purity of the Wyld by allowing human society to flourish. The wererats, on the other hand, followed a very different path, relying on their most feral instincts to survive. The Garou thought that the Ratkin had passed from the world, just as they had

forgotten many of their ancient victims... but they were tragically wrong. The Ratkin race has had thousands upon thousands of years to rebuild, repopulate and prepare for the future. The wererats refused to lie down and die; instead, they bolted into the hidden places of the world. Since then, the Ratkin have lived on the fringes of reality... and the fringes of sanity.

The Concord began the Age of Man, but now, as the Last Days approach, that age is ending. We live in the winter of the world. The wererats have watched and waited for millennia for signs of the coming Apocalypse. As the End Times draw near, more of the wererats' distant ancestors are returning to the dimension they left behind, fulfilling the curses of the ancient Ratkin bards. The Children of Rat are reclaiming their lost Kinfolk, seizing the sacred sites they protected long ago, and severing the webs that have held the world in stasis for millennia. Wererats carry the secrets of the Impergium in their blood, forbidden knowledge of the spirit worlds in their souls, and an undying anger in their hearts.

Living outside human society for thousands of years, the wererats have become the living embodiment of chaos itself. In their desperate struggle to bring that pure force back into the world, they will stop at nothing to heal Gaia's creation... by any means necessary. Countless gleaming eyes watch from the darkness. The chattering of countless sharpened teeth echo a message of revenge. Tiny claws have worn away the webs of the spirit world, breaching the barrier between untold dimensions and the dying Earth.

Prepare yourself, for the force of chaos is returning to the world. Prepare yourself, for these are the Final Days. The shadow of the rat, crossing into power, has returned.

A Doomed Legacy

I looked forward to redeeming at last the local fame of the line which ended in me. I would reside here permanently, and prove that a De La Poer... need not be a fiend.

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls"

The wererats are exiles from a doomed world, survivors of lives filled with violence and horror. The disease of lycanthropy isn't a blessing, after all... it's a curse. No doubt you've heard the time-worn legends of how a shapechanger's attack can doom its victim. Perhaps you believe that a disease carried by one of these monsters can lead to outbreaks of madness or orgies of destruction. In the world of the wererats, these legends are based on hideous truths.

Wererats consider breeding a sacred duty; thus, a scant portion of the world's population is descended from the Ratkin race. When a wererat breeds with a human, or even a rat, their offspring is known as *Kinfolk*. If the mother is a rodens Ratkin or a rat, she bears a litter of rat Kinfolk; if the mother is a homid Ratkin or a human, the child is human Kinfolk; very rarely, if one of the parents is a materialized spirit, the freak that results is Spirit Kinfolk. For all shapechangers, lycanthropy is like a latent or recessive gene, one that can remain undetected for years, or even decades. In fact, the taint of Ratkin blood can endure for generations, lying dormant within its inheritors until misfortune awakens the family's curse.

Full-blooded wererats are shapechangers who can spread corruption through disease and transmit it through acts of vio-

lence. When a Ratkin wounds an innocent human, he may choose to infect him with illness. There's a chance the sickness may eventually transform into the Birthing Plague, a virulent pathogen that has been evolving for thousands of years. The infection can be transmitted in other ways as well: wounds, poison and plague are the three most common. Performing the proper rites ensures this infection. Most humans who are consumed by the Birthing Plague suffer horrible deaths, but the few who possess a thin taint of wererat blood inherit the legacies of the Ratkin race.

For these unfortunate few, the limits of reality they once knew are shredded by a thousand eager claws. Until the infected Kinfolk undergoes his final metamorphosis, he is overwhelmed by changes to his body and mind, tormented by Rat-spirits lurking in the spirit world, and plagued by revelations from the Rat Incarna. It's a gradual process, one that slowly adapts its victim to the horrors of an altered existence.

Madness preys upon those who have carried the curse within their veins. The simple lives they once knew are torn to shreds, replaced by a calling of savage violence. For a blessed few, voices in their minds direct them, preparing them for battle. Many are called, but few survive. Some infected Kinfolk self-destruct, inflicting their rage on humans who invoke their wrath. The strongest endure until the terrifying moment of the First Change, when the transformation is complete. They finally learn to assume Crinos form and rejoin the Ratkin race. The limitless freedom of the Wyld alters their lives forever.

Aspects of Rat's Family

We search for vengeance.

Someone will pay.

We'll show no mercy.

They chose this fate.

— Leather Strip

Infection is always a descent into madness. Once a Kinfolk victim is consumed by the Birthing Plague, he is overwhelmed by visions of his forgotten heritage. If he has had no prior contact with the supernatural, the experience tears away the illusions of human society. The Plague awakens dormant memories in his blood. He hears voices; he receives visions; he embraces chaos.

Relapses can last for days, months or years, eventually leading to the terror of the First Change. By the time the wererat is utterly consumed with anger and completes his metamorphosis, he knows the role he must fulfill in the coming Apocalypse. Each Ratkin attends to one aspect of wererat society. Today, there are eight sacred ways that must be obeyed, ranging from the wise and spiritual to the utterly deranged.

- **Tunnel Runners** are the mavericks of Ratkin society; they act as the scouts and spies of the swarm. Consumed by wanderlust, they learn of secret paths through the worlds of flesh and spirit.

- **Shadow Seers** guard forbidden secrets lying dormant in their blood. Unlike their more violent brothers and sisters, they value wisdom over vengeance. Through calm meditation, they can understand anything cloaked in shadows. Too much introspection, however, leads to insanity....



- **Knife-Skulkers** hire themselves and their packs out to any who would pay their price. The distinctions and taboos of supernatural societies mean nothing to them; justice is all-encompassing. As assassins and thieves, they will make and break contracts with anyone.

- **Warriors** wield their Pain Daggers with rapturous abandon. Masters of guerrilla warfare, pack tactics, and swarm strategies, they prove Rat's rightful position as a Totem of War. Their methods of killing range from the imaginative reconstruction of modern-day ninja to the elaborate strategies of survivalists and militias.

These are the four sacred ways, preserved since the days of the Impergium. Yet as more Ratkin return from their exile in the spirit world, the wererats are uncovering new aspects to their society. Some followers recall the secrets of forgotten lore, while others are the result of the ever-adapting nature of the Birthing Plague. A few are the result of lustful wererats who bred with materialized spirits. The Ratkin who fulfill these duties are known as *Freaks*. Most make normal wererats seem sane by comparison.

- **Plague Lords** command the forces of disease, fighting the temptations of the Wyrms as they practice their dark arts. Though they were thought destroyed in the Dark Ages, their plagues have returned to the world in guises more sinister than ever witnessed before.

- **Ratkin Engineers** are the result of the growing power of the Weaver. Many are infected in laboratories, using their shocking new intelligence to insidious ends. From the rubble of the modern world, they salvage and devise ingenious devices.

- The **Munchmausen** have returned from lost realms of the spirit world, fulfilling the curse of Ratkin bards millennia ago. Most recall fanciful tales of realms that never were; some insist that they are outcasts of Arcadia. Though many are born as spirits, the Birthing Plague transforms them into flesh and blood.

- And last, but not least, are the **Twitchers**, Ratkin who reflect the rage of a dying world. As servitors of the Rat God, they unleash anarchy and destruction, preparing humanity for the Final Days of the Apocalypse. Succumbing to rage is all too easy for these madmen. They delight in ranting false prophecies of the world's doom.

Rat calls to all of these children, echoing the chattering demands of thousands of brethren waiting in the spirit world. She makes her demands in myriad ways, often coordinating vastly different wererats to execute the appropriate portions of one master plan. Eight aspects of Ratkin society reflect her many needs and desires, all focused upon one goal: preparation for the final battle for the world.

Theme and Mood

They must know it was the rats; the slithering scurrying rats who will never let me sleep; the daemon rats that race behind the padding in this room and beckon me down to greater horrors than I have ever known; the rats they can never hear; the rats, the rats, the rats in the walls.

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls"

Maybe the other Changing Breeds feel as though they've been blessed by their legacies, but wererats certainly don't. The dominant moods in wererat stories are rage, madness and desperation. Let the other shapeshifters speak of Gaia's healing love — the Ratkin revel in black humor, fatalism, and cynical self-satisfaction. Suffering has distorted their ideals. They are not amoral; they have merely abandoned the ways of human society.

Most wererat stories include the theme of betrayal. After all, Gaia, the spiritual Mother of all Changing Breeds, abandoned her most devoted children when she allowed the Garou to establish themselves as lords of the Earth. The werewolves, in turn, betrayed all of the shapechangers during the War of Rage, when they slaughtered entire races. The Garou later condemned them during the Concord, when they relegated all of the Changing Breeds to the shadows and began the Age of Man. Fortunately, that age is coming to an end, and the Ratkin's cursed legacy has given them a chance for revenge.

Shadows are lengthening everywhere, for the world itself has gone mad. Hell is here. Stories of crime and unchecked exploitation abound. In Tokyo, a madman releases poison gas on a subway; in Middle America, a would-be messiah sacrifices his followers to his secret, twisted visions; throughout the world, humans on the fringes of society stockpile weapons, strengthen gangs and arm themselves in secret militias. In the darkest corners of the world, terrorists strike back at world governments. In the light of day, the homeless starve on the street. From the slums of the Third World to the cities the First World, humans have vastly overpopulated the planet. Now, at long last, their civilization has begun to self-destruct. The Garou are unprepared to live in this world, but the Ratkin thrive in it.

As the Apocalypse draws nearer, the wererats have an opportunity to bring back the purity of the Impergium... one way or another. All Ratkin believe in helping chaos flow freely, though not all of them agree on how to do it. Chaos takes many forms, and so do the wererats. The worst of them serve as terrorists and anarchists, striking out at anything that carries the ozone stench of order. The best of them care for the victims of human civilization, living among the homeless and destitute. Caretakers show sympathy for others who must live as

animals... and eventually recruit them to their cause. The strangest wererats have been so possessed by pure chaos that they are overwhelmed by madness, chittering in response to the primitive call of the Wyld. The most bestial Ratkin are now feral, violent and often insane.

Regardless of how wererats choose to live their lives, it's evident in any Ratkin chronicle that the end of the world is approaching. The clock is ticking. All that mankind has built over the last five millennia will be torn down. The return of lost wererats to the world heralds the approach of the Final Days. Ratkin mystics and occultists believe that one day, millions of their brethren will return from the spirit world to swarm the Earth. Thousands of years of living among humans have made the Garou tame, but the wererats' spirit allies have been consumed by the undiluted force of the Wyld in its purest form.

As one of Rat's children, you must now act as an agent of chaos, a servitor of the Wyld. Your god is calling you; your ancestors advise you from the spirit world; your destiny is beckoning as a new age begins. A virulent curse has restored your ancient legacy and changed your life forever. Fighting off the temptations of rage and madness, you must prepare the world for the Final Days. The secrets held within this tome will show you the way. All you need to do is listen to the whispering within your blood... and keep reading....

Chaos Unleashed

... you, you will die of the shame,

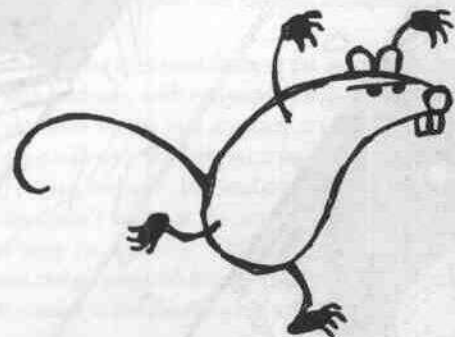
And then we will dance on your graves.

— Rudyard Kipling, "A Pict Song"

These are the Last Days, and you have received the call. The Garou made a compromise with mankind, establishing the Concord that allowed human civilization to thrive. Now the Weaver's webs choke the world, driving the Wyrms further into madness with each passing year. Time is running out, and the werewolves' failures have brought on the Apocalypse. You must decide what extremes you will choose to heal the world.

In fulfillment of ancient bardic prophecies, the Children of Rat are returning to the world in greater numbers than ever before. From the depths of the Umbra, they come. From the hidden places in the largest cities, they slink from the shadows. From the most forsaken realms of the wilderness, countless children chitter a message of vengeance, sharpen their teeth for battle, and gaze upon the world through angry red eyes. Your brethren are the Wyld in its purest form, and when the end comes, they will emerge from the rubble of the human race.

Rat is calling. It is time to answer.





Chapter One: Ratkin Legends

Fever Dreams

Skin pulses. Pores sweat. A fever rages. A homeless man collapses in an alleyway, falling beside a rusting dumpster. A few feet away, passers-by ignore everything, rendering a dying man effectively invisible. The body lies on the wet asphalt. Rain has been falling from the gray sky for hours now. Gregor is only sixteen, but the street has been his home for over a year. He's lived in the city of Seattle all his life, but now, he's about to die there.

No one offers help. Even on a good day, few people will look him in the eye. Strangers don't come near him, afraid that he'll beg for change. Desperation led him to the alleyway; starvation brought him to an open dumpster; misfortune rendered him unconscious. And now, today, another "problem with the homeless" is about to be solved, away from the scornful glance of the wealthy and significant.

As the rain soaks into Gregor's army surplus jacket, his body is wracked with pain. He tries to reason through what happened, searching desperately for an explanation. He remembers rummaging through the trash; a glimpse of a packet of food; something quick and deadly sinking tiny yellow teeth into his skin. A brief thought: Did something bite me?

His drugged brain reels, grasping for the truth like a drowning man. He could have been infected with just about anything. Another thought: Maybe I could make it to the clinic before it closes. False hope dies quickly. Gregor's health hasn't been too good; he's spent too much time there already. His medication has run out. Maybe whatever infection he had before today is growing worse.

A sharp pain in his head silences all speculation... and then the voices start.

He's not even sure what the words mean; they're all nonsense. The sounds between the noises are unnerving. Chittering. Whuffling. Scratching. The sound of a thousand teeth grinding. The sound of thousands of tiny claws scratching, trying to break through from God knows where. Noise and pain consume his mind. The rain beats down on his skin like a thousand tiny paws scrabbling at him. Muscles tense up on the back of his neck as he rolls into a heap of trash.

The last sensation Gregor feels before he falls into unconsciousness isn't painful... it's almost sweet. As darkness falls on his senses, he feels the scampering of four tiny feet across his neck....

Julia's Tale

A young woman kneels beside a half-conscious man. She bandages his suppurating wounds, searches for his identification half-heartedly. The passers-by on the street, ten feet away, keep their eyes focused straight ahead, struggling to ignore everything, straining to render suffering invisible. One of their own has been abandoned; the rest of them must survive.

The woman's cool blue eyes stare down at the sweating body. She regards him with kindness, with sympathy. Dragging the body out of the rain, she takes shelter in a doorway a few feet away. There's a pile of dry cardboard; she fashions it into a crude shelter. She intones a brief prayer, and soon, the wind doesn't bite at her skin anymore. The rain doesn't batter at the young man's flesh. The child's open sores weep for attention. The first of the buboes are taking shape, round and surging with brackish fluids. As she adjusts the bandages, she prattles to the shivering body.

"Ssssh. It's all right, child. It's all right. Don't worry, I'll take care of everything. Be still, and I'll start cleaning you up. You need to focus on the sound of my voice. I know you can hear me, child. Can you remember my name? Listen to your blood... you'll hear it. I can remember your name. I can remember the names of all my brothers and sisters; you will, too. It's in our blood. Listen. That's the rhythm that pounds in your nerves. The thin strain of memory in your veins."

She falls silent, and Gregor's chapped lips try to form a name: J-U-L-I-A. A scratching sound; a hiss of air; a chuckle and a cough.

"Yes, that's it. Julia. Claws in the darkness. I've been through this, too. The visions haven't started for you yet. If you fall unconscious again, we might lose you, child, but I'll keep you awake. Don't worry, my first Infection was just as bad. When I close my eyes, I can still see the endless tunnels my ancestors burrowed in the spirit world. I am Claws-in-the-Dark, a mystic, a child of your family. Welcome to the world of the rats."

Gregor sighs. She's insane, he thinks briefly. Cute, but insane. Beggars can't be choosers, I guess... He laughs again, and coughs.

"We are all Mother's children. Let the fever run its course, and you'll understand. While you're fighting it, I'll tell you a little story. Would you like that? Stay awake! That's something else your blood should remember: stories. Your mother, if she had but the thinnest strain of Rat blood within her, no doubt told you stories when you were small, and you listened. Listen to the sound of my voice."

Gregor is focused on two words: Rat blood? Nonsense. She's speaking nonsense. Fairy tales. Her own little world. Then he begins to fade into a warm fever dream, and the first of the stories begins.

...

"When the world was young, beasts ran free throughout the world. In the beginning, the Earth Mother breathed life into everything: the birds in the heavens, the fish in the seas, and all creatures that walked or crawled or swam or flew. And from all this chaos, one creature evolved to live in the center of it all: the smartest, the boldest, the most *dangerous* creature on Mother's world. That creature was the most intelligent, for it could rise up on two legs and say: *I am human.*

"And in the beginning, Mother looked down and blessed the bravest and wisest Women and Men, making them guardians of Her world. Their wisdom came from their affinity to the animals She had created. These Blessed Ones were neither fully Beasts nor fully Men. They wandered until they found the sacred places of the world, and cared for them as they cared for each other. The rest of the humans ran free, like the beasts in the fields, but the Blessed Ones acted with Her guidance.

"I know our Mother by many names—the Goddess, the Earth Mother, Gaia. You may call Her what you will. No matter what name you choose, you will know that She watches us from every tree and leaf, every river and cloud, from the heavens above and the asphalt below. In Her wisdom, She blessed the Changing Breeds so that they could protect Her creation. She blessed us with Her strength, so that we could heal quickly from injury and disease. She blessed us with the Changing Ways, so that we could



walk the Earth in forms of our choosing. She gifted us with the Sacred Ways, so that we could use the wisdom of the spirits to aid us. These are the first of the gifts She gave us.

"Now each of these Blessed Ones, these Changing Breeds, had a sacred trust to uphold. Those who learned the ways of Bear became Gurahl — we know that they were once great healers. The sly ones who capered with Cat became Bastet — we know of their affinity for secrets, magic and mystery... and of their arrogance. Those who ran with the wolves became Garou, greatest of the hunters and defenders. And after all of the Changing Breeds had been blessed, She looked down upon the last and the lowliest, the smallest and the most silent: the Ratkin, the Brothers and Sisters of the Rats.

"In those early days, rats were shy and sweet, just as they are sometimes today. They wanted nothing more than to hide and be safe, to breed and eat what they could find. And so, the Goddess taught the humans who loved the rats how to hide and stay hidden, to find food everywhere, and above all else, to be safe. The world was pure, and all was in balance, and each of the Changing Breeds knew its role in the way of all things.

"Then, as in all legends, something terrible happened, and the world was changed forever."

The Impergium

In the shelter of a doorway, in the murky light of an alleyway, a young woman shelters a dying man. He can barely hear her, focusing only on the gentle sweetness of her voice. Worn rags surround a soft face; her eyes are light blue, an unnaturally clear azure, as though they have seen far too much. Julia crouches, pulling her down jacket closer around herself and sheltering her ward out of the rain. She wraps him in another layer of cardboard, pulls out a plastic bottle from beneath a pile of trash, and sips the cool water inside it as she drones him to sleep.

As she speaks, the alleyway... changes. Damp cardboard becomes warm grass. Cold rain becomes a gentle breeze. Gregor hears leaves waving over his head. A brief thought: I must be delirious. Julia's cool hand wipes sweat from his brow with.... A cool rag? A paper towel? A newspaper? He can't tell.... Julia's voice soothes him, even as the chattering madness begins to wear at his mind....

"Those who can remember back far enough remember the Changing Breeds as the Bête; they have changed so much since then. All of them upheld their sacred tasks, for they were all supposed to be equals — much has changed since those days. The separation of the worlds of flesh and spirit was almost nonexistent, a mere slip of a veil that could be brushed aside with a calm hand. In those days, the line between Man and Beast was gossamer-thin. Now only the wisest can remember what that world was like.

"The Wolves were supposed to protect the humans from the terrors of the night. The Gurahl tended and cared for the sacred places of the Earth, where powerful magics lay sleeping. Corax soared through the skies; Mokolé swam beneath cold waters, dreaming memories more ancient than even we can recall. And in this quiet world, the Brothers and Sisters of Rats — the Ratkin — we had our role to play as well. We were the least and the lowliest, and so Gaia told us our duties last.

Because we trusted to Her so much, we were pledged to the hardest job of all.

"When werewolves failed to properly command the tribes of men, the Ratkin were supposed to go to work, swiftly and silently. If a tribe of humans grew too strong, a few stealthy wererats would help to keep the balance between the humans and the mysteries of Mother's world. If necessary, we would steal food to keep the villages small. If we were asked to, we raided them to take what the humans shouldn't have. A few of us would steal a tool, or a treasure, or a shiny thing that the Goddess didn't intend the humans to have. If the Goddess bade us to, we would even take a child in the night to warn the humans of their lack of caution. They learned their place.

"And when we absolutely had to, we used a weapon that none of the other Changing Breeds fully understood: disease. When Gaia commanded us, our mystics would unleash an unseen enemy that dispatched the weak and the wretched, sparing them their suffering. Gaia called on us to thrive in the places where the Garou failed, staying hidden and silent until we were needed. And oddly enough, the werewolves began to resent us for what we did, for what we were asked to do as part of Gaia's plan.

"We were supposed to be the equals of the Garou, but the Wolves set themselves above all others. The Gurahl and the Corax, the Bastet and the Mokolé — each of these children had sacred tasks, but the Garou considered themselves the watchdogs of mankind, the race from which all the Changing Breeds came. As such, they believed they were Mother's favored children.

"As the proudest and strongest, they claimed that they were the greatest of Gaia's creations. They stalked the night in packs, terrifying all who opposed them, acting as if they were lords of the Earth... and in a way, they were. The Wolves — the Garou — were hunters and defenders, and they swore to defend mankind against evil. Yet in their strength, they started to rule over men, and that was the beginning of thousands years of horror. That was the beginning of a dark time the Garou do not like to remember. That was the beginning of the Impergium.

• • •

Before Gregor's eyes, a feverish vision. A mountaintop; a campfire; the rising full moon. Monstrous creatures — half-man, half-wolf — howl in rage. Violent rites are performed by the light of flames. Human slaves cower in abject servitude. A mystic in lupine regalia looks down from the mountains, regarding the campfires of his human subjects below. Bathed in moonlight, he lets loose a terrible howl to warn them of his anger. No one dares oppose the fury of the night.

The moon is full, and the flock of humans cowers below; they know that the night has teeth. Naked and cold, they gather around a campfire, waiting for their masters to cull the herd. They are wary, for their lords may walk among them, if they choose. Their lords may sacrifice them to their gods, if they so desire. And when the moon is full, their lords may exact their terrible rage, if they will it.

Deep in the woods, a rat runs for cover, bolting for the safety of its burrow. Tonight, there will be fire and bloodshed, vengeance and terror. The fear of this night, and every night like it, will be remembered for thousands of years. The horror will never end.

• • •

"Humans have forgotten that time, long before the dawn of mankind's history. Millennia before men and women gathered to build the first cities, they were little more than slaves to the Garou. The werewolves — half-men, half-beasts — could mate with and breed with whomever they chose. Some ran with the wolves, taking the alpha's mate; some walked among men, selecting humans to bear or sire their brood. In building up their race, the Garou used the strongest human tribes as little more than breeding stock. While some feral humans were allowed to run free, the strongest were contained and cowed into submission. Humans don't remember, but we do — it's in our blood. Listen closely, and you'll hear the rats chattering horror stories of what happened when the world was young.

"The werewolves were filled with a furious anger, and terrible pride, and they herded humans in great masses. All of the Changing Ones could breed with beasts or men of their choosing, but the Garou seized the best breeding stock for themselves. They were more than masters, and their humans were less than slaves. The Garou considered these human tribes their flocks — little more than walking sheep. The Garou herded humans together to watch over them. Throughout the world, they formed many different tribes, and each of their human Kin — their *Kinfolk* — adapted to their ways.

"And when the werewolves wanted to walk among the flocks they tended, they shifted into their terrible battle forms — their Crinos forms. Half man. Half wolf. Teeth and claws. Terror in the night. Though the Goddess is not as powerful as She once was, She would later try to cleanse the human memory of the horrible recollection of this Impergium. This merciful benevolence depended on the *Delirium*. When humans see a werewolf in his full monstrous Crinos form, temporary insanity is the result. Men and women, being the herd creatures they are, quickly invent "mass delusions" to replace the horrific memories. Now think of the suffering the werewolves must have inflicted to create thousands of years of insanity!

"And the rest of us, we lived in terror of the Wolves. The Gurahl lumbered off into the wilderness with their mystics and healers; the Bastet lured out those who were curious and prone to mysteries, and laid down with them in their Dens. And all the other Changing Breeds found their own humans to live with and nurture. Once all the tribes had been formed, the last and the lowliest, the smallest and the most quiet scavenged for food with the Rats. Those who were desperate to survive sought out our nests and begged for food. Our children have lived on the fringes of human society ever since, living in terror of the werewolves in their midst.

"And why I am telling you all this? I am telling you, child, because the madness in my veins has infected you as well. You understand my story, don't you? It is more than a mere fairy tale. Soon, Gregor, you will remember it all. Blood calls to blood, and you have answered our call...

Kinfolk

"The Wolves were the protectors of man, and they learned to hate our kind. They lived among the strongest, while we cowered with the weak. But when the werewolves failed, Gaia called to us instead. When someone had to die, swiftly and

suddenly, they knew we were the ones who would commit the dirtiest deeds to correct their mistakes, for we were loyal to Gaia.

"Those were desperate times. During the Impergium, some Ratkin strayed from their nests, scavenging away from the rest of the colony. When there wasn't enough food to feed us all, either we would have to slay the weak, or the strong would scout out other places for food. To survive, some of the weaker Rats made deals with anyone who could clothe or feed them. They infiltrated human villages, seeking barter and trade. They petitioned Garou septs, offering to work with them. Assassins, thieves, whores, cutthroats — when we were desperate enough, we'd be willing to do anything. Before long, our human Kinfolk had thoroughly infiltrated the lowest castes of human society, waiting for the liberating call of their brothers and sisters among the rats.

"And away from the Wolves, wherever we could hide, we'd breed our swarms and form our armies. We loved Gaia, and as we became more numerous, more of us waited to answer Her call. Secret nests hid thousands who could wear the forms of thousand rats. Our carefully hidden colonies trained legions in the sacred arts of our kind. A few among us even scouted out the sacred sites of the Wolves as well, the caerns where they made their plans for war. Our bards learned where all the Blessed Ones made their homes. They were the emissaries of our kind, learning more of the other Changing Breeds, and carefully learning their secrets, so that we could serve the Goddess better.

The Triat

"One thing we learned was that there were a few beliefs all the shapechangers shared. If you like... if you live... I will teach you more later. There are three primal forces in the world that vie for all creation: the Weaver, the Wyld and the Wyrn. These three forces have been locked in an endless battle: they form the trinity of the *Triat*. Every mystic will tell this part of the story differently, so I will not speak of it overly much; it is the hardest part of the legend to relate.

"The first of these primal forces was the Weaver, she who brought structure to the world. Picture a spider web laid out across all creation. You may think of her essence as a massive spider sleeping in the center of this vast fabric of order. She lies on the webs that underlie all creation; sometimes they shake when the world stirs. Her spirits are the guardians, the monitors, the preserves of all order, stasis and conformity in the world.

"Caught within this lifeless web is the source of all life, all energy, all creation: the Wyld, that which brought life to the world. Her spiritual servitors are capricious, elemental, mysterious and indefatigable; they bring us chaos, madness, insight, creativity and the endless strength of the natural world. Their energy is so great that the Weaver continually tries to contain the limitless possibility of the Wyld, a struggle between order and chaos that never ends.

"When the world was young, there was a balance between the order and chaos, between the Weaver and the Wyld. And to keep the balance between them, there was a third force in the world. A force of corruption. A force of destruction. A force of balance. We call it the Wyrn. I will tell you more of this later, because it is the most dangerous part of the legend to tell.

"Not everyone agrees with this, but I will say it: Humans have always loved the Weaver, the first of the three primal forces. As men and women continued to evolve, they learned to weave clothes, to make tools, to build homes. Picture their hands, if you will, as the wriggling of a thousand spider legs. Instinctively, most humans believe in order.

"Early in the history of the world, the Weaver went mad. The vast overpopulation of the human race has magnified this madness a thousand-fold. Reflecting the rapid ascension of the human race, the Mad Weaver attempted to bind everything within her lifeless webs. The primal forces of the Wyld were stifled, and minions of the Wyrms were bound for millennia, driven to insanity by their confinement.

"To oppose the Mad Weaver, the servitors of the Wyld must sever the webs that proliferate everywhere. As the humans build up their civilization, they despoil the wilderness; this stokes the rage of the werewolves to a fever pitch, forcing them to the rapturous abandon of Wyld violence. Yet whenever rage surges, the foul corruption of the Wyrms sets in. We are more careful in our dealings with the spirits. Not all of my brothers and sisters agree with me, but I will say it: We have preserved the true force of the Wyld, raw energy returning into the world. Whenever human civilization grows too strong, we are the ones who must correct the balance, just as we did in the springtime of the world...

"Forgive me. I'm getting ahead of myself, and ruining the story...."

The War of Rage

Gregor listens, and his mind starts to race. Worms? Weavers? The Wild? What the hell is she talking about? It's all too much. He can hardly keep all the words straight. He barely listens anymore. The fever is growing worse. It burns like fire; he dreams of fire. More painful memories return.

His memories. Great pain. Sleeping curled up on the floor. His father slashing him across the back with his belt. Hiding a little money in a secret place, for the day he would leave. A house in flames. Broken glass. Shouting at people on the street. Freezing under a bridge. Giant rats in a dumpster. A brawl in an alleyway; he can't quite remember. Somehow, he knows, he is not like this gentle woman who tells him pretty stories.

...

"All of the Changing Breeds upheld their tasks, but the Wolves set themselves above all others. If you ask one of the Garou today about this, he will be loathe to talk about it, but he will remember. And he will feel the same way today as he did thousands of years ago. We were all equal in Mother's eyes, but the Wolves always believed they were first among equals, that they were Mother's favored children. The Wolves, consumed by furious anger and false pride, set out to prove they were the greatest of Gaia's children. They already held the most sacred sites, and the strongest tribes of breeding stock, but they demanded that as the greatest of the Goddess' creations they had the right to rule over everything.

"Long ago, the Garou pledged to defend mankind against evil, and for them, the greatest of these evils was the Wyrms. Suffice it to say that even then, there was evil in the world. The

werewolves knew it. They could smell its foul stench. They jealously guarded their flocks from this danger, and justified it by saying they did it in Gaia's name. And whenever they were consumed with this false pride, whenever they slaked their lust on the human breeding stock, the foul corruption of the Wyrms set in.

"Each of the Changing Breeds has its own story of why the War of Rage began. Some say it is because the Wyrms corrupted the Garou, and that ever since then, any werewolf in a frenzy of anger acts as a creature of evil. Some storytellers like to say that the different tribes began to war against each other, and that some cunning werewolf tricked them into fighting all the other tribes to bring the Garou together again stronger than ever. It doesn't really matter. Our distant ancestors, the Ratkin bards, remember the true tales, but they have all been killed by the werewolves. It doesn't matter which version is true. The Garou made war against all the other Changing Breeds, and in the end, they claimed dominion over the Earth.

"And in this war, we were the most desperate of all those who fought. Our sacred task was to keep down the population of the humans by whatever means Mother entrusted us. If that meant stealing a little food, so be it. If that meant spreading one of Mother's diseases, so be it. What we did wasn't evil — it was part of the way of all things. Unfortunately, the werewolves didn't see it that way.

"The Wolves were the hunters, the guardians, the protectors. They stalked the night, searching the evil that would prey upon Mankind. The Earth Mother told them that evil would come, that they would find it among themselves, and the Garou swore to defend humanity against the minions of the Wyrms. For millennia, the werewolves have believed that they have been amassing armies to oppose the Wyrms. The greatest enemy to the world, however, was not without, but within. The anger that gave them strength, that is the most destructive force in the world. The pride that set them against the other Changing Breeds, that was the most dangerous threat to our world. To this day, the Garou succumb to corruption, not from the talons of creatures around them, but from their guilt, their pride, and their rage.

"The Wolves could never accept the idea that the Wyrms could have infested them. And ever since then, child, they have set themselves against the world, trying to cure it of a disease that has infected them since the days of the Impergium. The rest of my kind know that it's dangerous to hold too much anger. It will give you strength, surely, and speed and instinct, but it will also poison your mind and taint your soul. Even a Ratkin knows that the path of rage can unleash a fury of destruction... but it will destroy you as well.

"In short, the werewolves use the Wyrms as their scapegoat, blaming it for all the evil in the world, but you must know the truth..."

The Exodus

The vision: A fire again. It burns like the sickness in Gregor's blood. A watch fire, lit in front of a dark cavern. Shapes inside. Chittering. Whuffling. Madness. Massive monstrous shapes slouch about inside, furtively sniffing the air, watching for danger. Ready for battle. Not wolves. Not men. Bloated rats scurry around the fire. Tiny paws reach for sharp things, shiny things. Paws curl around handles. A tail lashes around, snatching up a burning branch.

Giant rats, rising up on their hind legs. Hundreds of them, scuffling out into a wooded glade. Sniffing the air for danger. Frantically combing out their fur. Grasping at something with tiny paws... with tiny... thumbs? A tiny knife? Yellow teeth.

A howl in the night. Scurrying! Take cover! The Wolves are stalking the night again! The moon is full, prepare for attack! Thousands of rats, cowering in a circle. Howls of wolves in the forest. Huge hulking shapes, lumbering through the trees. Scatter! Squeal! Bloodshed!

Gregor writhes, and Julia can barely hold him down.

• • •

"Be still! Listen to the sound of my voice! If you listen, the pain will go away. Listen and remember.

"Listen to what happened next, an atrocity so great that we had no words to describe it. Humans now do, because they've learned from the Wolves' example. They call it *genocide*. Like I said, the Garou already had dealings with our Bards — they were the easiest to hunt down. Ratkin were hunted, harried and herded to places where they were slain *en masse*. Once there was a time when the Garou knew where the Ratkin kept their nests and sacred places. Messengers from the largest septs would come to petition the rats... sometimes this would be done to enlist a few rat packs in a strike against the others. Of course, the wererats who acted so openly were the first to die. Fearing retribution for the slaughter, the werewolves rationalized this by claiming the Speakers were diseased, and that the killing was an act of self-defense.

"We all remember the details differently; the bards who could have remembered them perfectly were the first to die. We do remember the story of how the last of them perished. They gathered together at a sacred site — the Field of Nettles — and began to compose one last epic tale of what the Garou had done to betray the Changing Breeds. And at the end of it, they spoke an epic prophecy of what the Garou's treachery would lead to. The Ratkin bards chanted curses about the Children of Wolf. When at last the Garou found them and slaughtered them, the Ratkin bards spat out curses of how their children would have revenge. They spoke of deadly plagues that would rage throughout the world.

"The Wolves tried to kill us all, and the killing continued until they couldn't find us anymore. They thought they had wiped us out. We weren't dead, of course. We just left. What do you do when a place isn't fit to live in anymore? What do you do when someone starts killing off all your brothers and sisters? You leave, just as we did, bolting to wherever else you can find. Our ancestors knew that the Wolves would one day hunt them down, so they had already started digging their tunnels when the War of Rage started, tunneling out of the physical world... and into the spirit world.

"The Umbra is like a vast palace, one with endless rooms. Most of Mother's children only scurry around the ground floor, like they do in many buildings. Maybe they'll walk through a few of the rooms, admire the wallpaper, search the drawers. We don't need rooms. We've infested the whole building, from the cellar to the attic. Our ancestors left the world, and from that moment on, they distanced themselves from humanity and human history.

"There was a danger, however. Shapechangers are creatures of two worlds, beings of flesh and spirit. If a shifter spends too much time in the world of flesh, then his soul begins to die.

That's the path the werewolves have taken — they've allowed rage to overcome reason. If, however, a shapechanger spends too much time in the world of spirit, then he will eventually become pure spirit. Thousands of years ago, thousands of our kind became ephemeral, living on in the Umbra as shadows of their former selves.

"Suffice it to say that from that moment on, we have been steadily breeding our human instincts out of our flesh and blood. Don't get us wrong — we still like a bit of human breeding stock once in a while — but we don't need it. We've got Kin, just like anyone else, but we need them far less than the other Changing Breeds do. We can fend for ourselves, just as our Kinfolk can get by without us.

The Concord

"By the end of the War of Rage, the Garou had proven themselves the masters of the Earth through endless bloodshed. Of course, not all of the Wolves supported this crusade for supremacy, but those who didn't were cowed into submission. After the killing began to slow down, and the Changing Breeds had learned to flee from the sight of Crinos Garou, the weakest of the werewolves slouched forward and mourned. Gaia's creations had been wiped out, many to the point of extinction. And as the terror built to a fever pitch, the unthinkable happened.

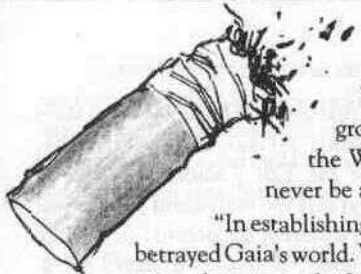
"Man began to wage war against the Garou.

"The Wolves were furious. Across the three thousand years of the Impergium, all that they had done, they said, had been for the sake of mankind. The Wolves gathered in moots, and many of their tribes gathered together to debate what they should do in response. Red Talons came to the moots with packs of wolf Kinfolk — they preferred life among wolves to existence among the treacherous humans. They scratched the ground and growled in anger and called for another crusade, this time against the humans. The Get of Fenris, another tribe of savage monsters who reveled in battle, howled in approval.

"Yet for many, the thought of visiting the anger of the War of Rage against the very humans they swore to protect was unthinkable. One group of wolves, flaunting their heritage by calling themselves the Children of Gaia, sued for peace. The Stargazers, mystics who lost themselves in fascination with the mysteries of human society, joined with them. The Black Furies, a tribe composed almost exclusively of wise women, rushed in to defend the human females who had been abused as breeding stock for generations.

"The Sixteen Tribes of the Garou were divided on how to respond to humanity's rebellion. In many septs, packs of Shadow Lords, Get and Red Talons joined with packs of their like-minded brethren to begin the slaughter. The nobles of Garou society responded by assembling the Concordiat. Unified, they opposed acts of genocide against the race from which the Changing Breeds learned reason and honor.

"Our scouts gathered what information they could of these decisions. We were still hiding in the spirit worlds, fleeing to find safer breeding grounds. When the news finally reached us, we learned that the Wolves had established the Western Concordiat, the basis of the Garou Nation. More importantly, they pledged to allow humans the freedom to act without



interference from the Garou. We had pledged to curtail the growth of human civilization, and the Wolves ensured that we would never be able to do it.

"In establishing the Concord, the werewolves betrayed Gaia's world. We were supposed to share Her creation, but instead, the Garou relegated all of the Changing Breeds to the shadows. They established the Veil, a pledge that they, like all shapeshifters, would remain hidden from human society. Gaia responded by gifting them with the Delirium, sheltering humanity from the atrocities the werewolves committed. Of course, it fed upon the horror that the Garou had visited upon the human race for three thousand years. The era of the Changing Breeds came to an end, and the Age of Man began.

"Somewhere, undoubtedly, the minions of the Mad Weaver rejoiced. The humans, of course, continued to evolve. Taking up the Weaver's ways, they built their first human cities thousands of years ago. The art of agriculture gathered them together in towns and villages. The Sixteen Tribes continued to spread throughout the world, watching over their Kinfolk, but they learned to act through secrecy.

"And the force of the Weaver grew stronger in the world. The Wolves began to lose touch with their Wyld nature, becoming more Man than Beast. And, sadly, Mother upheld the decisions of Her favored children. As the humans and Wolves swarmed over the world, we hid in the walls of reality, desperately trying to repopulate our race... and cursing our Mother for abandoning us. We had loved Gaia, but She had no love left for us. We had no choice but to quietly pray to other gods for succor. The Garou had driven us from the world, and we have been patiently waiting ever since.

The End Times

"Others will tell you of human history, but this is the only epic that really matters, the one that explains the tortured world that surrounds you — the civilization that left you to die. For thousands of years, the werewolves have lived in a world of humans. They've lived with them, they've bred extensively with them. Now, they're more men than wolves. Our scouts have confirmed what's happened to the real wolves in the world: They're dying out. Most of our race, on the other hand, vanished from the world a long, long time ago. For thousands of years, we have watched and waited, for we knew that the Garou would fail. And we knew that one day, we would have to take up the task that Gaia had assigned us: to thrive where the Wolves failed.

"When a litter of our children gather around their mother, she'll whisper to them of the world we knew long ago. Back before the War of Rage. Back in the days of the Impergium. The Wolves do not remember, but we do. Every Beast that can wear the shape of Man, every Changing Breed, each of us that they hunted and harried and terrified, they remembered. Not surprisingly, the Garou remember themselves as the heroes.

"We remember differently. Our blood sings a different song of what happened. And the visions you have undergone, child, the Birthing Plague that infects your veins, that will be a part of you forever. That sickness in you right now... it isn't

the end of your life. It's the beginning of a new one. It's your call to battle.

"The humans, and their werewolf guardians, have had five thousand years to throw the world even further out of balance. And why do we need to survive? Mother abandoned us, but She knew She'd need us someday. The world the werewolves tried to create failed; they are an anachronism, a shadow of the horrors they once were. The world the humans have tried to create is failing. Soon, it'll be little more than rubble. I don't know... how... it's going to happen exactly, but all this around you? All of the cities of men will be laid low. Earthquake, plagues, meteors, nuclear wars — the End could be just about anything. It could come tomorrow, or we may need to wait for decades, but anyway you look at it, the End Times are here. No matter what it is, we'll survive it. That's what our children do. We must survive, by any means necessary.

"The werewolves deny the real events of the Impergium almost as much as the humans do. Why do you think humans have done so much to poison the world? They rebel against their racial memories. The werewolves' slaves are still rebelling, crowding out and despoiling the Garou's most sacred sites. As Gaia grows weaker, the Veil She uses to obscure the memories of humans grows weaker as well. By the End Times, it will be gossamer-thin, barely obscuring the horror that festers and breeds in the shadows of the world. The Lie will be cast aside... and mankind's horror will begin. But we... we will never forget. We will remember.

"The world you see around you now, child, is the result of five thousand years of lies. The humans lie to themselves, claiming to have built up everything of consequence in the world. That's not surprising; Mother has thankfully hidden all their memories of how the world began. The Wolves lie to themselves, telling themselves that they are still the protectors of mankind and Gaia's world. That's not surprising, either — they've convinced themselves that the 'Apocalypse' will mean the end of everything.

"But now, my little one, thousands and thousands of Rat's children are returning to the world. We remember the truth. We remember the horror of the Impergium, the genocidal crusades of the War of Rage, and the terror of the Exodus. But now, the End Times are here, and we are prepared to reclaim Mother's world. Once, She abandoned us, but now, we know we hold the last hope of cleansing Her world. All that has been built up will be torn down, but not through the foul corruption of the Wyrms. Look around you, and you will see that the limitless chaos of the Wyld is already cleansing Gaia's world."

• • •

Gregor listens patiently, but the disease is making him fatigued. He succumbs to the age-old memories in his blood, listening to the beating of his heart. For generations, his brothers and sisters have fallen asleep listening to their mothers tell wonderful stories. As the infection inside him slowly ravages his body, Gregor descends into slumber... and prepares himself to awaken into his new life.

Away from the glance of the wealthy and significant, another Child of Rat hears the call of his god. Away from the cold order of human society, another Ratkin is redeemed. The Birthing Plague has claimed him, leading him into a rapturous waking dream: a dream of a thousand rats.

A Nezumi Tale

"Listen, O My Beloved Children, and I will tell you a story of a foolish man and his descendants. At the end of the First Age, Gaia the Earth Mother made the Ten Thousand Things of creation. She created the valleys and the mountains, the forests and the deserts, and the endless waters of the oceans. And in the midst of the Ten Thousand Things, she raised a sacred hill to watch over it all.

"For reasons only She knows, the Earth Mother set women and men upon the Earth. Almost immediately, one foolish man ran to the top of the sacred hill and said, 'This land is mine! It will be mine forever!' Gaia wanted the man to respect what she had created, so she sent Wolf to watch over him.

"Each day and night, Wolf hunted in the forests beside the sacred hill. From the woods, he howled, 'Be cautious! You must respect this hill. If you do not, my children will devour you.' The man did not listen — he fathered many children, taught them to build fires, and drove away the wolves that howled in the night.

"By the dawn of the Third Age, a hundred men lived at the top of the sacred hill. 'This land is ours!' they said. 'It will be ours forever!' Gaia did not want so many men to live on the sacred hill, so she sent Tiger to them.

"Tiger took the form of a human warrior and walked among them. In the center of their village, he said, 'You are still living on this hill, but you do not respect it. I will teach you honor, so that your children and mine may live on the hill together.' The men did not listen — they tore down the trees in the forest, made weapons, and hunted the tigers.

"By the dawn of the Fourth Age, a thousand men had built a great city around the hill. 'This land is ours!' they said. 'It will be ours forever!' Gaia was getting very impatient, so she sent Raven to them.



Raven flew through the city in the night, stealing all the weapons and tools the men had made. Then he cried out, 'You are still on the hill, but I will steal every tool that you make. You will have to leave and build somewhere else.' But the men did not listen — each time Raven stole from them, they built new and better tools.

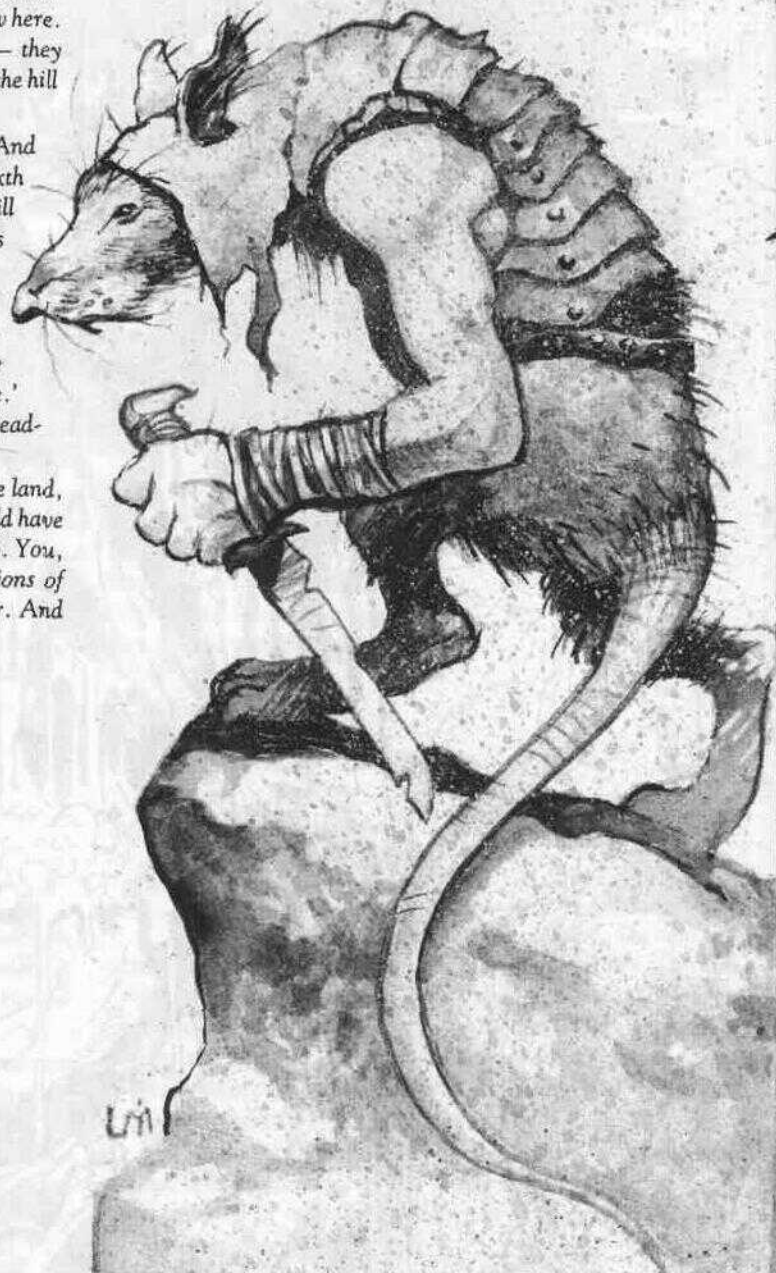
"By the dawn of the Fifth Age, a hundred thousand men lived in the city by the sacred hill. 'This land is ours!' they said. 'It will be ours forever!' So Gaia sent Fox to them.

"Fox poisoned their food and their water. From the bottom of a well, she said, 'This is what you have brought on yourselves! You have made the land fallow, and now nothing will grow here. You must leave the hill.' But the men did not listen — they brought their food from a distant place, and they covered the hill with stones and tar. And the hill was sacred no more.

"To this day, the men in the great city do not listen. And O My Many Beloved Children, at the dawn of the Sixth Age, a hundred million men will live where the sacred hill once was. 'This land is ours!' they will say. 'It will be ours forever!' Then Gaia will send Rat to them.

"Rat will look upon them and say, 'Once this was a sacred hill. Wolf came, but you did not listen. Tiger and Raven and Fox came, but you did not listen. I am the smallest of Gaia's children, but now, you will hear me.' And Rat will run through the city of ten million men, spreading a terrible disease that will kill them all in the night.

"And a plague and a pestilence will sweep across the land, O My Many Beloved. The men will learn that they should have listened, for Rat will do what none of the others could do. You, My Many Beloved Children, will swarm over the millions of bodies dying on the hill. And the hill will be ours forever. And the hill will be sacred again."



Walt Disney



Chapter Two: Infesting the World

The story was part of a book of essays... it was called "The Rat Race" — which, I learned, means a race where, no matter how fast you run, you don't get anywhere. But there was nothing in the book about rats, and I felt bad about the title because, I thought, it wasn't a Rat Race at all, it was a People Race, and no sensible rats would ever do anything so foolish.

— Mr. Ages, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

The Tale of Gregor Flames-and-Shadows

Gregor's eyes are glassy, and his skin is cold. Sweat clouds his brow. Shivering in the darkness, as rain pours down just inches away from his cardboard haven, he slowly comes to his senses. Had he heard the words correctly? Or was he just hallucinating?

He's been asleep for a long time. It's dark now, or at least darker than the gray sky that usually hangs over Seattle. Someone has saved him from dying on the street, but his savior was clearly insane. She had a lot of lovely stories, and he'd been delirious enough to believe them. Julia talked nonsense, telling tales of defending the Wild, of fighting the minions of the Worm, of human Weavers building a vast civilization like a great spider web.

Unexpectedly, Gregor's reverie is disturbed by a loud interruption. A truck barrels down the street, making a late-night delivery. In terror, Gregor curls into a ball, wishing that he could hide, wishing that he could just crawl inside the walls and get away from the madness of the world around him. Shivering, he falls back to sleep...

A World of Savage Horrors: A Knife Skulker's Tale

...and when he wakes up, Julia is long gone. The rain has stopped, and the alleyway is bathed in the nacreous light of the full moon. The visions that had assailed his senses remain in his mind like a dull ache. Rat blood in his veins? Armies of wolves slaughtering his brothers and sisters? Obviously, his medication is running out. Another episode like that, and he'll start wandering the streets, preaching about the end of the world.

That last thought sets his mind racing. His nerves tense like steel wires. Sensory overload returns. Whispering voices; surging blood; the chattering of tiny teeth. Instinctively, he stands erect, then slouches, sniffing the air for danger. The glint of moonlight reflects off a nearby window.

His heart races. Glass! he thinks. Smash it! What a lovely sound of broken glass! In a flash of preternatural speed, he rushes at the windowpane. Within seconds, his fist shatters it. Long jagged cuts bleed along his hand. His senses are out of control, scanning first left, then right, ready to lash out at anything nearby.



A pick-up truck enters the alleyway, and his heart pounds. Hide! Danger! Make yourself small! Gregor dives into the doorway again, frantically trying to hide behind a wall of soggy cardboard. He is far too big, though; there's no way he could hide in there. For some reason, his hands had start clawing at the wall, trying to wear a hole in it.

A door slams. Footsteps. A chuckle. Towering over him, a man in a leather jacket walks up to Gregor's pitiful attempt at subterfuge. His white hair is swept back in a long ponytail. Wrinkles on his face betray a lifetime of suffering. He stands in the alleyway and smiles. And Gregor, in the depths of mind, can hear the voices whispering again. Joe. His name is Joe. Thousands of tiny voices chitter in gleeful affirmation.

Something about this guy isn't right. His eyes look a little beady, and he seems to slouch a bit too much. Gregor muses pragmatically. Either that girl slipped me something psychotropic, or I really am in the clutches of the Rat People. Then the rat man begins to speak...

...

"Your ride's waiting, kid. I don't think you're gonna have much luck making a hole in that wall. Your fingers are bleeding. Hey, I got a bottle of Jack Daniels inside the truck, if you need it bad enough. Single-malt whiskey's one of the best cures I know for the Plague. Don't make it go away, but it'll make you feel a damn sight better.

"I know what you're goin' through. I got infected back in '82. You want to sleep here in the alley, that's fine with me, but I'm supposed to drive you out of here. You want to sleep in the back or ride up front? Yeah, good choice... I wouldn't want to sleep in the back of a pick-up truck either. Make yourself comfortable. It's gonna be a long drive...."

The Cities

A twenty-year old Ford rattles down the expressway to I-5. Gregor stares out the window, trying not to make eye contact with Julia's friend. Even from the freeway, the city looks cold and unforgiving. Then the driver starts rambling, the same kind of nonsense Julia was on about. Damn Rat People. Apparently, they love to go on about their delusions.

...

"Take a look at that mess out there, kid. Makes you sick, don't it? That's the world the Wolves wanted. Everything Julia told you, that's the result of what the Garou agree on. Damn fools ended the Impergium and let the humans have their own civilization. Five thousand years of human progress, and look at what they've got. Street gangs. Rampant crime. Pollution. Homeless dying on the street.

"Don't even try to tell me it's the fault of the Wyrms. That's what humans do to the world. Some folks'll try to tell you that Wyrms doesn't bring evil into the world, that it just magnifies the dark emotions that breed inside people, but I don't buy that New Age crap. The Garou blame the Wyrms, but it was humans that did all that. And the Wolves let them.

"Take a look up at the top of those skyscrapers. The people in those buildings wear nice clothes, trying to live so far above the people starving on the street. The rich folks think they're safe up there. They've built up layers and layers of crap — technology, corporations, wealth and progress — that they think it'll save them from all the madness around them. Layers of webs, binding up everything. It's funny, isn't it? The humans now act like they

own the world, and hunt down anything that threatens their superiority. It's all bass backwards; everything's gone to hell.

"The solution seems pretty damn obvious. It would be so easy to tear it all down. No matter how shiny and new they make that building, there's rats in the walls, kid. Spread a little disease through ventilation system.... take out the structural foundation with a little pyrotechnics... all that steel and concrete... it wouldn't take much to reduce it to rubble.

"You know, every time I come to the big city, I think the same thing. You know what's the biggest problem they got here? Overpopulation. It's like something was keeping the world under control, and it's just not there anymore. Too many damn people on the planet. Every time I see so many people walking down the street, I think, 'What would happen if a few of them just... disappeared?' In the history of the world, would it really make much difference? Maybe O'Tolley's would sell a few less burgers and Queequeg's will sell a little less espresso, but what's wrong with that? Too many damn people, that's what's wrong with the world. Kill 'em off, that's what we should do. Damn straight.

"Hey, I got some cheeseburgers under the seat. You hungry?"

The Wilderness

"Um... no," Gregor explains. "I'm a veget..." He stops himself, watching Rat Man's reaction carefully. "I used be a vegetarian, but those burgers smell... um... kinda good."

Gregor hates meat, but he starts rummaging through the bag. The taste is foul. Then again, if some swaggering Joe Bob has offered to give him a ride out of town, he's not in much of a position to refuse his courtesy. As long as he's safe and fed, it doesn't really matter. Gregor fastens his seat belt and obeys the first law of hitchhiking: Let the driver do most of the talking.

...

"Don't get me wrong, kid. The cities are screwed, but it ain't that much better outside of 'em. There isn't much real wilderness left. That Weaver they tell me about, it's binding up everything. I thought I would be safe, staying out on my dad's farm, but I was a fool. A hundred acres all around me, and I lost it all. I had a patch of wetlands on one corner of my property, until the EPA came in and seized it. Those bastards way out in Washington want to regulate everything. Started telling me what I could do on my own land. The webs are everywhere. Phone lines, power lines, barbed wire, television aerials, television transmissions, radio waves — they just keep growing. Every aspect of our life is contained, regulated and controlled.

"Wilderness? There ain't none left. Anywhere the government can send its agents, anywhere you can get radio or the TV, it's rural, but it ain't wild. And the human race keeps breeding and breeding, taking up more of the planet. I say its time the planet fights back."

"Fights back?" Gregor asks nervously.

"I'm talking about justice, kid. We're planning to mete out some country justice. We hold our own court, out in the wild. Judges, juries and executioners. If the visions hit you just right, we could teach you a lot about being a Skulker. Or if you like, you could train in one of our armies. We got Kin everywhere, and we are prepared."

Gregor tries not to flinch. Militias. These Rat People are all part of some militia. I'd better be real polite. *That's when Gregor notices the paper targets sitting under the seat. One of them has the outline of a policeman, and several big holes in the center of its head.*

"Course, I'm not asking you to join up with what we're doing. There's a lot of movements starting out in the wilderness; the one I joined is just one of them. I signed on because I was angry about losing my lands, about losing my rights. Everyone's looking for someone to blame. Some blame the government; some blame the bankers; some blame the Jews, or the blacks, or the environmentalists, or the United Nations. Me, I know it's all just the signs of the Apocalypse. Soon the whole damn human race is gonna get wiped out when the Wyld fights back.

...

"Um... the Wild?" Gregor desperately tries to change the topic, but to no avail.

"Yeah, kid. That's who we are. The force of the Wyld. Chaos unleashed. And you've just been recruited."

The Spirit World

"Wait a minute? Didn't Julia send for you?"

"Hell, no, kid. The Rat God sent me. The Voices told me you'd be in that alley. Rats work in mysterious ways. One of them steals something, takes it somewhere else. Another one knows where to pick that thing up, knows it'll be there. A third one is waiting to use it. No one is able to follow who does what, 'cause the Rat God makes a plan for each one of us. We hear, and it's done."

Gregor casually looks over at the door a few inches away. The locks have been broken off. There's no handle on the inside. The window won't roll down. His seat belt's already clicked into place. He thinks he could make a break for it, but that's when he notices the pistol sticking out of Rat Man's boot. This is all insane. He's in mortal danger. But he's also hungry. He decides to play along and gag on a few more of those nasty day-old cheeseburgers. Suddenly, they don't taste so bad.

...

"Scuse me. I know it might seem like our family's a little bit crazy, but you've got to widen your perspective a bit. Even the world you see outside that window is just part of a bigger picture. We're waiting for reinforcements from another dimension. There's a world waiting outside the one you see, a reflection of everything that happens in this one. Yeah, I see that look on your face — I didn't believe it myself 'til someone took me there. You'll see for yourself, and find where the Rat Race has been breeding and building for the last five thousand years. The cities, the wilderness — they're just a reflection of the spirit world.

"That's the best part of being one of us. We can step out into a world that isn't as messed up as this one. It's addictive; we've got spirit tunnels goin' through the whole damn place. Our Kin are holed up everywhere, so the Wolves don't find us. We've got access to realms no one else even knows about, and hiding places where we can watch the places everyone does know.

"If you concentrate, you can start to see that other world. Late at night like this, when the white-line fever sets in, you can practically drive there. You just sort of zone out and..."

The Voice

Joe flashes on the high-beams, reflecting light off metal. That's when the disease catches up with Gregor again. The trees becoming luminous, and suddenly, there's a lot more of them outside the window than there used to be. The truck isn't even on a road any more, just a long shining path leading off to the horizon.

The world is suddenly full of patterns. Gregor sees the road is paved in spider webs, telephone wires pulsing to the horizon — the Weaver. The cars are gone, replaced by speeding, luminous lights, the energy of trees by the roadside — the Wyld. The city quickly receding into the distance, its buildings pulsing dark and black with massive, corrupt tendrils — the hallmark of the Wyrn. Gregor shakes his head, trying to shake off the effects of the trip. The sickness is driving him insane; he's hallucinating again.

• • •

"Scuse me, kid. We're gonna take a little short cut. Don't like using the damn roads much. As I get older, road rage gets a little too easy. What the hell you expect, huh, bein' a shapechanger? Ha ha ha ha! Everyone's getting pissed off! Even the humans are getting angrier and more violent. You can tell the End Times are approaching... see it in a thousand different ways.

"Don't look at me that way. It ain't like I'm gonna start quoting from the Book of Revelations — well, not yet. Look, I know it's all a bit much. It's all a lot to take in, and if it weren't for the visions, you probably wouldn't believe any of it. You think we're all insane, don't you? I had it a bit easier I guess. I was chosen long before I was infected.

"Yeah, I see that look on your face. You've heard the voices too, haven't you? Did they put you on medication? Did you get that whole "chemical imbalance" talk? I still laugh at that one. Those voices... those were your brothers and sisters calling for you from the spirit world. That was the sound of your family, trapped in the Umbra, hidden behind the velvet shadow, waiting to break free. I kinda like it. The voices and the visions go away, once you change, but until then, you better listen real close to what they tell you."

"I thought I was losing it, too... until I heard the Voice. It happens to a lot of our Kinfolk, too. That's how our family has stayed together for so long. I remember sitting in my living room, back on the farm, when I heard someone calling my name. I didn't know where it came from, but I turned around to see who it was. There was no one in the house. There was no one within miles, but someone was calling me, clear as day.

"The spirits of the Rat God work in mysterious ways. Before I got my Birthing Plague — collapsed in the middle of my kitchen from the fever! — I did all sorts of things for the Rat God. I knew the End Times were coming. I started stockpiling food in my basement. I bought up cases and cases of ammunition. The gun running went a little fast and loose, but I knew the day would be at hand when all Hell broke loose.

"That wasn't the scariest part, though. The scariest part was when I Changed... and found out what was really going on. See, you're my Kin, distantly related, and I'm taking you to meet the family. We're all family, boy. We've got Kinfolk, but not like Mother's other children. We left the world for so long that a lot of our Kin's blood has become diluted. The blessing

of the rat blood never goes away — it lies dormant in your blood, like a disease — and one of our Kin can't really draw upon that gift unless he starts to hear his Momma calling for him.

"When everything's really quiet, one of our Kin might start to listen for signs of his brothers and sisters around him. Anything might set him off. A scratching in the wall. A whuffling under the floorboards. In the middle of a dark street late at night, he may start to hear a chittering sound coming from nowhere. It's enough to drive some people mad. That's the idea. You've been hearin' the Voice, boy.

The End Times

"I'm sure someone's told you about the struggle, the battle between good and evil. The Wolves seem to think that the Apocalypse is a foregone conclusion. I'm not so sure. After all, what exactly's at stake? Will the Apocalypse mean the end of all of creation? I'm thinkin' that maybe the "end of the world" will just mean the end of human civilization. For me, there's nothing wrong with that. The best thing that could happen to Mother's world is the end of the human race.

"And once the humans have been exterminated, millions of our brothers and sisters are gonna swarm over the world. No matter how much the Wyrn destroys, we are the purest form of the Wyld, and we will surge over the planet to cleanse it of evil. Pure chaos will overwhelm everything that remains. At least, that's what I see when I dream. That's what the Rat God whispers in my head.

"Now I've got this little plot of land just outside the city. Hasn't got much more than a trailer and this pick-up... and what I've got buried under the back yard. That's where we're going. That's where you can rest up a bit. You're family now, and we'll take care of you."

• • •

The truck comes to a stop out in the middle of Upper Butt Crack, Washington, somewhere off an access road in the eastern part of the state. There's no point in bolting now, not unless Gregor wanted to hide out in some barn somewhere. Might as well play along, since none of these people can be trusted anyway. Joe's farm isn't very impressive, just a double-wide trailer on a patch of land. Sure enough, you can see the "nature preserve" from where the truck is parked, fenced off by the government. The Ford stops on a oil-soaked stretch of asphalt. No one's around for miles.

That's when Gregor hears a rustling sound about ten feet away, like something's coming up out of the ground. The dirt settles as a crazed young woman pushes up a piece of plywood from underground. There's a tunnel stretching down under the earth. Who's this "family" that found me, anyway? Gregor thinks. Survivalist freaks? A local militia? Some religious nuts talking about the Earth Mother and the Final Days!

The raggedy young woman leers at him from underground. Unfortunately, Gregor has always had a weakness for dangerous women. He can smell her name: Ariel. Like the angel. He hears a whuffling sound at the back of his mind, and the headache starts to come back. Ariel straightens her dreadlocks and looks over Gregor with elevator eyes, scanning him from top to bottom. Then she starts off with her opening line:

"Shit! You look like a mess. Be careful stepping over those sacks. Fertilizer ain't cheap these days."



Crash Space: A Shadow Seer's Tale

So much for romance. She's as crazy as the rest of these Rat People. Gregor jumps down into the hole; the tunnel beneath it is lit by a single glow stick. The sacks of nitrates are piled ten feet high. In the dim orange illumination, Gregor can make out a big metal wall, some windows, and four words: KING COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT. Ariel jumps up into the driver's seat, turns on the headlights of the school bus, and shows Gregor his new home.

"Brilliant, isn't it? Burying a whole school bus in the back yard. The filtration system is over there. And don't go too near the Emergency Exit! It's a spirit-world thing; you wouldn't understand. We got the idea watching Koresh on TV. Think of it: a million rounds of ammunition stored in a buried school bus! They'd take some of the children down there for Bible study, too! I'm a Seer, myself, so I like the idea."

"Are you gonna tell me more of those werewolf stories now?" Gregor asks. He tries not to look too hard at the fifty cans of pork and beans stored behind the driver's seat.

"You don't want to listen to those werewolf stories. They're all lies. We all started out as part of the same family, so I guess we have a few ideas in common, but that ended five thousand years ago...."

Gregor winces. Every Ratkin seems to have his own delusions about the end of the world. Resigning himself, Gregor sits down next to the Pork & Beans, gets ready to snag a can when no one is looking. Picking out the bits of meat will take a while though; any more bad meat, and his vegetarian system is gonna make him puke.

"Are you about to tell me the reason you're buried in this school bus with all these sacks of fertilizer and boxes of ammunition?"

"Damn straight. See, it's like this..." Her eyes start to go glassy with religious fervor...

Mystic Shit

"Let me set the record straight. I'm sure Julia told you a lot of New Age nonsense, but she and I don't agree. We both know the Garou terrorized the other Changing Breeds during the War of Rage and established themselves as the lords of the Earth. For five millennia, we've watched and waited from our breeding grounds in the spirit world, so naturally, our perspective is a little different. Over last few millennia, we've preserved our sacred stories far away from the madness of Earth. The Wolves, however, have been living in this insane little world for thousands of years, and as their stories have been retold again and again, the Lie has been reinforced over and over.

"Ask the Wolves, and they'll tell you over and over the story of how the world fell apart. In the beginning, there were three primal forces in Gaia's world: the Wyrn, the Weaver and the Wyld. The Weaver made all the structure of the world, creating the trees and rivers and mountains. The Wyld breathed life into the world, allowing the Weaver's creations to thrive. And to prevent the world from growing too quickly, the Wyrn snipped at the threads of creation that prospered more than they should. I agree with that part.

"Somewhere along the way, the Weaver grew too ambitious, and trapped the Wyrn in her threads. The Mad Weaver

went insane, trying to bind all of creation in her web, and the Wyrms, in its fury, lashed out at everything. This also has some truth to it. There's one part I still wonder about: What exactly caused the Weaver to go insane? For every event that happens in the spirit world, there's a corresponding event in the mundane world, the physical world, right? If the Weaver really did go insane and try to control everything, no doubt there was something similar going on in this world.

"You can see where I'm going with this, right? The world wasn't thrown out of balance at the dawn of time, like some folks'll tell you. The Weaver went insane around the same time that humans tried to make the world their own. After the Concord, it's the humans who swarmed across the planet, trying to bind up all the natural places of the world within the Weaver's lifeless webs. I don't blame the Mad Weaver, 'cause she's just a reflection of human civilization. That same civilization the Garou have been protecting for thousands of years.

"The Wolves will tell you that the Wyrms became corrupt, and that all the suffering in the world is the result of its tendrils of corruption. Where dark emotions surge, the minions of the Wyrms exploit and victimize. Just like in the Impergium, when they thoroughly infected the Garou. The War of Rage was instigated by the Garou, but curiously enough, they don't like to remember that. They won't take responsibility for it, and they sure as hell aren't trying to make up for what they did.

"Instead, most Garou look at all the suffering in the world, and they have the same response: they blame the Wyrms. The Wyrms has become a scapegoat for everything the humans and the Garou have done, for all of their failures. Even though they think the

Apocalypse is a foregone conclusion, they're willing to die one by one fighting the inevitable. And along the way, they fervently protect the cause of the whole damn problem: the humans."

Motherwit

Ariel starts rocking back and forth right about then, shaking with religious fervor. She's practically gazing off into another dimension, like that "spirit world" Joe talks about. Gregor stealthily cracks open another Beenie Weenie can behind his back, dips his fingers in the tomato sauce. The pork and sausage don't bother him as much as they once did; in fact, he's getting to enjoy the taste. The "Emergency Exit" is wide open at the back of the bus. The front of the bus is lit up with headlights, but he could easily hide in the back. Gregor watches Ariel closely, waiting for his chance to bolt....

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"I'll put this in simpler terms: Do you know what happens if rats breed more children than their environment will support? They know that when a colony is too big, they can either all die slowly of starvation and disease, or a few of us can die quickly. It's only logical for us to turn against each other until the balance is restored. Mothers eat their weakest children, and the weakest of the swarm is destroyed for the benefit of all.

"Now, consider this: There are too many humans on this planet for the Earth to support. They can all suffer slowly, through disease and starvation, or the weakest should be killed. The Weaver's webs should be severed. Every human that dies, before that balance is restored, heals Mother's world. Of course, not all of my brothers and sisters will agree with me. Some say we've got to 'sever the Webs that drove the Wyrms insane.'



Some say we should care for the humans who are starving on the street and get them to join us. Me? I just pray for the day when the human race dies out. Now you know why this Plague is hammering you so hard..."

Ratkin Psychology

"You probably understand why your body's been reacting so strangely to the disease. Look at you! You're so scared that your hands are twitching. I can almost feel your muscles tensing from where I'm sitting. And you look like the visions are pushing you over the edge. This madness you have, this disease — you better get used to it, because it's going to be with you for the rest of your life. Your blood, my friend, pulses with the Wyld, and there's thousands of years of feral instincts and memories flowing through it right now.

"We know the force of the Wyld better than any of Mother's other children, because our ancestors have had to hide in the spirit worlds longer than any other Changing Breed. You look skeptical. If you're quiet enough, you can almost... hear... the spirit world. Sit still and listen to the blood flowing through your veins. You'll hear your nerves surging... twitching... You want to move... to scratch... to gnaw!

"That's the Wyld alive inside you! A source of endless strength! (THE CALLING OF ENDLESS CHAOS!) GLORIOUS MADNESS... CLIMBING THE WALLS!!! TEARING THEM DOWN!!! RIPPING AND TEARING AND CHEWING!!!

RAT MADNESS!!!

HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE!

CHCHCHK CHK! CHK! CHK! FT! FT! TTTTT!"

Gregor drops his fourth can of beans, leaps over the nearest seat and runs for the back of the bus. The door is shut, but if she does that again, he's going out the back. His hands start tearing at the corners of the door, trying to remember how to open it....

"Ssssh! Ssssh! Calm down! It's okay! It takes some practice to get used to your nerves racing like that. See, if the stress and anger builds up in you too much, your reason can't contain the rage building inside you. But if you can focus yourself on what you hear surging through your veins, you can master that energy. It's a good thing we've brought you somewhere safe.

"If you sit in a safe nest like this, and meditate on what you hear, you can learn to contain that madness. You can help reason win out over rage. Take a deep breath. Listen to your heart beating. Listen to those chattering sounds you've started making. Do you understand them? I wouldn't mind finding a nice, safe quiet spot where I can stay clean and maybe breed a few dozen kids. When you're really quiet and listening to the blood in your head, the surging of your nerves, when you start to clean the filth and foulness from your fur, that's when you can remember the fragments of Mother's wisdom within you."

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Gregor has made his way to the back of the bus. His hand is about five feet away from the handle. One thought runs through his mind like a mantra: must... open... door.... Gregor opens the emergency exit, and light floods the back of the bus. Screw this, he thinks. He's gonna run until they pin him to the ground. No more damn lectures. Worms, Weavers, Wild — screw it!

That's when the gateway to the next dimension opens.

The emergency exit opens up on a vast spirit tunnel, dimly lit by the illumination of another reality. No sane man would dare walk down that path, and probably, no one ever has. Three tiny forms leap out of the light, start running around the floor of the bus. "Christ! Rats!" Gregor reflexively jumps about a foot off the ground. The three rats stop in unison, then slowly turn to look at Gregor perched on top of the bus seat. There's a chittering in the back of Gregor's mind; he can start to make out words.

"What were you expecting?" the first rat says. "Werewolves, maybe?"

A Rodens' Tale: Twitcher Society

Gregor sizes up his situation. He is homeless and diseased, buried in a school bus under a farm in Eastern Washington. Three rats have entered the room from another dimension to talk to him. On the plus side, he's got two more cans of beans in his pocket, and a psychotic religious nut might want to sleep with him. Gregor does some quick mental arithmetic and decides he might as well listen to the Rat from Dimension X.

"Don't worry, kid. I'm not diseased... yet. I won't bite you, not if you come down offa that bus seat. Stop acting like a damn housewife! Who the hell are you?"

"Sorry. I'm Gregor. Um... I don't know my full name yet. Um... Sleeps-in-Alleys? Eats-in-Dumpsters?"

"What's with this Three Names shit?" the rat says, clear as day. "Drinks-of-Vodka? Nibbles-at-French-Fries? Verbs-with-Pretentious-Poetry? Where the hell were you infected, a poetry slam? Are you trying to get in touch with your Injun ancestors or somethin'? We need to find you a name. First we got to figure out what the hell you are."

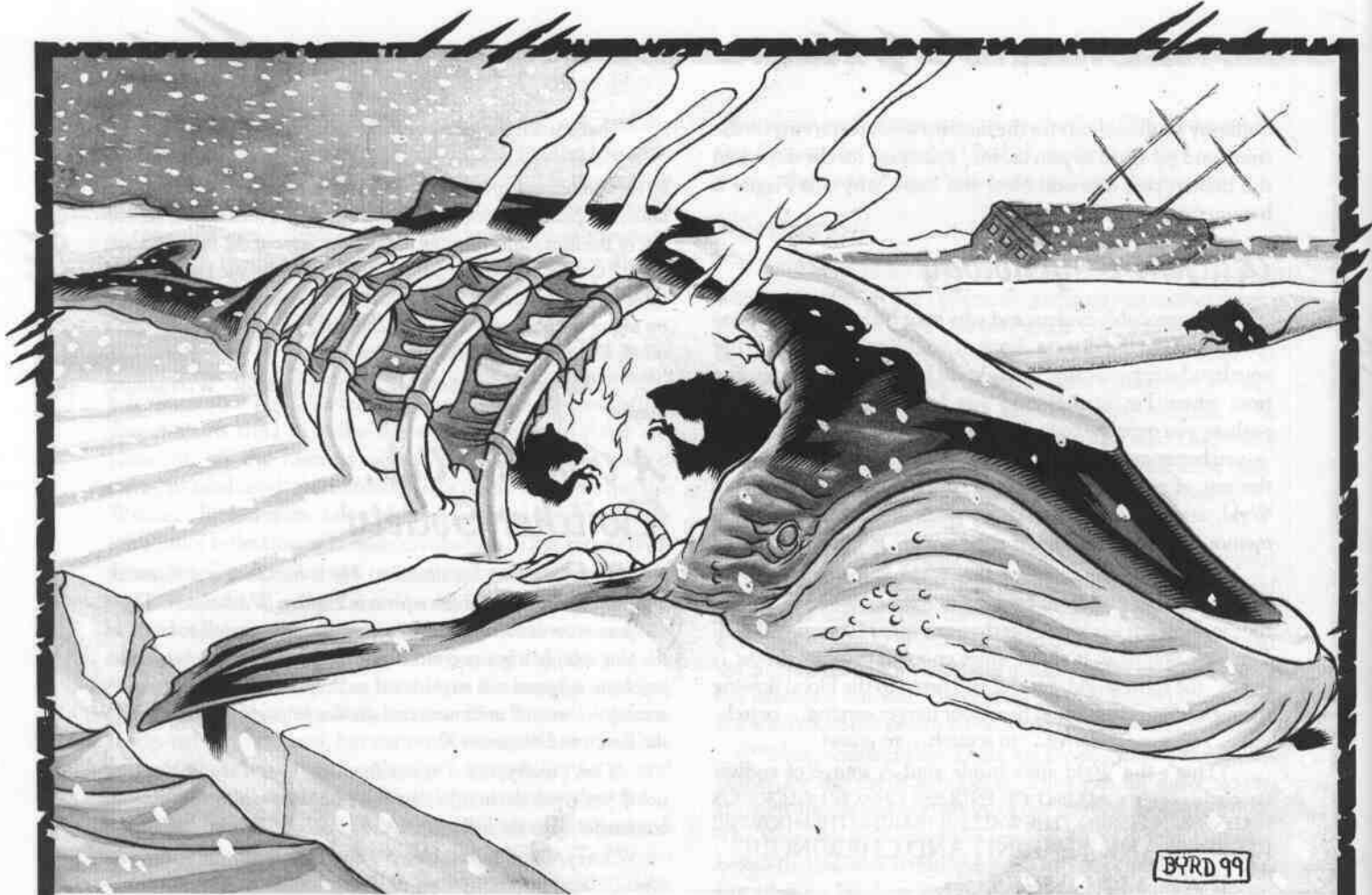
Gregor starts laughing, can't stop. It's all a dream. Then the Voices answer him in his head, something like a scream, like a sound of metal being torn. Round about that time, Gregor decides to shut the hell up. He falls onto the ground and curls into the fetal position. It seems like a definite improvement.

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"Hey, kid, now that you've been infected, you're one of us. That sickness you had, that was your Birthing Plague. The visions you had? They hold all the clues about who you really are. We may not all agree on how to survive the End Times, but we're all part of the same family, all descendants of the first Birthing Plague our Mother released upon the world. The eldest and the youngest, the fattest and the smallest — we all have our place within Rat's family. Once Her blood begins to pulse in your brain, you'll begin to hear the many names of your brothers and sisters.

"Unfortunately, the first time you Change, the voices stop... for at least a little while. Most Ratkin don't hear the voices unless they've gone really nuts, when Rapture takes hold of them. There's a few lucky ones, though, who never have to be alone. The voices call them all the time. Rats like me. Rats like you. The Twitchers.

"Yeah, that's it, Greg. We all start off on a first-name basis, but your true name, well, you don't get that until after your Rite of Passage. My kind, we don't go in for that. I got me a name,



and I found it the old fashioned way: I stole it. It's a name someone threw away... that's the best kind. I can tell you're gonna be one of us, so this'll be easy.

"Let me tell you about the Rite of Naming, an old Twitcher tradition. You take a big trash can filled with Stuff: the bigger, the better. Then you knock it over. Most of these things in there got words on 'em. You pick one at random, grab it in your teeth (or your little paws, if ya ain't got the guts), and you've got the beginning of a name. Take me for instance. I was the runt of the litter, so Mom called me Johnnie. Once I was old enough—and didn't die in some terrible way—I found the nearest pile of trash, snatched the first piece of paper that fell on me, and ran off with my name. One of the homids read it to me, and he said it fit me just right. I'm proud of my name.

"I'm Johnnie McMuffin, and don't you forget it."

Crash Space

Gregor can't stop laughing. He's snapped. He's gone. He's off in Joe's White-Line Dimension. He's trapped in Julia's Fever Dream, or hearing about the end of the world in Ariel's Underground Survivalist School Bus, and he's snapped.

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"Don't worry, kid, we don't all live like this. We don't all join militias, or live on the streets, or sign up as monkeywrenchers and ecoterrorists. Some of us are smarter than that. Some of us really are rats. This place here... this is just another Ratkin nest, a nice bit of crash space. Anyone else saw it, they'd think it was a mess, but it's home. The safe places become sites where we can

rest up and share stuff. You hang out with these people long enough, you'll see what I mean.

"Crash spaces are the only safe places to meditate. Rats don't react all that well to stress; if you lived in a sewer tunnel long enough, you'd know what I mean. Yeah, if a rat lives in filthy conditions with constant danger, he's gonna act like a feral little beast. If his home is overcrowded, he'll get so wound up he'll be set to attack his brothers and sisters. There's something about a nest, though, that's got a calming effect on everyone of the blood. I always get kinda warm and sleepy—kinda hungry, too. This is your crash space, and you better remember where it is.

"Now, there are some kinda nests I'd never go near, and I'd advise against you going there either. They call 'em rat colonies; they're huge and dangerous. Around here, we're all rather informal. We all see things differently, but it's not like we're going to eat each other because of it. The biggest families of Ratkin, though, they've got some pretty fierce disagreements about how to do things. The ones that get their act together, they start forming tribes, setting up rituals, starting a whole bunch of mumbo-jumbo. Invariably, one rat's going to try to rule them and serve as the Rat King. Any real Twitcher learns to avoid them like the plague. You, you're one of us. A street rat. As long as you can make it back here, you're safe.

Delusions, Again

"I know this is all confusing; it's because people have been lying to you for so long. Human history is built upon lies. There

are two groups of creatures who have perpetuated them throughout history. The first one, the humans, are utterly oblivious to the truth. They believe the Lie because they've been kept ignorant. Gaia, the Earth Goddess, has sheltered their minds from the truth because they've suffered so much already. The second group, includes the Wolves — you might know them as Garou, or Lupines, or werewolves, or whatever, but I know them for what they are. Bastards. Deceivers. Killers. The fools who started the Concord and are responsible for all this mess.

"This world the humans built since the Concord? It's all part of the Great Lie. They like to keep it all shiny and new, just to fool themselves. Their whole society is built around the nicely packaged, the neatly contained, and the freshly scrubbed. Dent a human's car and you'll see what I mean. A little scratch about as big as a rat's paw drives him ballistic. Those big square buildings above ground they like so much, they keep them shiny and bright, just to keep from thinking about all the rot and imperfection inside everything. Tearing them down exposes the Lie. For some reason, the wolves think that all destruction has something to do with the Wyrms. They're fools. Chaos works much faster than corruption. That seething rage that lies sleeping within you, that's chaos. That's the Wyld — your strength.

"Maybe there's hope, huh? Maybe we can teach them a little about the Lie, just by giving entropy a little push. Start small. Scratch a door. Tear the corner of a piece of paper. Rip a little piece of cloth. That book you're holding. It looks so nice and shiny! Can you scratch it? Can you tear off a little piece? Maybe you'll feel a little guilty. Then, oddly enough, you'll feel... free, because the Lie will start to give way.

"It's addictive, though. Once you let a little chaos out, you'll want more. Maybe you'll want to take off your shoes and walk around barefoot... or draw on a wall... or just break a human law for the hell of it. If a human catches you, she'll go ballistic, 'cause humans fear chaos. All laws contain the Wyld. They know instinctively that the Wyld can destroy their world... and replace it with Mother's world.

"And what if it did? What if, in one of the biggest human cities, we set off enough explosives on street corners and released enough plague and shut down a power plant or two? One rat couldn't do it all, but I know a thousand rats could. I'll tell you what would happen: *the Wyld would start to come back*. And you know what would happen after that? The Wyrms would start to weaken. Of course, not all of my brothers and sisters agree with me, but, well, you know....

"One of my Bone Gnawer friends — he says he gnaws on bones so his teeth won't grow — says he thinks the Apocalypse will be the end of human civilization, and that will mean the end of the world. I told him a little secret. If all the human cities go to hell, that doesn't mean the end of the world. That means the battle for the world has just begun. When the power goes out, and the policemen can't do anything, and all the television screens get smashed and there's breeding in the streets and killing and looting and riots, then the real War of the Apocalypse will begin.

"And guess what, kid? It's a war we're going to win. We are the Wyld, and we will win. You better start training now.

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"I don't understand," Gregor responds. "Severing the Weaver's webs? You're talking about gratuitously ripping and tearing down anything you feel like."

"Uh, yeah..." his Twitcher friend replies.

"But... it's not some abstract concept to me. You're talking about messing with people's shit. Breaking windows. Keying cars. Stealing people's stuff."

"Uh... yeah. By the way, that's a nasty cut you've got on your knuckles."

Gregor slowly lifts his hand, looks at like it's an alien lifeform grafted onto his arm. Then the memory came back: a few hours ago, he had slammed his fist through a window for no particular reason.

"Welcome to the family, brother."

The First Change

The visions come back. Sitting on the roof of a farm out in Montana, waiting for the FBI to come in and kill him. Hiding in alleyways, striking from the darkness at anything that just happens to piss him off. The voices of ten thousand brothers and sisters waiting to break through from another dimension and become real again. Feeling so much anger surging through his blood that he's set to kill.

The scratching starts again. Is it on the outside of the bus? Or is it coming from that other dimension everyone keeps talking about? That spirit world... Gregor's trapped underground in a school bus... trapped like a rat... he feels his anger surging through him....

Gregor's way over the edge now, laughing and shaking and giggling as a few more of the walls that confine his reality come crumbling down. He starts physically shaking. His skin is pulsing. Reflexively, he decides he's not going to hide it anymore... his skin starts growing fur, the front of his skull grows larger, ripping through his skin... his spine curves, hunching him over... his teeth start cutting through his lip....

Gregor slowly grows to a full seven feet, eventually towering over everyone around him. He lowers his head, hunches over and bears his yellow teeth. Rage flows through him like blood; anger surges; fur bristles. Then the screaming starts, the squealing, the shrieking, like the sound of metal being ripped apart slowly. And when it all comes to an end, a hulking rat-shaped monster is cowering in the back of the school bus. The monstrous beast starts choking out a strange coughing sound: black bile. The fever is passing. The madness is gone. Another Ratkin stands on Gaia's world.

"Hmmpff," McMuffin stoically declares. "They're so cute when they're small."

Epilogue

Nine months later, Gregor's finally made it back to his uncle's farm. He's sitting on the rooftop with a high-powered rifle, waiting for the ATF agents outside the front gate to make up their minds. It's just like the visions told him, months ago. There's a storm gathering on the horizon, and Gregor's waiting for it. Like any good Twitcher, he feels the surge of the Wyld pulsing through his veins.

There's a feeling on the wind, something like ozone, and it's pissing Gregor off. The agents are getting ready to call in for back-up... unless he does something first. He feels his anger pulse through him... the bones pushing up through his face... the skin giving way... He leaps off the roof top, rifle in hand, charging into the gathering of Federal agents.

Gregor's got a taste for meat now, and he likes it.

The Fringes of Reality

I think we are in Rat Alley, where dead men have lost their bones.

— "The Wasteland," T.S. Elliot

Humans control the cities; werewolves stalk the wilderness. Ratkin hide wherever the humans and Wolves can't find them. Since the earliest days of the world, the wererats have hidden in secretive breeding grounds, spawning hordes of offspring for one epic goal: undermining human civilization. Once the Garou tried to kill off the Ratkin race, but now the servitors of chaos are back with a vengeance.

Most Changing Breeds keep their numbers small, but Ratkin are the most prolific shapechangers in the world. Privileged Ratkin breed hundreds of children for rapidly growing, sprawling anarchistic colonies. When their tunnels become overcrowded, the youngest wererats leave the crowded tunnels of their nest to roam the world in rat packs. Not everyone follows the same path. Some races of exiled wererats prefer to consort with the ephemeral creatures of the spirit world, building kingdoms far from the madness of mankind. Others have joined with Ratkin plagues, vast families of wererats that keep in touch across entire continents. From the back-alleys of urban neighborhoods to the mythical realms of lost dimensions, Ratkin have been infesting reality for millennia, surviving the worst dangers existence has to offer.

Rat Packs

Rats have a reputation as being untrustworthy. They're not, really... they just define loyalty by a different set of standards. While werewolves might dedicate themselves to the same totem and pack for a lifetime, trusting any one group for too long can seriously impair a Ratkin's chances for survival. Alliances within a deceit of Ratkin are always temporary at best. Whenever a Ratkin allies with other living things, he's got every right to ask one question: "What's in it for me?"

Before the pack is formed, the rodents *always* need a few temporary, short-term goals before they can work together. This is declared during the rite that forms the pack. If the amount of risk or danger grows too great, or if the wererat has goals that aren't fulfilled, he always has the right to bolt and strike out on his own. This may involve a slight loss of Renown, but a wererat's strongest long-term goal — surviving long enough to affect the outcome of the Apocalypse — overrides all other concerns.

Until that time, the Ratkin stays tight with the dysfunctional family of misfits who travel with him. Rats travel with their own kind, if possible. A rat pack might consist of up to ten full-blooded wererats, but five is more the norm: a Runner, Seer, Skulker, Warrior and Freak comprise a typical pack. In contrast, packs of normal rats are *huge* — an average pack of *Rattus norvegicus* may consist of over sixty rats.

Paranoid or suspicious Ratkin may invoke a Contract Rite before allying with a pack, demanding that the spirits witness the alliance. Breaking the rite doesn't have severe consequence for most wererats (other than a reduction in Renown), although Knife-Skulkers are fanatic about upholding them. If a Ratkin can't find others of his kind, his pack mentality may very well lead

him to other supernatural creatures — these rat travelers are known as *consorts*. Even if a lone Ratkin hasn't learned the Contract Rite, he has every right to demand what he wants before offering his support to anyone. If a Ratkin doesn't feel like he's getting a fair shake, he'll rip off whatever he wants and leave.

Rat packs have primitive methods of establishing dominance, like most gatherings of communal animals. While werewolf packs are concerned with establishing an alpha leader, rat packs must also establish a *straggler* or *runt*: the weakest member of the pack. Werewolves struggle to see who will "finish first" in any conflict; wererats are more obsessed with not finishing last. If the runt bolts from the pack, the community of rats must still find someone else to act as the straggler.

For the record, the runt in a pack usually starts out as a Storyteller-controlled character, a "whipping boy" who looks for revenge by seeking out the other pack member's weaknesses and failures. When he actually succeeds in getting his comeuppance, it serves as a source of Rage for the runt's target. If the pack is sufficiently amused, they may decide to make the victim the new runt. That wererat must then keep that role until he overcomes another in a test for dominance.

High and Low

Ratkin society has its own stratification, from the elite who live in the largest infestations to the scum who spread chaos and terror in the streets. There's a big difference between wererats who pledge to protect Ratkin nests and the anarchistic rat packs who would never go near them.

Packs of anarchistic Ratkin are typically known as *low packs* or "*gangs*" — the violent wererats who assemble them are often called *ramblers*. Formal, traditional rat packs who prefer the gratitude of Ratkin elders are known as *high packs* or "*retinues*" — the esteemed wererats who serve in them are known as *courtiers*. There are a few obvious differences between these two types of packs.

— *Ramblers* define the phrase "preserve the Veil" very liberally; if a bunch of humans snap into Delirium, it helps bring chaos into the world. In fact, anything that brings about chaos is good, regardless of the consequences.

— *Courtiers* are fanatic about protecting the Veil; if a bunch of humans near their nest are forced into Delirium, someone might investigate and uncover their nest. If courtiers don't stay hidden, their breeding grounds might be threatened.

— *Ramblers* don't care who performs a given rite. If the Shadow Seer gets killed, for instance, someone else may have to perform the next Rite of Dedication.

— *Courtiers* have formalities of who should perform which rite. If a Ratkin of the "wrong aspect" performs a rite, he should lose Renown for his impudence.

— *Ramblers* don't need an "alpha," since no one is better than anyone else. It's more important to assign blame when something fails.

— *Courtiers* should follow the highest-ranking Ratkin present, or at least resolve the issue of who is most fit to lead through gamecraft, facedowns, tests of wits or non-lethal combats.

— *Ramblers* can get enough Renown to advance in Rank just by attending Twitcher revels. Infamy is good enough for them.

— Courtiers demand proper recognition for their deeds, and want to distinguish the Ratkin who demonstrate Cunning from the wererats who fulfill their Obligation to the Ratkin race. Infamous wererats are good for something too, though: attempting to fulfill contracts that are far too dangerous for proper courtiers.

— Ramblers might breed with just about any human or wharf rat. They abandon mothers with illegitimate children and scrawny Kinfolk wherever they travel.

— Courtiers are concerned with earning the right to breed with (or becoming) the most esteemed Rat Mothers. They take pride in the accomplishments of their carefully bred offspring.

— Ramblers see themselves as guardians of pure chaos. They hate courtiers who set up rules for the orderly working of society, even inside Ratkin nests.

— Courtiers see themselves as the protectors of the young and defenders of sacred breeding grounds. They hate ramblers who endanger the safety of their nests.

Gangs of ramblers and retinues of courtiers represent the two extremes of Ratkin society. Think of them as the two largest “camps” of Ratkin society, if you like. No doubt your rat pack will probably fall somewhere in between the anarchy of ramblers and the elitism of courtiers.

Other Alliances

Not all wererat stories involve packs and nests. Many Ratkin are loners, or follow secretive commands whispered by their chosen god. A talented few find reasons to associate with other supernatural creatures. Shadow Court cliques, Shadow Lord cults, Sabbat packs, *hengeyokai sentai*, grudging alliances of Changing Breeds and even circles of Renegade wraiths can all benefit from a few shapechanging rodent allies. Ratkin still retain the need to find a straggler (or “fall guy”) when his chosen allies fail, but curiously, other creatures are offended by this type of behavior. Before long, even the best packs self-destruct, leaving a few more wererats to wander the world, seeking chaos in all its forms.

• **Consorts:** As allies of the Wyld, Ratkin consorts pair with unusual coteries of supernatural creatures, following their whims in the process. Such alliances never last for long — the thought of doing so for more than a few cycles of the moon is far too predictable for one of Rat’s children.

Some opportunities to work as consorts are obvious, to say the least. Tunnel Runners know the ways of the Umbra exceedingly well, and will offer their services if they desperately need something in return. Munchmausen may offer changelings a chance to learn more about (alleged) Rat Kingdoms. Plague Lords need to find protection for their spirits’ journeys into the underworld; they also have a habit of digging up a wraith’s most carefully hidden Fetters. And finally, any Ratkin should have at least a minimal amount of respect for Bone Gnawer werewolves. The Rat God works in mysterious ways, after all.

• **Sentai and Nezumi:** Trust between the Changing Breeds is much stronger in the Eastern Concordiat. The War of Rage never affected the *hengeyokai*, the shapechangers of the East. To this day, shapeshifters of vastly different races form *sentai*, temporary packs for achieving temporary goals. The

Nezumi, or “Japanese Ratkin,” serve as masters of Low War in these packs, offering their masterful skills of espionage and assassination.

In this same spirit, Eastern Ratkin visiting the West have fewer grudges against Western changers. In desperate times, they may attempt to forge a temporary alliance with another Changing Breed... as long as everyone concerned knows that once the quest is finished, everyone goes their separate ways. Western Garou are another matter entirely. Nezumi are wary of Western Shadow Lords and Stargazers, but will usually consider a brief alliance. Working with Red Talons can be difficult, but orchestrating a combined effort against the local human population is always possible. Any other werewolf should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Never make a deal with a Lupine unless you can benefit immediately... and abandon them eventually.

• **Bonding:** It is possible, though extremely difficult, for a Ratkin to develop a long-term partnership with another Changing Breed’s Kinfolk or another supernatural creature. However, keeping a friendship with a Ratkin ally takes a significant amount of work. They’re high-maintenance relationships, to say the least.

In game terms, if a Ratkin has a strong cause to work with another creature of the night, her ally should invest at least one experience point at the end of each session they work together. When the number of points invested exceeds the Ratkin’s permanent Willpower, a temporary bond is established. This doesn’t mean the Rat will do anything stupid or suicidal on behalf of her ally, only that she’ll accede to the alliance. If the creature ever betrays her ally or foregoes the investment, all bets are off, and the Ratkin will bolt for safety at the first opportunity. This largely applies to those who take Ratkin as allies through Backgrounds or the like; a player needn’t sacrifice experience to maintain a friendship with another player’s Ratkin, but the Storyteller should make sure she gives the Ratkin enough attention — or that rat’s out of there.

Ratkin Societies

First you see us; then you don’t.

Now you’ll hear us; now you won’t.

It’s a secret for survival in a very nasty world.

— The Weasels, Terry Gilliam’s *Wind in the Willows*

For most wererats, infiltrating human and supernatural societies, upholding the obligations of an aspect, serving as a minion of the Wyld, and running with an anarchistic rat pack makes life sufficiently complex. Truly disturbed Ratkin are troubled by other cultural nightmares. Some belong to elaborate families that stretch across entire continents, while others hide near sacred sites with the protection of obscure Ratkin tribes. If you feel alone in the world, keep reading. If you’re wise enough not to trust your own kind, scurry away from these places as quickly as you can.

Nests

Whether they’re referred to as burrows, infestations or just plain crash space, sacred places offer sites of healing and meditation to Ratkin on the run. Collectively, wererats commonly describe these places as “nests,” since they’re used as

breeding grounds first and foremost. While rat packs roam the world seeking adventure and conflict, many rodents prefer the safety of a nest to the dangers of a world run by humans.

The smallest nests may only harbor one or two rat packs, where the fate of the place is decided by the local pack leaders. Travelers refer to these hideaways as "crash space." Homid Ratkin are most common in such places, since they are often tucked away in temporarily safe places in the urban landscape. A slightly larger hidey hole might be ruled by one Rat Mother and her brood of loyal children. By contrast, a vast breeding ground on the fringes of the spirit world may have an entire court of wererats as attendants.

Nests of all kinds are often separated by miles of sprawling urban terrain and vast labyrinths of tunnels. Tunnel Runners relay messages between the hundreds or even thousands of nests in a city. To facilitate their duties, Tunnel Runners have evolved a traditional language of scraping and rattling on pipes and walls. By rapping on pipes deep underground, they can spread their messages farther.

The more rats gather at a site, the more likely it is that politics will set in. Some of the largest Ratkin sites of power are known as *burrows*, and are typically constructed by hundreds of burrowing brown rats; the biggest communities of Ratkin are called *infestations*, and are dedicated to chaos in its purest form. Though some rat packs prefer to stay as far away as possible from social battlegrounds, it is inevitable that during their travels, they will be drawn into elaborate rodent intrigues.

Rodens Ratkin usually hold most of the key positions in the largest colonies, since Ratkin who have grown up around humans aren't trusted fully. Metis Ratkin serve as their guardians and prop up their power. Rodens politics is so extensive that stalking into a nest in Homid form is considered an insult. The largest warrens will have shelters nearby for destitute Kinfolk, but a sprawling network of tunnels keeps anyone in human form outside.

Rat packs are a necessary part of Ratkin society, but wererats who spend too much time in the human world are watched carefully by their rodens relations. Ratkin who like to live in the cities of men face a subtle xenophobia that can never be fully dispelled. A traveling rat pack that wants to petition the leader of a sacred nest must approach her in rat form and, just to be safe, put everything in terms a rat would understand. Many feel safer never venturing near burrows or infestations unless it's absolutely necessary.

Elders

Whether trapped in this world or isolated in distant dimensions, rats are communal creatures. Even though rats don't always trust each other, they still form extended communities. There's no guarantee that all the Ratkin in one nest will be able to share the skills necessary for survival, so sometimes it's necessary to travel a long way to find a particular specialist. In addition to learning one of the eight aspects of Ratkin society, a privileged wererat may also take a position of leadership in the colony, becoming the local "elder" of his aspect.

In a large rat colony, any one of these elders may step forward to assume leadership in times of trouble. Typically, no

one below Rank Three presumes to lead the local rodent populace and become its ruler. Anyone who contests for leadership may do so; such methods are strikingly similar to the three methods Garou use to choose their alphas. If you try to assume leadership of a colony and fail, you lose Renown; if you succeed, then your new rank carries great privilege. Incidentally, the title of ruler never lasts for more than one day. You get your moment in the sun, but starting at dawn the next day, any of the other elders can declare himself, herself, or itself the new chief.

- **Rat Mother:** Raising children is essential to Ratkin survival, and protecting the young even moreso. Rat Mothers are thus the most respected and revered members of a nest. Since they often spend the most time there, they often have the most say about a nest's priorities. In larger colonies, when a local problem threatens the safety of the children, all the Rat Mothers will assemble to discuss a solution. The momma rat who has bred the most children leads them.

- **Scout:** In more extensive nests, rats breed in great numbers. That means that someone has to command all of the rat packs that scout the immediate area for danger. Rats prefer to scrounge for food near their breeding grounds, but a few need to find other places that can offer basic necessities. Occasionally, the Scout organizes a raid on a human place of habitation that can make life better for the colony.

- **Warlord:** When hundreds of rats gather in one area, someone must command the largest swarms. The Warlord does more than prepare for military defense; he also needs to soothe the egos of all the Warriors who live there. The entrances to the colony have to be kept hidden, the troops have to stay stronger than the rats they protect, and threats to security have to be contained.

- **Mystic:** In the largest infestations, the sacred site is so overrun by minions of the Wyld that it contains powerful magical energies. A Mystic will then act as a caretaker and guardian to this highly valuable resource. In some safe havens, the Mystic may even watch over a pack of Shadow Seers, who attend to local rites. Any nest that does *not* have a Mystic needs to periodically send out rat packs or Tunnel Runners to find someone who can advise them on spiritual matters. Usually, a nest will need decades to grow before it requires a dedicated Mystic.

Challenges and Tests of Dominance

If you want to depose a colony's ruler, or become an elder for a day, you'll have to challenge your rival one-on-one, rat to rat. How you do this depends on the ruler's aspect. If you want to prevent a Rat Mother from leading a colony on any given day, for instance, you must defeat her in a *staredown*. After all, no one can give a dirty look like your momma can! Both the Rat Mother and the pup who wants to challenge her roll Manipulation + Intimidation; the difficulty for each character is equal to 10 - their own Rank. Anyone failing a staredown loses two points of temporary Obligation Renown.

If you think that a colony's Scout isn't fit to rule, you're welcome to challenge him to a *test of wits*. You've got to come up with a challenge the rest of the colony's scouts agree on, however. Both the Scout and the punk kid who challenged him roll Wits + Subterfuge; the difficulty for each character is equal to the 10 - their own Rank. Anyone failing this contest loses two points of temporary Cunning Renown.

If you think you'd be a better commander than the Warlord, you may only challenge him if the nest is not currently under attack. All of the Warriors form a circle around you and the Warlord, and to unseat him, you'll have to beat him in *single combat*. This is always non-lethal (rat punches and kicks only), and is fought until the first non-aggravated wound is inflicted. Losing results in the loss of two temporary points of Infamy Renown and a solid ear-cuff from the victor.

Convincing the colony that you'd make a better elder than the local Mystic requires you to best him in a *test of wisdom*. Some will challenge you to contests of esoteric lore; others confuse you with imaginative gamecraft. Either way, after describing the contest, you and the Storyteller each roll Intelligence + Enigmas for your respective characters; the difficulty for each character is, of course, equal to 10 - the wererat's Rank. Anyone failing this contest loses two points of temporary Cunning Renown.

When a rat pack desperately needs to find a leader, these same four types of challenges are used. Tunnel Runners use tests of wits; Shadow Seers use tests of wisdom; Knife-Skulkers use staredowns; Warriors use non-lethal combat. If a Ratkin declares himself pack leader, unfortunately, the straggler may challenge him up to three times per day.

Renown and Rank

Visiting a tribe or colony is the easiest way to gain Renown, a measure of a Ratkin's status and reputation in wererat society. A Ratkin's Renown Trait illustrates his infamous accomplishments, his cunning achievements, and the

obligations he's fulfilled for wererat society. These are represented by three traits, appropriately titled Infamy, Cunning and Obligation. In some circumstance, the Storyteller may ask for a Renown roll to see if a character's reputation influences the reactions of other Ratkin; roll Infamy, Cunning or Obligation (difficulty 6) to see how much weight your reputation carries.

As experienced Werewolf players know, earning enough Renown can also increase a character's Rank, allowing him to learn more impressive Gifts. Once a wererat attains Rank Three, he can also become a tribal elder. Ratkin who flee the society that bred them care little for such recognition, but even the spirits respect a wererat who's upheld the ideals of his race. Experienced Ratkin quickly learn the names of the five levels of Rank: *Rakka* (Rank One), *Voto* (Rank Two), *Tava* (Rank Three), *Teppen* (Rank Four) and *Rrrrr't* (Rank Five).

Courts and Politics

There are no standard rules of order for rodent politics, but a few practices are common. Colonies can live with a different ruler each day, so small nests keep this informal, constructing a *low court*. In egalitarian style, gatherings of the low court are very communal, with no one demanding authority above anyone else. In a larger, more formal colony, *high court* reigns, and only one rat can rule on any given day. Through tradition, the highest-ranking elders will regularly convene to address the most important issues of the colony. No one wererat can rule over a high court for long. Each day, a new elder demands to lord his authority over the nest, forcing the weak to bow before him.



Ignoring Renown

There are numerous references to Renown in this chapter, but if you're planning on playing a one-shot Ratkin adventure, keeping track of this Trait isn't essential. Revel in chaos, and score some quick fun. The Storyteller can feel free to ignore all references to it. In a long-term chronicle, however, Renown is crucial. A player should feel free to take notes on the back of his character sheet about all that his rodents have accomplished, especially if she's the only Ratkin player in the troupe. Later, when the Ratkin visits a rat colony for the first time, the Storyteller can use the system in Chapter Five to translate those achievements into accolades, and possibly advance the character's Rank.

Once a nest gets large enough, even Ratkin get tired of this turmoil. If the local population gets organized, decides to settle down and dedicate their lives to the maintenance of the nest, they may form a collective known as a *tribe*, the most formal kind of Ratkin society. One wererat must become the leader of the new tribe, proclaiming himself the *Rat King*. The new ruler cannot be invested unless he has the support of all the elders; if they can't agree, a few of them might be killed or deposed by rivals. Rarely, the Rat Incarna herself may intervene, blessing the members of the court with visions of the *Rat Who Would Be King*. When the final choice is made, a Shadow Seer is summoned to perform the Rite of Investiture. Once a formal tribe has found its Rat King, no one can challenge his authority. The only way to depose such a ruler is to kill him and conspire to take his place.

Tribes

The Ratkin's use of the word "tribe" causes some confusion in dealings with Garou from time to time, since they treat their tribes differently. An Uktena werewolf might live anywhere in the world, but a Ratkin tribe stays to defend one nest, come hell or high water. The identity of a Ratkin tribe is shaped by the very site it is pledged to protect. In fact, huge nests are usually identified by the name of the tribe that lives there, whether that's the Blossoming Flower Tribe in Mongkok or the Circle K Tribe of Tucson, Arizona.

Some tribes choose an identifying device known as *The Mark* to show solidarity. In most cases, though, a Ratkin's ability to remember the names of all his kin make this redundant. Ratkin who wish to join a tribe temporarily may do so, but are always required to wear the Mark when visiting the local elders. Whether this is a sigil of scar tissue slashed into flesh, a type of stone worn around the neck, or a number ear-tag selected by a high-ranking Engineer, the Mark chosen always reflects the character of the local tribe.

The Rat King

After investiture, a Rat King or Queen may choose his or her own title and the required formal mode of address. If the high-ranking Ratkin of the local court cannot agree how a problem should be resolved, the Rat King makes a proclamation of how the local Ratkin will solve it. If his solution is

unpopular, his enemies may attempt to conspire against him, or even kill him. If this is too difficult, they may make a contract with a local Knife-Skulker to do it for them.

Through tradition, Rat Kings hold periodic feasts to address the needs of the populace, convening the tribal court. First, Tunnel Runners gather to address their sovereign, after taking a few scampering circuits of the king's chamber. They report on dangers surrounding the nest. Then, the eldest wererats, in order of rank, approach the Rat King with their gravest concerns. Lower-ranking Ratkin are also present, but at kept at a greater distance from the ruler. Once their concerns are addressed and their stories are told, the common rats may appeal to the ruler for justice. Any he cannot address by the end of the feast are referred to the local Knife-Skulkers.

Tribal court is a perversion of feudal and chivalrous ideas. For some, it is a method of keeping civility in a world gone mad. For others, it's an ego trip for one rat and a pain in the ass to everyone else. Rat packs may spend the rest of their days supporting a sagacious sovereign, or they may get sick of all the pomp and circumstance, crashing at low courts whenever possible. In some nests, the king or queen is little more than a figurehead; in others, he or she is a tyrant of the worst sort. Regardless of gender, the local ruler always chooses the Kinfolk who will bear his (or her) legions of children. The ruler can be of any aspect, and may continue to hold a position as a Rat Mother, Scout, General or even Freak after investiture.

Rat Kings hold their titles for life. The only way to depose a Rat King is to kill him. Any who fail to depose him will be exiled, crippled, killed or even eaten, depending on how much the ruler hates him. If the attempt succeeds, the conspirator who masterminded his assassination is the obvious choice for his replacement; sometimes a Pact of Vengeance will confirm who this is. Any who disagree strongly with this tradition may leave the nest... and start up another one nearby, establishing crash space and building it up to another infestation. In some parts of the world, it is traditional for the colony to then declare war on their rivals, a skirmish that can only really end when one of the Rat Kings dies, and another rises to take his place all over again.

Wererat Moots and Revelry

Although most are distrustful loners, ready to bolt whenever peril grows too great, rats occasionally have reasons for assembling in secret. Ratkin moots are festivals of paranoia. Wererats know that gathering together many of their kind in one place is dangerous; after all, that was part of how they were almost exterminated during the Impergium. Esteemed members of one aspect or colony may furtively assemble to briefly exchange information, but never without a bolthole nearby. Gatherings involving more than one aspect or colony degenerate into freakshows.

A Grand Moot of Ratkin typically involves several cells of Ratkin, limiting the number of wererats gathered in any one place. Tunnel Runners serve as messengers between cells, disseminated information in a vast game of telephone tag. Were it not for the Runners' excellent Blood Memory, misinformation would run riot through these moots like Zyklon B in a commuter train.

Ratkin in especially large cities also hold aspects moots, providing the opportunity for wererats with similar occupa-

tions to share information and test their abilities. Many prefer not to attend, since the idea of gathering all the Warriors or Engineers in one place could be deadly! Those who do attend often come away with a better understanding of their place in the Rat Incarna's master plans for the world. Every aspect handles these occasions differently.

Revels

Violent and anarchistic rat packs sometimes hold their own distinctive moots, known as War Revels. Often the goal of these gatherings is to get an army of rodents ready for a major undertaking for the good of the colony. This usually involves driving the rage of everyone present to a fever pitch. The participants begin by launching into ritual combat, lashing at each other with non-lethal weapons. Everyone present turns on each other for a brief while, fighting bitterly over trivial matters until the swarm is full of fury.

Twitchers are drawn to such occasions like mice to cheese. In addition to getting off on the raw energy of such events, they also petition local rat packs to let them join right before a major skirmish. If more than one Twitcher is present, they'll brag about everything they've done since the last Revel; recognition for these accomplishments is the primary way for these Freaks to gain Renown.

Twitchers like to host their own private Revels as well; these are more like anarchistic parties than war councils. First, the little rodent terrorist will dispatch Rat-spirits to invite the most dangerous rats in the realm. By tradition, a Twitcher Revel needs at least 13 attendees. On the eve of the festivities, the host gathers all the chaotic energy he can into his chosen isolated area, whether that's a warehouse, an abandoned lot, or even a patch of wilderness. By setting off an explosion, starting a conflagration, cranking up raucous music, or leading rats in a maddening, capering dance, everyone present tries to infuse the area with raw energy. Once chaos reigns, any full-blooded Ratkin present feels the need to brag about their victories over order. Renown is then awarded to the best stories of the evening.

Breeding and Gender

For the Ratkin, breeding isn't a mere diversion — it's a sacred duty. Ratkin don't just amass Obligation and Infamy for the sake of impressing just anyone; the most esteemed wererats attract the most-favored breeding partners. Anyone can go shag some unsuspecting rat down by the wharf (or a desperate human, for that matter), but Ratkin females have the right to refuse or reject a would-be suitor based on his contributions to his race. Since wererats are perfectly capable of remembering the names of all their Kinfolk, any proud parent takes pride in the accomplishments of his children, no matter how many there may be.

Unfortunately, this "need to breed" is proselytized to any rat who approaches a nest, whether male or female. Female Ratkin who take off into the world are the sorts who want more from life than large litters of children. They usually ritually scar or tattoo themselves to show that they are not available as breeding partners. This means that they'll get treated with disdain by the local Rat Mothers, but it's better than abandoning your life and surrounding yourself with squealing ratlings until you die.

Wererats can repopulate their race faster than any other *Changing Breed on the planet*. With other shapechangers, a Kinfolk who bears a 'Changer's offspring only has about a 10% chance of creating a full-blooded werebeast. Consider this, however: Ordinary rats can also breed over a hundred little ratlings a year. Unless some force acts to counteract this population explosion, gathering a swarm of wererats may only take a few years.

On the other hand, a Ratkin Kinfolk must survive the Birthing Plague to reclaim his legacy. Nine out of ten will die horribly. In addition, privileged elders have no qualms about letting lesser castes kill each other off, die seeking fortune in the supernatural world, or perishing in a pointless assault against implacable enemies. Ratkin populations surge and suffer, depending upon all of these factors.

Urban Kingdoms

Ratkin are the most urbane of all shapeshifters, and by far the most adaptable. Save for Bone Gnawers and Glass Walkers, most Garou shun cities. Thus, the Ratkin population in a major city often easily outnumbers the Garou population. The wererats are almost fanatically concerned with the threat humans pose to the world, and prefer to watch them in their native habitat. As soon as a Rat King assumes control of a colony, he will start to define the boundaries of his domain, sending out Tunnel Runners to mark the limits of it with cryptic sigils. They will then watch over this territory, reporting on anyone who passes through. Wherever one Ratkin makes his home, a hundred ordinary rats may breed nearby; thus, a few words are necessary regarding their urban domains.

Humans and rats often compete for the same territory. In the largest cities, the population of rats often exceeds the population of humans, and far exceeds the population of Ratkin. Rats and Ratkin alike are notoriously common in areas that have poor sanitation or easy access to food. Sometimes that food is just garbage, but when the rats can access anything better, the results can be catastrophic. A rat does not eat as much as a man does, but can easily spoil an equal portion of food by leaving deposits of its urine and feces.

Just as humans build up vast transportation systems for traveling around major cities, so do rats. Sewer tunnels serve as urban superhighways to rodents, allowing them to travel from one section of a city to another undisturbed. Though urban legends (and roleplaying games) suggest otherwise, many sewer tunnels are little more than vast networks of narrow pipes, not massive "dungeon corridors." That makes them just the right size for a rodent who wants to travel unnoticed. When tunnels are flooded, rats can still swim. As noted elsewhere, any opening at least the size of a quarter affords a means of egress. Just for the record, rats have been known to crawl up into homes through drains, bathtubs and even toilets.

When the number of rats exceeds the number of humans in the same territory, this can lead to epic struggles for control over the same buildings and resources. Sometimes Ratkin feel the same control urges over a piece of property in a large city. When this happens, the wererats have a variety of strategies for driving humans out. Sabotage, vandalism and theft are common methods;

calling a swarm is usually a last resort, as it tends to kill off vast numbers of innocent rats. Nonetheless, Ratkin are sometimes called upon by their "god" to secure a heavily populated area by any means necessary; such religious zeal often results in bloodshed.

Rural Kingdoms

Most of the houses are deserted and falling into ruin and... the broken-steepled church now harbors the one slovenly mercantile establishment in the hamlet.... It is hard to prevent the impression of a faint, malign odour about the village street, as of the massed mould and decay of centuries.

— "The Dunwich Horror," H.P. Lovecraft

Not all rats live in cities, of course; they are among the most adaptable animals in the world. They can live in almost any climate, save for the Arctic wastes. Like them, Ratkin have found hiding places throughout the globe, and kept many of such secret for centuries. Even city Ratkin have been surprised to find long-forgotten brethren in the most Goddess-forsaken places on the planet. There are reasons for such prolonged isolation. Urban wererats, for instance, look down their snouts at their rural relations, regarding the "country mice" as cowards. Nonetheless, while a city rat may have a better view of human civilization, a country rat has a better chance of surviving when all hell breaks loose in the cities of mankind.

The rules of supernatural society are often discarded in rural kingdoms, leading to strange mutations of "acceptable" conduct. Cut off from the rest of their race, rural elders feel free to devise their own social mores. For the sake of survival, bonds between races are easier to form in such places, though they're just as temporary as pacts made anywhere else. What holds for one group of rats might be completely unrealistic for another, especially since every climate zone in the world has a few unique species of rats seen nowhere else.

The werewolves are only just beginning to suspect how thoroughly the Ratkin race has infested the planet. Once you know how to look for them, it seems like the Ratkin are *everywhere*. Bone Gnawer Galliards tell mythical stories of wererats who shun the madness and corruption of the cities, forming rural clans of shocking brutality, yet rural Rat Kingdoms are typically much smaller than the empires of city-folk. Wander away from your safe little home, and we'll show you what we mean.

• **Swamp Rats:** In the swamps, Ratkin packs are extremely mobile, always trying to stay one step ahead of the humans who invade their domain. A Shadow Seer will typically try to form a bond of some sort with any local Mokolé that just might be present (which is unlikely), offering tribute to the nearest Lizard King in exchange for help. If this doesn't work, local wererats live up to their reputation as "egg-stealing mammals," ripping off this powerful rival. Some swamp tribes measure their status by the ability to find the largest and most exotic eggs in the area. (Of course, this is a good way to doom an entire tribe — there's nothing Mokolé hate worse than a threat to their children, and even one can often outfight even a large pack.) Swamp rats, incidentally, can swim rather well. They can even hold their breath, if absolutely necessary. A few practice a rodent version of the Garou Gift: Spirit of the Fish.

• **Desert Rats:** Humans are reluctant to inhabit the desolate deserts of the world, unless they have the resources to build great cities there. Desert rats don't need to gather in such numbers, instead forming small nomadic families that travel the wastelands of the world. Many take other types of rodents for Kinfolk, integrating some of the traits of kangaroo rats into their genetic stock. A few rare Bedouin Kinfolk have helped the desert rats settle throughout the Middle East. Desert tribes have adapted many of their traditions from other local nomads.

In North America, desert rats are outraged at the number of human settlements destroying the land. The desert isn't really desolate, after all; it just teems with life most humans don't recognize. In response, desert packs often turn to monkeywrenching to defend their domain. These types of rodents are also common in Northern Africa, where they commonly act as traders, spies and, if necessary, assassins to those who can meet their price.

• **Mountain Rats:** Bone Gnawers and Ratkin have been known to work together closely in the most mountainous regions of the world. Unfortunately, Gnawers who consort with wererats tend to develop an almost fanatic hatred of humans, sometimes furthering the goals of the Man-Eaters, a reviled camp of werewolf cannibals. Interspecies inbreeding is not uncommon in mountain retreats, combining werewolf and wererat blood with an occasional dash of Black Spiral taint. Such isolated settlements don't become truly violent, however, until a Shadow Seer can act as a messiah to set them against the nearest human town or village. At that point, Weaver beware...

• **Ghost Rats:** Though ghost towns are not as common as they once were, some rural Ratkin are drawn to places where human settlements have failed. Plague Lords tend to rule these colonies, occasionally bonding with a few local wraiths. Rat-spirits thrive in this environment, adding to the chaos that breeds there. Restless Dead who have lost touch with everything that mattered to them in life may sympathize with exiled wererats.

Infesting the Physical World

Overpopulation is one of the biggest problems of the World of Darkness. Even the Ratkin themselves have only a vague conception of how extensive the physical kingdoms of the wererats really are. The matriarchs and patriarchs of the largest Ratkin plagues have only just begun to suspect how thoroughly their brothers and sisters have infested the world. Curious rat packs continue to send emissaries to the leaders of these vast rat families, demanding to know more. Some address these rulers as Rat Lords; others speak of Emperors, Grandmeres, and other strange guardians of authority.

A lifetime of exposure to Rat's Madness has driven many of these elders to the very brink of sanity, but it has also given them revelations to help them guide legions of wererats to the possibilities of a dark new age. Suffice it to say that if the Ratkin are going to survive the Final Days, they must keep their true numbers hidden... until the time comes for Rat's Warriors to overwhelm their enemies during the Apocalypse. In the meantime, most Ratkin are only aware of the simplest facts about the nine largest plagues of wererats on the planet.

Asia and Indonesia

Ratkin: As detailed in *Rage Across Russia*, for the past few years, most of Asia has been surrounded by a Shadow Curtain strong enough to keep out most shapechangers. Unfortunately, it wasn't wholly effective against the Ratkin. Tunnel Runners thoroughly riddled the Gauntlet with Boltholes, and in late 1998 the Curtain came crashing down. Needless to say, the local Ratkin were very alarmed, but immediately started taking credit for the collapse.

Thousands of wererats have been recruited into the two largest families in this part of the world. The most insidious plague in Southeast Asia is a century-old criminal empire led by the venerable Giant Rat of Sumatra. From a temple in Indonesia, he maintains a dynasty that has been kept for centuries. His family title has been passed down from parent to ratling for generations, ever since the plague's founder began his legacy of crime during the Victorian age. The Sumatran Emperor's most ardent servitors are descended from a small cult of wererats originally from Northern India. For over a century, they have been known as the Thuggee. Any Ratkin Infected in Asia will be welcomed as a member of this criminal empire... and reviled if he does not dedicate his life to fulfilling the Emperor's whims.

Far to the north, roaming the forbidding steppes and taiga from Mongolia to Siberia, nomadic Ratkin inhabit the wilderness. The numerous supporters of the Horde assemble each month to share information on the supernatural activity that surrounds them, particularly since the fall of the Hag and her Curtain. Not all Russian Ratkin like to associate with this vile band, but the Horde can call on any one of them to gather information on degenerate Silver Fangs, ancient bloodsuckers or power-hungry mages. All devout members of this plague are trained in the ways of war, and all supporters of the Horde are required to craft Pain Daggers, regardless of their aspect.

Mundane Rats: Asia was the original home of the two most common rat breeds in the world, the black rat and brown rat. Since European explorers first made contact with the East, both varieties have been smuggling themselves onto ships and spreading throughout the world. The vast majority of Ratkin are descended from the brown rat, or *Rattus norvegicus*. Only the Plague Lords would dare admit to their black rat ancestry.

Europe

Ratkin: Wererats from the Old Country have developed an addiction to intrigue and mystery. The Europe plague is ruled by the "Great-Grandmere" of Europe, Madame DeFarge. She receives constant updates on signs of the Apocalypse while hiding the sewers of Paris. Her court maintains many of the trappings of the French Revolution, complete with at least one homemade guillotine. Madame's spies are everywhere. Her most devoted followers are street children, and thus, she refers to her virtually mob-ruled plague as the Gamine.

Mundane Rats: Humans estimate that the black rat first appeared in Europe in the sixth century, although written records don't mention them until the 12th. By the early 1300's, their descendants spread the Black Plague throughout Europe, aided by the mysterious Plague Lords. The brown rat first came to Europe around 1553 and eventually drove out the black rats entirely.





BYRD 99

The Far East

Ratkin: The Nezumi are a race of Asian shapeshifters (or *hengeyokai*) who have remained isolated from the rest of the world... until now. Eastern Ratkin pride themselves on the arts of Low War, a method used by warriors when the honorable tactics of High War fail. Ishira Nezumi is the current matriarch of the clan; she rules from a feudal castle in Hokkaido. The wails of Hakken Garou in the despair of Harano have become a call to battle for her troops. [There's plenty of information on these nasty fellows and the context of their society in the *Hengeyokai* sourcebook.]

North America

Ratkin: Humans estimate that the brown rat first came to North America in 1775; that revolutionary spirit has lived on ever since. Ratkin from this part of the world are often the most violent, deranged and dangerous. The American plague has no matriarch. Instead, many wererats from this part of the world hold to heretical beliefs of a great "Rat God" who will lead them to victory in the Apocalypse. Though most North American Ratkin avoid the members of this extensive "family," any wererat who refers to the Rat Totem as "He" probably subscribes to this dangerous philosophy. The most fanatic patriots half-jokingly refer to themselves as the Rat Race; outsiders are not amused by their genocidal attitudes towards humanity.

Mundane Rats: The black rat was originally the most common rat in North America. This variety of rodent is still well-known for spreading bubonic plague, typhus, varieties of food poisoning and other diseases. Within a scant century,

however, the American black rat was almost driven from the continent by the more aggressive brown rat.

On a different note, North America is also home to another legendary variety of rodent: the bushy-tailed woodrat. The woodrat is also known as the "pack rat" because of its habit of carrying off shiny objects or other items that strike its mood. Sometimes, the woodrat is called the "trader rat" because of a rather folksy bit of lore: the rodent will allegedly leave something behind when he sees something else he really wants.

South America

Supernatural Ratkin: Ratkin "south of the border" are drawn to the most horrific slums the Third World has to offer. Wererats often infiltrate the most overpopulated sections of cities in this part of the world. As long as starvation and poverty are prevalent among the disenfranchised, the Ratkin are doing their jobs right. Many Ratkin Kinfolk carry a curse in their veins, one that often resigns them to lives of poverty on the fringes of society. The largest plague of Ratkin there, the Borrachon wererats revel amidst the suffering. A few sympathize with the outcasts of human society; most exploit them with efficiency that shocks cultured rats from other locales. Other Ratkin refer to the Borrachon wererats as "drunken rats," largely because of a local rite that involves poisoned liquor and the twitching *delirium tremens* that it inflicts.

Mundane Rats: Central and South America are home to the spiny rat, a critter that uses its short, spiny bristles of hair to discourage predators. Spiny rats typically make their nests near

boulders, stumps or roots. One curious breed of Ratkin here is the South American metis, whose bristles are often sharp enough to cause damage to any who attack it. Many metis wererats born in South America quickly learn the Gift: Spirit of the Spiny Rat.

Africa

Ratkin: *Revolution, famine and pestilence bring prosperity to the Ratkin of Africa. The current patriarch is a Plague Lord who rules from a system of Umbral tunnels underneath the savanna of Zaire. As is common among the most powerful of his kind, he has incorporated the name of a debilitating disease into his epithet, egotistically claiming himself Lord Ebola. Unfortunately, the ghosts of those slain by his disease have begun to stalk the corridors of his palace.*

Because of this Plague Lord's accomplishments, members of his Freak aspect do not suffer social stigmas they would endure in other parts of the world. In fact, enough plague rats have begun to return from the Umbra to create a family dynasty. Most believe that their variants of the Birthing Plague will corrupt enough Kinfolk to create a new race of rodentia. Their plague name comes from the proposed scientific name of this mythical new creature: *Rattus typhus*.

Mundane Rats: The most unusual breed of rat from this part of the world, the infamous African giant rat, measures between two or three feet in length. It makes its nests in tropical rainforests. Since "giant African Ratkin" have bred with many other varieties of wererats throughout the world, they have increased the overall size of Rat Kinfolk among their spawn.

The High Seas

Ratkin: Over six-tenths of the Earth's surface is covered with water, and at any given time, thousands of oceangoing vessels ride the waves. The oldest ones are infested with vast colonies of rats who live off goods carried across the seas. As one would expect, many of the wererats who live among them share a strange kinship, *preferring the freedom of travel on the world's oceans to any other way of life. Any ship can be infested with Ratkin, and most of them pay tribute to a rat plague known as the Ronin.*

All members of this plague are outcasts from the rest of Ratkin society. They have no system of Renown — in game terms, all of them are Rank One Ratkin. The ancestors of this plague were originally a pack of 48 *Nezumi*. *Centuries ago, they committed an unspeakable crime that resulted in their exile. Ratkin Ronin despise the rest of their race, and any wererat who travels by ship may very well find himself confronted by a pack of angry "wave rats."*

The Exiled Ratkin of Antarctica

Ratkin: Antarctica, of course, is one of the few places on Earth that rats do not frequent. Nonetheless, the so-called "Arcadian Ratkin" have claimed one of the most inhospitable realms on the planet as their own. Howard Phillip Gallomo, a delusional would-be bard, rules over an Umbral city in the ice. Munchmausen undertake at least one quest in their lifetime to deliver an "ultimate legend" in his honor. Many of his descendants trace their ancestry back to the De La Poers, a cursed New England family prone to outbreaks of insanity.

The Ways of Spirit

Shapechangers are creatures of two worlds: spirit and flesh. Keeping a balance between sympathy for the spiritual world and an understanding for the physical world is an arduous task, and spending too much time in either dimension can be perilous. Two of Gaia's children — the werewolves and the wererats — serve as excellent examples of this concept. The Garou have become overly concerned with the ways of flesh, while the Ratkin have been forced to extremes by prolonged isolation in the spirit world.

If a shapechanger fails to maintain regular contact with the Umbra, his heart hardens, and the rage of the physical world consumes him. Werewolves, for instance, are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain regular contact with the spirit world. Crossing the Gauntlet between this world and the Umbra is far more perilous than it once was. As such, the Garou are increasingly becoming creatures of flesh, consumed by rage and the pain of a dying world.

If a shapechanger spends too much time in the Umbra, he loses all understanding of the ways of flesh, and becomes an ephemeral spirit. Wererats have hidden legions of their brethren in the spirit world. The Middle Umbra is infested with spirit tunnels that only the Ratkin can access. Lost breeding grounds are occulted in the farthest depths of the Deep Umbra, where generations of spirits pass on ancient secrets. Too much time in the spirit world will typically drive a Ratkin insane. As a result, the Umbra's nooks and crannies are now flooded with wererat visionaries.

Since the days of the War of Rage, many descendants of the original Ratkin have fled into the furthest depths of the Umbra. Becoming ephemeral creatures of pure spirit, they have lost touch with the world they left behind. If the Garou wanted to take responsibility for the fate of mankind, they reasoned, they were welcome to it — none of the other shapechangers could challenge their tyrannical supremacy. Nonetheless, even Deep Umbral Ratkin believe that one day, the werewolves will learn the error of the ways.

The Unearthly

Unearthly Ratkin have typically spent too much time in the spirit world, and as such, have sometime lost touch with the so-called "logic" of the physical world. The ones who claim to hail from Paradise Realms are often exiles; usually, the Rat Incarna won't show one of these lost souls the way home until she performs an epic task for the good of her people. Unearthly wererat characters from the Deep Umbra are rare; this is part of the reason they start out the game at Freak Factor Five.

"Arcadian Ratkin," or Munchmausen, are eternally delusional, and have an addiction for questing and adventure, no doubt to prove their worth to the plague that abandoned them. Unearthly Tunnel Runners are sometimes scouts for lost realms deep in the Umbra, or wanderers who cannot return until they gather evidence of Apocalyptic prophecies coming true. As aliens lost in a dying world, the Unearthly are among the most cryptic and unusual wererats on the planet.

That day has come. The werewolves now watch over a dying world. From the fringes of reality, these distant kin are returning to the dimension they left behind. The realms of the Ratkin are vast and treacherous. And in the physical world, the nine major Ratkin plagues are ready to offer the lost Children of Rat a place in the destiny of their race. Their spawn have only just begun to quest in the spirit world for other lost brethren. Legends continue of Paradise Realms, mythical places where exiled Ratkin yearn to return to the world of flesh. Stranger dimensions exist beyond the velvet shadow, leading even the most experienced Umbral travelers astray. Watch your step; from here on out, things get a little strange....

Paradise Realms

A fair is a veritable

Smorgasbord, borgasbord, orgasbord,

After the day is done...

— Templeton, the movie version of *Charlotte's Web*

The Ratkin have always had legends of Paradise, places in the spirit world where the Dreams of a Thousand Rats can be realized. Paradise was once just a legend, but the myth has become truth. Deep Umbral Ratkin are rarely seen in the physical world, but when rat packs encounter them, they're eager to hear fanciful tales of Paradise Realms, lost pseudo-homelands that exist in dreams more than reality.

In isolated dimensions of the spirit world, Paradise Realms are breeding grounds for ancient plagues of Ratkin. Each typically holds between a hundred and a hundred thousand rats, wererats, Kinfolk and Rat-spirits. Thus, each expresses a living dream of what "rodent heaven" is like. No two concepts of Paradise are exactly the same, especially where rodents are concerned.

The tunnels leading to these realms are treacherous enough that only a Rat has the patience to travel there. Reaching one can take years of questing. Boltholes through the farthest realms of the Umbra are overwhelmed with the raw force of the Wyld, driving even the calmest Shadow Seer into epic bouts of feral rage and madness. These far-flung dimensions are usually so consumed by the Wyld that the paths leading to them are always changing.

A few of the more unusual Deep Umbral plagues staunchly believe that the Apocalypse will only determine the fate of Earth itself... and if that one planet is lost, Gaia will find a home for them somewhere else. Until that time, legends of a few exotic Paradise Realms have become increasingly common, especially among Tunnel Runners who have gathered far-flung rumors.

- The **Coliseum** is a dimension of Bacchanalian debauchery that provides limitless intoxicants for its inhabitants. The local Ratkin fervently believe that their race should take credit for the fall of the Roman Empire.

- In **Carnivale**, time is frozen at the moment before the local carnival leaves town; it's heaven for an ambitious pack of rats.

- **Buboe** is a legendary medieval realm where Plague Lords rule with absolute authority; they consider the Bubonic Plague to be the pinnacle of Ratkin achievement.

- Munchmausen speak highly of the **Copse of a Thousand Teeth**, a forest in the Arcadian Gateway completely overrun by wererats and their Kin.

Some Ratkin from the Deep Umbra include the name of a lost realm in their names. Famous examples include Typhus of Buboe; Chitter-Tooth, Charioteer of the Coliseum; or Johnny Three-Paws, the Carney-of-Carnivale. Now that signs of the End Times have become more frequent, waves of Ratkin are beginning to find their way back to the Tellurian, like immigrants from an exotic land. In any major city, a handful of Ratkin may seek their fortune, preparing for the arrival of thousands and thousands of cousins, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters.

Rat Kingdoms

Munchmausen often have elaborate stories of spirit realms that defy all logical explanation. Their lost realms are often imaginary, or at least mythical. Rodent storytellers repeat fantastical stories of these realms again and again. The most common tale of this type is told by an Uneathly Ratkin who has lost his kingdom in the depths of the Umbra. Sadly, a few of these legends have at least some basis in fact.

Rat Kingdoms are similar to Paradise Realms, but typically created around the dementia of a single wererat. Through enough storytelling, an Uneathly wererat can attempt to make even the most imaginative realms become real. Many Munchmausen quest to recover these lost realms; some will typically bring a rat pack along to confirm its existence and speak it back into the spirit world. A few have rapturous visions of their lost realms, or can return to their personal paradises only in dreams. The details of these realms always correspond to the psychological "embellishment" of the wererats who speak of them. Whether they actually exist is another matter entirely.

Rat Alleys

Rat Alleys are a recurrent, and dangerous, spiritual phenomenon Umbral travelers can use to their own advantage. A Ratkin can gain access to these spirit realms through any of the seediest, most dangerous alleyways on Earth. Pools of rainwater — and less identifiable fluids — reflect the illumination street lamps and neon lights, providing the focus required for any shapechanger to step sideways. Particularly mystical Ratkin can lead other supernatural creatures, or even humans, into the spirit world for a short while. This provides one of the deadliest traps the wererats can devise.

Rat Alleys are always found accidentally; a Storyteller may ask a character to roll Gnosis (difficulty 9!) if there's a chance of an alley forming nearby. Some mystics believe that all manifestations of Rat Alleys are connected somehow, and that if a well-traveled mystic can find out how to leap between them, that rat can travel around the world in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, the few Shadow Seers who have managed to make any progress in this research have all mysteriously disappeared while trying.

Stairway Realms

Ever hear odd noises in an old house late at night? You don't believe it's the "house settling," do you? Do you really think it's just "hot air expanding in the walls?" Of course not. All too often, the strange sounds made in a huge, empty house in the night are the result of the rats in the walls, people under the stairs, or Rat-spirits in the Umbra messing with the limits

of reality again. When Tunnel Runners use their Bolthole Rites a little too often, sometime the walls take a little time to adjust. If a Ratkin seriously botches an attempt to step sideways, the result is an alternate dimension known as a Stairway Realm.

If too many Umbral travelers pass through the same human habitation, it's not unusual for the dimensions of hidden parts of the house to get a little distorted. Unseen ventilation shafts shift, stretching larger and larger until humans can crawl through them. Crawlspace becomes labyrinths. The boundaries between Ratkin spirit tunnels and mundane architecture become blurred, allowing the house's dimensions to get as twisted as Alice's trip down the rabbit hole. Although Ratkin can eventually find their way out of them, other supernatural creatures have been known to get lost in their Wyld perambulations. A few exiles adopt them as permanent homes.

If enough Rat-spirits swarm into a Stairway Realm, they may even take up residence there. Lost Ratkin may join them, setting up an otherworldly nest not far from where ordinary humans reside. As long as no one goes poking around under the stairs, or gets trapped in the crawlspace under the house, everyone stays happy. On the rare occasions where humans like to muck about with such things, the Delirium kicks in, making the experience even more traumatic for everyone involved. Children have been known to get lost in Stairway Realms; a fortunate few are captured and raised by rats afterward. The next time you hear a strange groan from the wood under your stairs, say a little prayer, and hope the nearest Bolthole is working properly.

The Television Zone

*They fight, and fight,
and fight and fight and fight...*

— "Itchy and Scratchy Show" theme song, *The Simpsons*

One of the more unusual realms beyond the velvet shadow is a dimension devoted entirely to human memories of television programs: the Television Zone. Since memories of TV programs have thoroughly infiltrated the collective unconscious of the human race, the various rooms of this zone contain elements of many popular programs, past and present. Rat-spirits travel freely in the walls between dimensions, and this zone is no different. Full details of this unearthly space are detailed in *Umbral: The Velvet Shadow*. One particular section has become a site of pilgrimage for many Rat-spirits.

Wererats know it as the Itchy Zone. In this violent arena, cartoon characters are locked in eternal conflict. Cats and rats fight epic battles for animated houses, using everything from kitchen knives to catapults to fight their skirmishes. Rat-spirits and Ratkin alike have begun to make regular trips to this realm, learning ingenious new tricks to use in the war against order. Rodentia ephemera who make their home here have even learned ways to alter their spirit forms to help them wage warfare in this dimension. (See Appendix One for more details on *Itchy Form*.)

Some demented rodentia ephemera have even started to infest areas associated with other television shows. A few Shadow Seers believe that if enough Rat-spirits invade an area associated with a program currently on the air, the show will either mutate terribly or suffer from horrible ratings until it dies. One legion of Rat-spirits, led by a precocious young rodens

rugrat, has begun to corrupt several current children's shows: tormenting Teletubbies and purple dinosaurs rank among their favorite pastimes. Another swarm has developed an affinity for '50s family shows, infesting the spiritual reflections of places like the Cleaver household or Mr. Ed's barn. Though this may sound strange, it may be hard to find a better explanation of the final episodes of many television programs....

Spirits

If you haven't already been dissuaded from risking your life in one of these otherworldly dimensions, you'd best study up on the spirits who live there. A few of them are massively useful for wererats who need to ask for further directions....

Rat-spirits

Rage 6, Gnosis 7, Willpower 8, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Materialize, Tracking

Rat-spirits are the best friends you can find in the spirit world. Whether created as offspring of the Rat Incarna, resurrected from the spirits of fallen Ratkin heroes, or distantly related to the survivors of the War of Rage, they all have sympathy for the Children of Rat. They can be summoned in battle to attack in swarms, enlisted in business arrangements to steal small items, or just enticed to sleep in a pocket or hat as a traveling companion. Ratkin know of many unusual cousins to the city-bred Rat-spirit; all of them share the same basic traits.

Kangaroo Rat-spirits: Far from the madness of the cities, Kangaroo Rat-spirits are a welcome sight to wererats traveling in the calm tranquillity of the desert. They are eager to teach travelers useful spirit knowledge, including the Gifts: Survival and Leap of the Kangaroo Rat.

Packrat-spirits: Though some Ratkin eschew the collecting of material possessions, the North American Packrat-spirit helps out those who need to accumulate as much stuff as necessary. They may choose to help wererats find extremely esoteric items, but never without a price.

Mole rat-spirits: Brown rats have been known to dig warrens out of soft soil, but no one can outmatch the mole rat for its amazing ability to fight its way through just about anything. If you were to hold one in your hand, it would probably shiver and cower blindly... or chew right through your skin in mere moments. Mole rat-spirits are no different. To those who approach them correctly, and carefully, they will offer to teach the Gifts: Burrow and Gnaw.

Pain-spirits and Disease-spirits

Willpower 2, Rage 8, Gnosis 5, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Possession, Corruption, Agony*, Infection*

• **Agony:** The spirit can amplify a target's pain, doubling any dice pool penalties from wound levels. The duration is one turn; the Power cost is three.

• **Infection:** A Pain-spirit who learns the Charm: Infection mutates into a Disease-spirit. These ephemera grow stronger by possessing anyone inflicted by a debilitating illness, and thus are naturally drawn to Plague Lords. By spending 3 points of Power,



they can use the Infection Charm to inflict the symptoms of their favorite disease on a victim they possess. If the victim fails a Stamina roll (difficulty 8), the result is a full-blown infection of the chosen disease (for whatever that's worth against certain supernatural creatures like Garou or vampires).

Only a follower of Grandfather Thunder or a Plague Lord would dare invoke these foul ephemera. *The Rat Incarna* sometimes makes use of such spirits, but never for long — they have a habit of following urges no sentient can understand, not even those of their masters. Spirits of Pain and Disease communicate in shufflings, groans, moans, whispers and chitterings, and insane languages of suffering only a Ratkin or a madman could interpret.

Pain-spirits seek out places of suffering, whether it's inflicted by torture, torment or infection. They can't materialize in the physical world, but they can manifest themselves in the Shadowlands, where sites of suffering are easily found. They hover near humans who are plagued by their physical affinities. Spirits of Pain love to be bound to implements of torture.

The Freakachu

Rage 2, Gnosis 9, Willpower 3, Power Varies

This is an electronic Rat-spirit, a tiny critter with an affinity for the Weaver that would put an Engineer to shame. It breeds in complex electronic systems, and takes on many of the characteristics of a virtual pet gone bad. Anyone who owns an electronic device inhabited by this spirit becomes its owner... or its victim, depending on your point of view. Freakachus (or "Freakas," as they're colloquially known) are notoriously hard to kill, even in the spirit world, since they can hide in the smallest computer networks.

Unlike its more sedate, mundane counterparts, the Freakachu has a repertoire of tactics for conditioning its owners. To the mundane, this manifests as amusing technical glitches that can only be solved by unusual methods. ("Really, the computer likes it when I sing.") For the spiritual aware, the critter will appear on a television or computer screen, taunting its owner. As the name suggests, it will "Freak-at-You" until it gets what it wants.

Freakachus have a love-hate relationship with Ratkin Engineers; their mood can make them boons or banes. A clever Ratkin, however, can nurture one of these little bastards into an electronic ally. When released in a computer network, the Freaka can carry out viral terrorism on command. Truly proficient owners will train their Freakas to battle each other as they develop, releasing them into contained computer networks surrounded by elaborate firewalls. Ratkin Engineers sometimes incorporate Freakachu events into their most popular aspect moots.

The Others

"Okay, pup, the Rat King says I gotta teach you about the different Changing Breeds. Apparently, you want to learn all about the different 'Changers of the world. No problem! My name's Frankie, and I've been studying this mystical crap for a long time, so I'm up for it. Let me tell you what we generally know about the other guys.

"I've never understood why we have this tradition, though. I mean, it's not like we really know all these guys. And it's not like

all Ratkin have the same opinions about them. I've been from one side of this planet to the other but, I haven't actually seen every one of them. I hear stories, though. I guess this is a way to hand down the same stereotypes from one generation to the next. What, do I sound a little cynical? Go ahead. Give me a difficult one."

Rokea

"What the hell? Why'd you start off with that one? You're asking me about *weresharks*? All right, I'll tell you what I know, but do you really think you're ever going to meet one? I guess if you join a pack with a bunch of Ratkin Ronin, infest a big tramp steamer with some wave rats, maybe you'll run into one. C'mon, ask me about someone you'll really have problems with."

Nuwisha

"Okay, okay, this one's a little easier. Um... shapechanging coyotes with a funky sense of humor. They like to play pranks on people. Uh... they don't take anything seriously. Does that help? Next."

Mokolé

"Crap, you studied for this, didn't you? The Mokolé probably know the truth about the Impergium almost as much as we do, if not moreso. The few that are left in the world have to stay hidden real well. I know you might think they're just giant shapechanging dinosaurs, but that ain't right. They're giant *pissed off* shapechanging dinosaurs."

Kitsune

"*Werefoxes*? They're... um... also like tricksters, see? They live in Japan! And they've got seven tails. Tell you what, go find a Nezumi first, I'm sure a Japanese Ratkin would know what the hell these things are."

Gurahl

"An easy one. You want my opinion? It's a damn shame what happened to the Gurahl. They had the potential to help fix the Earth, heal up all the sacred places, but they just couldn't get their shit together. If they don't wake up soon, they're probably going to sleep through the Apocalypse and miss all the fun."

Garou

"You already know about these bastards. The werewolves are the biggest hypocrites on the planet. All the suffering and misery you see in the world is the result of their ill-conceived "Concord," but they keep acting like they're the saviors of the planet. Killing Garou is an act of vengeance, and an easy way to get infamous. Don't tell the boss I told you that, though."

Corax

"These guys are great. Born thieves and deceivers. Like the ravens they live with, they like shiny things, and love secrets even more. You gotta watch 'em, 'cause they'll set themselves up in a perch somewhere and spy on everything they can. Unfortunately, they've also got a habit of betraying other shapeshifters to

get what they want, so I wouldn't trust 'em if I were you. Make sure you betray them before they betray you. Next!"

Bastet

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty! Heh, heh. The Bastet are even more stuck-up than the Garou are. Pretentious, egotistical assholes. Someone needs to put a few kinks in their tails, take 'em down a few pegs. They've also got this habit of claiming portions of the spirit world for themselves. That's the main reason we started hating them. That and their damn aloof attitude. And their tight sphincters. And their uppity attitude about "magick" and all that crap. I think messing up a Bastet is a cheap way to get infamous at the next revel. Give me another one."

Ananasi

"Uh, I think they're some kinda werespiders. They're Weaver creatures... or are they Wyrn creatures? I can never remember. I think they eat children and drink blood. There's something about them *sharing their minds* with big swarms of little spiders. Creepy, huh? Rats can hide in some pretty small places, but I don't want to think of the places a spider can hide."

Ajaba

"Jeez! You're asking me about the Ajaba? Where'd you hear that word? I think they're some kinda hyena creature that lives off carrion and filth. Sounds like decent folk to me. I never met one; don't think I ever will."

"Okay, are we done with this? *Homina, homina, spiritus sancti*, bam! You know about the Changing Breeds. Now go on, kid, you're botherin' me. What? Oh, cheese and crackers, you need to hear about the tribes, too? *Hey! Johnny!* Help me out with this, willya?"

Frankie and Johnny Versus the Thirteen Tribes

Johnnie sez: "Jeez, Frankie, for a Tunnel Runner, you don't get out much, do ya? That was pitiful. Let me do this. Kid, there used to be sixteen tribes; now there's thirteen. Then there's this big society they've got called the Garou Nation, the Western Concordiat. Just to confuse you even more, there are werewolves in the Eastern Concordiat, too, and apparently, they don't think the Wyrn is dangerous, and they team up with Nezumi. I don't understand them; they're still Garou, and I'd just as soon eat them."

Then Frankie sez: "I'd watch this guy if I were you, kid. It's not like every rat feels the same way about the tribes. Forget the Eastern Concordiat, Johnnie; you don't know shit about them."

Black Furies

Johnnie sez: "Okay, first there's the Furies. Lilith Fair with a mosh pit. All of them are women. They're all, like, radical feminists and lesbians and stuff. Yeah, that's right, they're females who have weird ideas about breeding. They tend to have trouble controlling their anger, so I'd think twice about starting a fight with one."

Frankie sez: "Damn, Johnny, you've got issues, don't you? Kid, the Black Furies are all female, but that's about the only

thing you can say is true for all of 'em. All I'm sure of is that they all act like they've got something to prove. That means that it's really easy to push 'em into a frenzy. Once you get them angry enough, it's easy to outwit them. Make some smart-ass remark about their riot grrl combat boots, and you'll have them swinging at anything."

Bone Gnawers

Frankie sez: "Here, let me do this one. The Bone Gnawers are nice guys, once you learn to talk to them correctly. They don't all serve Rat, but the ones that do tend to at least give a Ratkin a chance to talk. The smart ones will make deals with you, maybe even set up a contract to give grief to one of their elders. The nicest ones show sympathy for other people starving on the street, so if you approach them just right, they won't gut you and carry your hide back to the sept."

Johnnie sez: "Are you kidding, Frankie? You can't trust them! They're Garou! They're just like the rest of them. Sure, they're usually victims of Garou society, but that doesn't mean they won't stab you in the back just for some quick honor and glory! Street people are desperate, no matter what they really are. They're Garou first, and servants of Rat second, if at all."

Fianna

Frankie sez: "First off, don't try to poison them. It's futile. They drink stuff that would make rat's piss taste like champagne... uh, not that I've tried that taste test, mind you. They live up to all the worst stereotypes of their part of the world: drunken fools, rowdy Ren-fair singers, and hot-tempered fighters."

Get of Fenris

Frankie sez: "Don't fight them unless you absolutely have to. I don't care if you're dealing with a warrior or what, but they're all Germanic headbashers, and they'd all love to kick your ass. I heard that back in World War Two, they fought on both sides, just cause the Get got off on all that violence."

Glass Walkers

Johnnie sez: "A little too tight with the Weaver, if you ask me. There's isn't much of the Wyld left in them at all. They've made more compromises with human civilization than any other tribe of Garou, so much so that even the Wolves don't always trust them."

Red Talons

Johnnie sez: "Now, you gotta admit, Frankie, these guys ain't half bad. Talons all have this burning hatred of humanity, and usually are just waiting for some excuse to sneak off and kill humans. I wouldn't want meet one in the woods, though. I hear they've got all sorts of dark rites they perform when no one's around. Even if it involves sacrificing humans, I still don't want to see it."

Frankie sez: "I wouldn't want to meet one of those critters anywhere! Talons are even more vicious than the rest of the Garou are, and they'd just as soon kill you as look at you. I've seen a Red Talon chase down a whole rat pack, just 'cause they stole one of his fetishes. I mean, what the hell?"

Shadow Lords

Johnnie sez: "Knife-Skulkers love to make contracts with these folks, but they also check over the details repeatedly. Seems they've got a habit of going back on their word, or trying to Clinton their way out of trouble. I've seen some packs dedicate themselves to Grandfather Thunder to fulfill one of these pacts, but I've never made that deal myself. Carrying out dirty deeds for some werewolf cult doesn't seem like a good way to survive."

Silent Striders

Frankie sez: "So damn mysterious, even I can't figure them out, and I'm a Tunnel Runner. I've traveled with a few, but only because I had something I wanted to get out of them. But then, the Wolf knew it the whole damn time, and was trying to get something outta me, too! Then this Unseelie fairy showed up, and everything went to hell, and I never found out what the Wolf expected out of me."

Silver Fangs

Frankie sez: "Back me up on this, Johnny. I hate these guys. Two words: Sanctimonious nobles. Way I hear it, way back in the Impergium, some of the Wolves thought they should command all the Changing Breeds, started telling them what they should do for Gaia. The Silver Fangs were the worst of them, since they considered themselves the nobility of the Garou. I hear it was a Fang that demanded that the Gurahl should get killed off."

Johnnie sez: "That was a long time ago, Frankie. Their just a shadow of who they used to be. Now they're all dangerously inbred, half-insane and overcome with depression. Of course, that still isn't enough punishment for what their ancestors did. If you mess up a Silver Fang, especially one of their cubs, half the Garou tribes will get pissed off like you wouldn't believe. The other half will secretly be grateful."

Stargazers

Johnnie sez: "Mystic Far-Eastern kung-fu fighting, enigma-addicted freaks. I can never tell if one of 'em's going to kick my ass or challenge me to a game of go. Too damn smart for their own good. Last time I met one, I challenged him to a Zen poetry contest. First he tried to impress me with some haiku about cherry blossoms. Then I read half a limerick, hit him on the nose with a stick and ran away. Seemed like a good idea at the time. Hey, you haven't seen any around here, have you?"

Uktena

Frankie sez: "They breed with indigenous tribes around the world, from what I hear. That doesn't sound too bad at first, especially if they want to preserve the way humans were thousands of years ago. Unfortunately, this also means that they learn all the dark, occult secrets civilization's tried to gloss over, and they practice freaky rituals they don't dare reveal to the other Garou."

Wendigo

Johnnie sez: "Native American werewolves. Heap bad medicine. About a century or two ago, they lost their lands to the Europeans, and they've been raging about it ever since. I

mean, c'mon! The Changing Breeds lost the whole damn planet to the Garou, and they handed it over to the humans, and they're still killing us! The average Ratkin's got more angst than a whole sept of these Injuns."

The Lost Ones

Bunyip

Johnnie sez: "There were these Australian werewolves, and they got into a disagreement about something. And it was all about something that some Black Spiral lied about to the wrong person. And then, um, they all vanished in the Dreamtime, or killed each other, or settled in the Bermuda Triangle... uh, how did it go?"

Frankie sez: "Don't look at me. Not like we're gonna really ever meet one. Keep going..."

Croatan

Johnnie sez: "So, anyway, a long time ago I was watching this TV show called *In Search Of*. You know, with Spock? And they had this story about a place called the Roanoke colony, where there was a bunch of settlers. Pilgrims and shit. And then one day, they all mysteriously disappeared, and the only clue was one word scratched on a tree: Croatan. See, I think a werewolf carved it there, cause all the members of their tribe died trying to protect the pilgrims from the Wyrms."

Frankie sez: "Uh, Johnny! No more crack for you, okay? The Croatan all sacrificed themselves while fighting the Wyrms. Garou get off on that, because they think dying valiantly fighting evil is supposed to be glorious or something. I guess if they all died like that, I wouldn't mind much."

White Howlers

Johnnie sez: "Yeah, this crazy old Injun Moon Mouse was telling me about the Howlers. See, all of the people in Scotland are White Howler Kinfolk. Then the White Howlers died off, but I hear that once in a while, one of 'em gets reborn into the world, and they're reforming their tribe."

Frankie sez: "No, you idiot! That's it, you're not doing this anymore! Listen to me... THEY'RE DEAD! THEY'RE ALL DEAD! They're never coming back! Some of their Kinfolk started out as Scottish, but that was a long time ago. The vast majority of people in Scotland ain't got nothing to do with any of this, okay? The White Howlers all got corrupted by the Wyrms, their tribal totem got flushed down the john, and then the few who survived became..."

Black Spirals

Johnnie sez: "... the Black Spirals. Yeah, I know! They're all corrupted by the Wyrms. Frankie thinks we should be killing 'em all, scoring some Renown for doing it. I think they kill off werewolves, and that means we should be leaving them alone."

Frankie sez: "Uh, Johnny! What happens when a rat gets infested with the Wyrms? Or a whole damn colony? You'll get a whole bunch of rabid rat things, and the Black Spirals will eat the rest of us alive. There's a reason we get praise for killing the Wyrms: 'cause once it's through with the humans and the werewolves, it's coming after us."

The Others

Frankie sez: "All right, let's wrap this up. Yeah, yeah, you've heard the 'we are not alone' spiel. You're dyin' to hear about the other freaks. Like the so-called masters of the city, huh? That's right."

Vampires

Frankie sez: "These guys are no friends of ours. For one, they're all about the perpetuation of the Lie — they hate chaos and things they can't control, so they hate rebels like us. For two, they hate the thought of Apocalypse — to them, a world without humans is a world without food. So we got nothin' in common. If you see one of those butt-ugly fellas in the sewers and he gives you his 'Come heether, my leetle freend' speech, you turn around, get the hell outta there and get some brothers and sisters together to kick his ass."

Johnnie sez: "And they can turn ya into one of them, too! 'Course, it only seems to work on the unluckiest bastards, those who've offended Mama Rat. It's bad. Don't know how most vampires keep themselves preserved, but it don't work for a bloodsucking rat. They rot just like they was ordinary corpses, and eventually just fall over and quit movin'. Hope what's left of them isn't still conscious when there's nothing but bones left...."

Wizards

Johnnie sez: "Hey, didja know that there are some honest-Injun Merlins out there? They don't have pointy hats and long beards — well, okay, the really powerful ones do — but they're doin' their schtick even as we speak. Problem is that nobody really cares about magic anymore, so they're pretty sensitive and sulky. Nothing worse than a sulky guy who throws lightning bolts."

Frankie sez: "Yeah. Merlin. Whatever."

Fairies

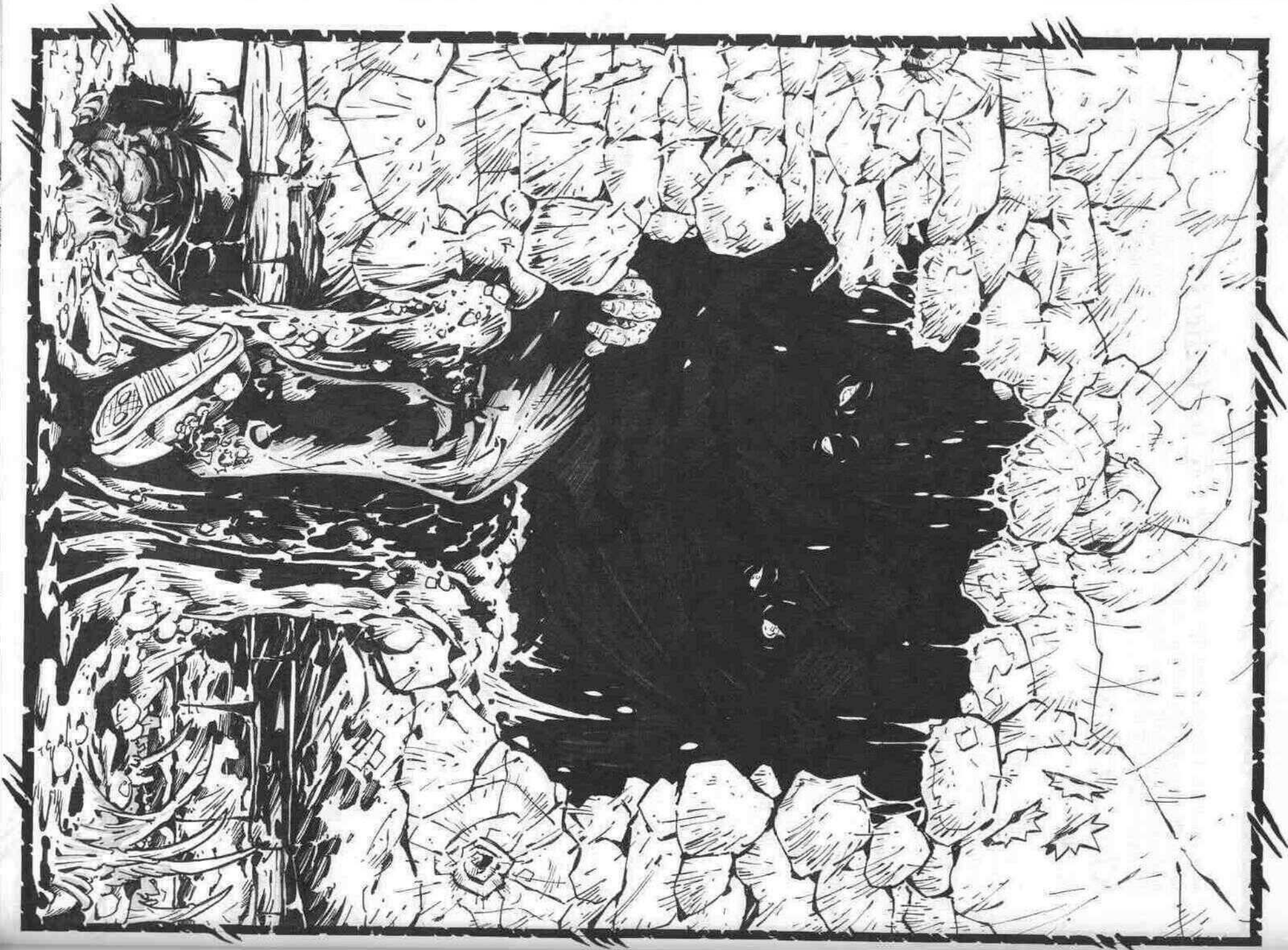
Frankie sez: "And there's fairies, too. They're as big as anybody, and don't have pretty little wings. Hey, I told you I seen one, right? His name sounded kinda like a sneeze. And he was black, too. I don't think any of those nancies who airbrush unicorns on notebooks and all that crap ever thought that a fairy coulda been black, heaven forfend. Just goes to show."

Johnnie sez: "For cryin' out loud, Frankie, don't call 'em fairies! Call 'em 'changelings,' 'cause it seems to go down better. Kind of a baby-stealing kind of word, but if they like it, then hey."

Ghosts

Frankie sez: "What does that leave? Ghosts. Yeah. If there's a good reason not to revisit the scene of your crime, it's ghosts, kid. They tend to hang around the places where they died, and they can make your life real unpleasant. So if you're gonna start nukin' buildings left and right, don't go back to the site. 'Cause the haints will getcha."

"That's enough of this for one day, kid. You really want to learn about this stuff, you should go out and meet these guys yourself. Now beat it! Johnnie did what the Rat King said, so now I gotta get him out of here. Hey, Johnnie! You beat the rap! Now let's get out of here before that Skulker kicks your ass again!"



Chapter Three: Crunchy Bits and Shiny Things

Templeton was down there now, rummaging around. When he returned to the barn, he carried in his mouth an advertisement he had torn from a magazine. "How's this?" he asked, showing the ad to Charlotte. "It says 'CRUNCHY....'"

— *Charlotte's Web*, E.B. White

Prophecies Fulfilled

Life as a wererat doesn't begin with the Change; it begins with Infection. There's nothing glamorous about contracting a disease that kills most of the creatures it touches. Though the experience is cathartic, it isn't as dramatic as shapeshifting into an otherworldly creature for the first time. Kinfolk who survive the Birthing Plague may carry it around for days, months or even years before changing for the first time. Until then, the result isn't a welcome embrace showing Gaia's love. It's a slow descent into madness, a gradual acceptance of the extremes of the wererats.

The first Infection is an experience a Ratkin never forgets. Humans who survive it experience unbelievable visions of possible futures, along with revelations from the distant past. Rats find their minds overwhelmed by thoughts and ideas beyond anything they've experienced before. From the first moment their claws curl into tiny hands, their minds are flooded with bursts of intelligence, and life is never the same again. Metis Ratkin are sacrificed to the Plague shortly after their birth, but those who survive know that they have been chosen for monumental plans.

Throughout most of human history, Ratkin sightings have been declining. In centuries past, wererats stranded on Earth have

seen fewer signs of their brethren with each passing year. Isolated packs have whispered that someday, hosts of rats would return from Paradise, eagerly rejoining their distant cousins. Now, as the Final Days approach, times are changing. An ancient curse is being fulfilled. Now there are signs of a rapidly growing population of Ratkin, along with a rapidly evolving society to accommodate it.

Mystics and loremasters who are aware of the increased number of wererats often consider it to be a sign of the end of the world, a portent of the Final Days. Stories of the bardic curse have been passed down through generations, hidden in the Blood Memories of legions of Ratkin. If the tales are true, then the Age of Man is drawing to a close. Furtively, wererats whisper that the Apocalypse need not be the end... but instead, a new beginning....

Organization

In the city of New York, rats outnumber humans two to one.

— factoid from *National Geographic Explorer*, "Nightmare Creatures"

Any citizen of a major metropolis suspects this simple truth: If you're unfortunate to see one rat scurrying across your floor, there's probably a hundred more nesting nearby. This is hardly

surprising. In a single year, two rats can breed close to a hundred offspring. For their shapechanging cousins, repopulating the Ratkin race has taken little effort in recent years. Because sightings of the wererats have been rare, the other Changing Breeds still do not realize how extensive the colonies of the wererats really are.

Hidden in the remotest corners of reality, the wererats have been breeding, waiting, and planning for untold ages. Some scheme against the Wyrms, and whisper that overcoming its minions depends on outnumbering them. They furtively breed armies and swarms, preparing the world's Wyld defenders. Others prefer to remain ignorant of such demented prophecies. Delusions about the "true meaning of the Apocalypse" are as plentiful as Ratkin themselves. Revelations of the Weaver, Wyld and Wyrms are meaningless when day-to-day survival is far more important. Instead, they just sense that the world is ready for a drastic change. Whether they prefer to stockpile food, ready their weapons, or simply drudge through tedious lives, they feel in their blood a distant echo of a call to battle.

Wererats thrive best where humans, werewolves and other predators can't find them. The majority of Ratkin are thoroughly urban creatures, establishing hidden networks of allies in the biggest cities of the world. A few have shunned the madness of the cities to establish rural kingdoms. Emissaries in the Deep Umbra continually scout for exotic breeding grounds, questing after legends of paradise. In any story based around the Children of Rat, wererat characters come from the fringes of reality; their beliefs and practices reflect this in spades.

Traits

All Ratkin share a few elemental similarities. Whether their home is the violent West or the mystical Far East, a lost realm of the spirit world or a familiar urban environment, wererats retain a few simple blessings.

- **Maze Memory:** All wererats have a highly developed "tunnel sense," a feel for absolute direction that prevents a Ratkin from getting lost underground. Even bound, gagged and stunned, a wererat abandoned in the deepest of labyrinths can still crawl back home by the most direct route... or die trying.

- **Acute Senses:** When a Ratkin wears the form of a rat, he senses the world in an entirely different way. Hearing and smell become his two most acute senses. The sense of touch is most sensitive near their *vibrissae*, or whiskers, which are prominently displayed along their snout in both rodens and Crinos forms. When using their ears, noses or whiskers to sense the world around them, wererats get a -1 difficulty to their Perception rolls.

- **Night Vision:** Although sight is the weakest sense rats possess, wererats have exemplary night vision. A Ratkin can see in anything short of absolute darkness by focusing her concentration. In game terms, a Ratkin who burns a point of Gnosis can draw upon the dim illumination of the Penumbra to make out rough outlines in the night. Normally, this crude night vision lasts for the duration of one scene; with the Gift: Darksight, it can last for up to eight hours after the scene ends if need be.

- **Immunity to Disease:** Wererats have a reputation for surviving against impossible odds. All of them share a highly-developed immunity to disease; they can even carry and trans-

Infecting Your Ratkin

Basic Character Creation

Step One: Character Concept

Choose your *character concept*.

— When were you first Infected?

— How much time elapsed before your First Change?

— What part of the world are you from?

Optional: Describe the *colony* that raised you.

Optional: Choose your *Nature and Demeanor* from the **Werewolf Players Guide**.

Select your breed.

- **Homid:** You began life as a human, not knowing you were the cursed offspring of a human and a wererat. Before you were infected, you were human Kinfolk.

Initial Gnosis: 1

- **Metis:** You are the incestuous offspring of two Ratkin, raised in shame in a Ratkin colony. All metis have a deformity visible in all three forms.

Initial Gnosis: 3

- **Rodens:** You were born as a rodent and raised by rats. One of your parents was an ordinary rodent; the other was a slumming Ratkin. Before you were infected, you were rat Kinfolk. Rodens Ratkin have the same Ability restrictions as lupus Garou.

Initial Gnosis: 5

Select your aspect.

- **Tunnel Runners:** the mavericks, messengers, scouts and spies of Ratkin society

Initial Rage: 1

Bonus Rite: Rite of the Bolthole

- **Shadow Seers:** mystics devoted to studying the mysteries of the spirit world and the madness of human society

Initial Rage: 2

Bonus Rite: Dedication Rite

- **Knife-Skulkers:** enforcers and assassins who mete out justice in all its forms

Initial Rage: 3

Bonus Rite: Contract Rite

- **Warriors:** soldiers bred for the armies of the Apocalypse; the *Blade Slaves*

Initial Rage: 4

Bonus Rite: Rite of the Pain Dagger

If your Storyteller allows it, you may play a *Freak aspect*.

- **Engineers:** lab rats scrounging amidst the offal and wreckage of human cities

Initial Rage: 2

Bonus Rite: Rite of the Shopping Cart

- **Plague Lords:** hideous metis skulkers who master the dark arts of disease, the mysteries of the underworld, and the rituals of plague

Initial Rage: 3

Bonus Rite: Rite of the Birthing Plague

• **Munchmausen:** storytellers, Umbral adventurers and inveterate liars

Initial Rage: 4

Bonus Rite: Rite of Artifice Dedication

• **Twitchers:** conspirators, anarchists and revolutionaries who reflect the world's rage

Initial Rage: 5

Bonus Rite: Rite of the Cardboard Palace

Step Two: Choose Attributes

Divide 15 points between Physical, Social and Mental Attributes. Seven points are allocated within the primary category, 5 in the secondary, and 3 in the tertiary.

Step Three: Choose Gifts and Abilities

Choose three Level One Gifts: one breed Gift, one aspect Gift, and one Ratkin Gift. This may influence which Abilities you'll want to learn.

Choose your Abilities. Divide 27 points between Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Thirteen points are allocated within the primary category, 9 in the secondary and 5 in the tertiary. You can't begin with an Ability over 3 without spending freebie points during the final step of character creation. Also note that all Ratkin must spend the appropriate points in Rituals in order to begin play with the bonus rite of their aspect.

Step Four: Choose Other Traits

Choose 5 points of Backgrounds.

• **Colony:** You're on good terms with the guardians of a Ratkin sacred site. The number of dots reflects the population of rats, Rat-spirits, Kinfolk and Ratkin living there.

Note: Metis must begin play with at least one point in the Colony Background.

• **Contacts:** Conspirators and contacts can provide you with information.

• **Fetish:** You possess an item containing a trapped spirit, one that can grant you magical or mystical abilities. You might have stolen this from another shapechanger.

• **Freak Factor:** You're a genetic abnormality, a rare aspect of Ratkin who doesn't quite fit into wererat society. If you're playing a "Freak aspect," you must purchase this Trait.

— Twitchers must pay for Freak Factor 3.

— Engineers and Plague Lords require Freak Factor 4.

— Munchmausen must purchase full Freak Factor 5.

• **Mentor:** An older Ratkin has agreed to teach you as his apprentice. You owe him a massive debt for this.

• **Plague:** You've got allies in a local "rat family" who are willing to help you out; unfortunately, they keep demanding help in return.

• **Resources:** You've managed to scam some money and can collect it on a regular basis.

Note: Wererats cannot have more than two dots in this Background. Tunnel Runners can't have any points in it until they reach Rank Three.

• **Rites:** You have been taught the rituals of a Ratkin aspect. A Ratkin begins play with one rite; each dot in this Background represents one level of additional rites.

Each Ratkin starts off the game with one free rite, depending on his aspect.

The Allies, Past Life, Totem and Pure Breed Backgrounds are not available. The Kinfolk Background has been replaced by the Colony and Plague Backgrounds.

Step Five: Finishing Touches

Record Rage (determined by your aspect) and Gnosis (determined by your breed).

Start with 3 points of Willpower. Finish up with 15 Freebie points.

Spending Freebie Points

Trait	Cost
Attribute	5 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Backgrounds	1 per dot
Rage	1 per dot
Gnosis	2 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot
Extra Gifts	7 per Gift (Level One only)

mit deadly infections without suffering their effects. This benefit is the result of the Birthing Plague, the infection that continually courses through a wererat's blood. If anyone managed to cure a Ratkin of its diseases, the beastie would lose its spiritual essence, reverting to a human or a normal rat. Metis wererats afflicted with such a punishment die.

• **Reduced Delirium:** The wererats were far more subtle than the Garou during the Impergium, relying on secrecy and stealth. Because of this, the effects of Delirium are lessened for them. When a human sees a wererat in Crinos form, check the same table (Werewolf, pg. 203) that Garou use. The human's reaction is still based on his Willpower, but add two dots for the table's purposes.

• **Regeneration:** Like virtually all shapechangers, wererats regenerate. As one would suspect aggravated damage such as silver, fire and the teeth and claws of supernatural creatures

counteracts this. Healing a point of aggravated damage still requires a full day of rest and a Willpower roll. Ratkin may heal back from death's door just as Garou do, although Rat's blessing grants them a bonus of -5 to any rolls on the Battle Scars table.

• **Silver Vulnerability:** Silver adversely affects Ratkin just as it does Garou, reducing Gnosis and even causing unsoakable aggravated damage.

• **Teeth and Claws:** Ratkin in Crinos can bite and claw for aggravated damage. Their bite is decidedly nasty, inflicting Strength + 1 damage, but their claw attacks are a little less potent, inflicting only Strength damage.

• **Stepping Sideways:** A rat pack doesn't have to use the Rite of the Bolthole to enter the Umbra — they can "step sideways" into the spirit world, just as werewolves do. This still requires a shiny, reflective object, but any wererat can do it. Just roll Gnosis against the difficulty of the local Gauntlet. As usual,

the number of successes still determines the length of time it takes to enter the spirit world: scoring one success means the leap takes five minutes; rolling two successes translates into thirty seconds (or three turns); with three successes, stepping sideways into the Umbra is instantaneous.

Stepping sideways also requires privacy; if anyone other than a Ratkin or other shapechanger is present, the attempt won't work.

- **Keening:** Ratkin have the ability to silently warn each other of danger, as long as their packmates are within hearing range. Rats, when threatened, can emit a high-pitched sound that humans cannot hear. Wererats, when faced with an enemy, can emit an unnatural sound that only other Ratkin (or certain shapechangers with sense-sharpening Gifts active) can sense. If one Ratkin in a pack keens, it sets everyone's heart racing, pumps adrenaline, tenses nerves, and gets everyone ready for a fight. Ratkin can only keen when actually threatened; it's impossible to "cry wolf" effectively unless you are experiencing the stress of great danger. Other shapechangers cannot emulate or imitate this sound.

- **Speaks in Squeaks:** All Ratkin share a rodent language that only they can understand. This can be used in any form. Ratkin in Rodens form can be quite verbose; wererats in Crinos form limit themselves to simple sentences of a few crude words. Ratkin in Homid form are very careful where they use this rodent language — it's most unnerving when a rat disguised as a human starts chattering, nattering, clicking and whuffling.

- **Blessings of the Rat Incarna:** Ratkin don't need to take the Totem Background during character creation. Instead, every wererat begins his or her life in service to the Rat Incarna. Rat watches over her children from the first moment of Infection to the catharsis of the First Change. The wererat gains all of the benefits (and adheres to the ban) of the Rat Totem. Ratkin can change their totem each time they form a new "rat pack." They collectively decide which totem best fits their current goals in life; you'll find more details in the *Totem* section.

Once wererats form a pack, they don't "pool" their Totem Background points, like werewolves do. Instead, a Shadow Seer must perform a Dedication Rite to bind the rat pack together and declare the quest they are trying to achieve. The final roll for this ritual determines the number of temporary background points the pack gets and influences which totem they can choose. Once the pack disbands, all of the wererats present resume their spiritual affiliation to the Rat Incarna... until the next pack is formed. You'll find more details on these practices in the *Rites and Rituals* section.

- **Blood Memory:** Most supernatural creatures know nothing of the Blood Memory possessed by Ratkin, an ability that allows them to share racial memories. Through this talent, a wererat may "remember" the name of another Ratkin he's never met, a place he's never been, or a deed performed by a member of his aspect generations ago. For more details, keep reading.

For the record, Ratkin blood is also poisonous to those who feast on it. Each turn a vampire or other supernatural creature drinks the blood of a wererat, he receives one unsoakable health level of aggravated damage. In addition, the creature is also overwhelmed by disturbing and terrifying psychedelic images. Such experiences "reveal" nothing; they're just really bad trips.

Blood Memory

Quiet, introspective rodents can have remarkable flashes of insight. For instance, a wererat who calmly listens to the sound of his own blood can remember the name of another Ratkin he's never met before. With enough effort, a Ratkin might even recall another wererat's aspect, what part of the world he hails from, or where he's been.

Knowledge of ancient labyrinths is also passed down from generation to generation. A Ratkin can't "remember" passages that have changed during the last ten years, but in any major city, there's a chance that she can find a secret path that's been long forgotten. If it doesn't exist in the physical world, it might exist in the spirit world. Tunnel Runners excel at this.

A lone Ratkin, through introspection, can even attempt to channel memories of ancestors who served his aspect. Though this may sound similar to the Garou's Past Life Background, it has one important difference: It's limited to memories. A wererat cannot channel the heroes of Ratkin history to work through him. This feat is somewhat more difficult than the other applications of Blood Memory.

System: Calling upon Blood Memory is usually a simple Gnosis roll. "Remembering" the name of a Ratkin you've never met is difficulty 6. Finding your way in a place you've never been is difficulty 8 (or difficulty 6 if you're a Tunnel Runner). Recalling visions of the past is far more difficult: it requires the expenditure of a point of Gnosis and a roll of the remaining temporary Gnosis; the difficulty is 9. This last ability can only be used once per game session.

Ancient revelations are always sensory experiences, and often relate to the situation the wererat is currently struggling with — they're usually panic-filled flashes of mad flight and desperate searching. True clarity is impossible, particularly when trying to regain facts having nothing to do with hiding places or fellow Ratkin's personal history. The amount of time you can reach back depends on the number of successes you obtain on the Gnosis roll. Memories more recent than ten years ago cannot be recalled. Infection plays hell with this talent, recalling memories of the Impergium that are as fresh as yesterday, and generally driving the Ratkin to the point of near-madness.

Visionary	Revelations
One success	10 to 50 years
Two successes	50 to 150 years
Three successes	150 to 500 years
Four successes	500 to 1000 years
Five successes	1000 to 2000 years

With more than six successes, a Ratkin will flash on memories from the War of Rage or the Impergium. Seeing back that far, of course, is extremely rare. Any characters wanting to remember back further or with actual clarity are advised to consult a Mokolé; wererat Blood Memory can't compete with the Dragon Breed's Mnesis.

When a Ratkin goes into a meditative trance to seek a revelation from the past, the Storyteller has every right to tailor the nature of the information gained, making it succinct and clear or keeping it vague and mystical. The Storyteller should definitely try to dredge up something that would make a good

plot thread. Just keep in mind that most Storytellers aren't eager to circumvent an entire story with a single die roll.

The Veil and Delirium

Preserving the Veil is the first, and most controversial, dictum of the Litany of Survival. Different aspects hold with different interpretations. Twitchers don't give a damn about the Veil, and are often banished from nests for precisely that reason. By contrast, Engineers are fanatic about upholding it; if someone sees them hooking up a housecat to an electrical generator, the humans will no doubt get suspicious and call *someone*. Knife Skulkers endlessly debate where to draw the line between chaos and injustice. Some punish wererats who take Crinos form in public, while others harass any Ratkin who use their Gifts openly. Justice is personal and arbitrary, especially among Skulkers.

Whether "preserving the Veil" is important to *your* wererat depends on who she wants to hang out with. Packs that stay far away from large colonies interpret this phrase very liberally. A few dangerous deceits delight in unleashing Delirium, claiming that it helps spread chaos. One of their most popular tactics is the Freak Show, a ritual performed by a pack of rodens-form wererats exploiting the Rite of Artifice Dedication. After dressing outrageously, they scurry across the floor of a human's home and torment the inhabitants. If any of the humans leap onto chairs and scream, the Freak Show is a success. Anarchistic packs are infamous at Twitcher Revels, but they often find themselves on the run from older wererats, who usually don't have a sense of humor about such things.

Not everyone believes that acting like a maniac in public serves the Wyld. In some colonies, doing anything that threatens the safety, secrecy or security of the nest "shreds the Veil," and is a punishable offense. Colony elders and the Knife-Skulkers they command are the most dedicated to enforcing these concepts. In fact, Skulkers can earn quick Renown for reporting Freak Shows and Twitchers to nearby colonies. Rat packs who offer to hunt and punish these Ratkin will find no end of Contracts. If you're trying to score points with the elders — and you'd like to frequent sites that are more than just crash space — you may choose to obey the first dictum of the Litany very strictly. The choice is simple: obey the elders, or run from their minions. Freak out humans at your own risk.

Rage and Reason

Ratkin are creatures of extremes, even moreso than other shapechangers. Rage and reason are the two extremes of their existence. Two of the most important stats on your Ratkin's character sheet — Rage and Gnosis — represent this. The general guidelines for thinking like a rat are pretty simple. Basically, if your wererat is thrown into an extreme situation, ask yourself one question: Which trait is higher, Rage or Gnosis?

The system works like this: When a Ratkin's temporary Rage is higher than his temporary Gnosis, he's visibly disturbed, almost shaking. He's ready for action, all the time, and just about ready to climb the walls. If that Rage overwhelms him, he'll physically react, either by lashing out at things around him, or trying to bolt away from any danger, real or imagined. Ratkin roll



A Brief Ratkin Lexicon

Ratkin society is swarming with legions of furtive little cultists. To an outsider, one group of wererats is the same as any other. Anyone who deals with them extensively, however, may quickly get overwhelmed with the details of their society. Here's a quick summary to help you keep your rodential etymology straight.

- Any gathering of Ratkin and their Kinfolk is known as a **deceit**.
- A deceit of Ratkin that's allied themselves to each other and a totem is known as a **rat pack**.
- The most anarchistic rat packs are composed of **ramblers**; the members typically refer to themselves as a **gang**.
- More traditional rat packs are far more concerned with defending the breeding grounds of their race; they defend entire colonies of wererats. Colonies are built around sacred sites known as **Nests**.
- Formal, traditional rat packs who defend Nests refer to themselves as **courtiers** and assemble in **retinues**.
- If a colony is large enough, they may be ruled by a group of **privileged elders**. Elders are usually at least Rank Three.
- Larger colonies get organized and form **tribes**; they are ruled by cunning and sagacious **Rat Kings**.
- Retinues of courtiers refer to the smallest nests as **middens**; gangs of rambler consider them **crash space**.
- The largest colonies are known as **infestations** and are typically ruled by stodgy old **councils** reflecting all the aspects present.

for frenzy, just like Garou do, and when it hits, instinct takes over rational thought. The result is Rat Madness.

If your Ratkin can overcome this fury, raising his Gnosis higher than his Rage, then he can keep those instincts under control. The wererat will become calm, rational... even helpful and trusting, if he's approached correctly. If his Gnosis gets too high, however, he'll start to get disconnected from the physical world. His affinity to the spirit world grows greater, until he becomes almost delusional. Ratkin can also succumb to *Rapture*, a sort of "Gnosis frenzy." When it hits, visions, voices and delusions result. Storytellers can find more concrete guidelines for this at the end of Chapter Five.

Kinfolk and Breeds

Most Ratkin have a difficult time passing on their legacy to their offspring. First, they must find suitable breeding stock. Some humans are shameless enough to breed with just about anyone, including drifters and criminals who are actually wandering wererats in disguise. In these cases, the child that results is human Kinfolk, a cursed creature with a latent taint of rat blood in its veins. Wererats who are less particular about their procreation like to go slumming in rodent populations. Their offspring are rat Kinfolk, beasts who are slightly more insightful than their rodent brethren. Humans may limit the number of children they have, but rats are reproductively precocious. Thus, rat Kinfolk far outnumber human Kin.

If two Ratkin breed, the result is a metis, a hybrid offspring that is usually infected with the Birthing Plague at birth. If it survives, there is a brief occasion for rejoicing, since the Army of the Apocalypse will have one more soldier. Unfortunately, metis Ratkin are always sterile, which is a significant stigma in wererat society.

In the past, human and rat Kinfolk could go their whole lives without learning about their doomed legacy. Now Ratkin are roaming the world again in increased numbers, desperately searching for their lost descendants. If a Kinfolk is wounded, poisoned or plagued by a Ratkin, the latent disease of the Birthing Plague is passed on. If a ritualist then performs the Rite of the Birthing Plague, the sleeping taint of rat blood awakens, and Infection begins. Many die; the chosen survive. Descendants of Kinfolk also retain a thin taint of Ratkin blood, but for them, the chances of surviving the Plague decrease with each successive generation.

As with other shapechangers, a Ratkin's breed depends on whether she was a human or rat before she discovered her true nature. Rat Kinfolk who survive the Birthing Plague become rodents Ratkin, while human Kin who survive become homid Ratkin. Metis Ratkin are just grateful to survive. They spend their formative years slinking about their breeding grounds as they tend to their many brothers and sisters. Each of these poor creatures—homid, metis and rodents Ratkin—learns about the world differently.

Human Kinfolk and Homid Ratkin

I think that the swelling is going down.

I said I think that the swelling is going down.

Two hundred dollars to leave this town....

— L7, "The Frying Pan is Red"

Human Kinfolk live lives of quiet desperation, knowing that something is horribly wrong with the world, but completely unable to do anything about it. Most live on the fringes of human society, never quite fitting in and never fully succeeding. Whether they're drifters, criminals, trapped in bad relationships or just plain impoverished, the taint of rat blood curses their lives. Normal life seems confining, mundane and tedious. Life before Infection usually involves waiting for a "moment of glory" that will justify everything the poor bastard has suffered through. In this mythical moment, the pitiful creature will "beat the system" and find freedom.

Infection offers that freedom. The restrictions of human society are cast aside. Perspective changes entirely. All of human history becomes an irrelevant saga between the lies of the Concord and the redemption of the Apocalypse. Truly gifted victims can understand most of wererat history and cosmology after a few brief visions. Others don't give a damn about the Wurm, Weaver and Wyld; they just bolt out of their desperate situations to seek something better. The overwhelming rage an Infected human feels tears him away from the simple life she once knew, and plunges her into absolute terror at what she has become. When this happens, the only surcease from her suffering involves striking out at the webs that bind her. Some Infected Kinfolk flee; others fight their way out.

Fear of discovery becomes a strong motivation afterwards. Many Ratkin refuse to trust anyone after the First Change, even *their own kind*, until they are forced to do so by necessity. The

lucky ones find their kin early, or are rescued by them and offered a place of temporary safety. Eventually, offers of help become very tempting. If a homid Ratkin can't be found by others of his very kind who can explain what's going on, he might misinterpret the experience, resorting to mania or violence. Ratkin have many terms to describe this phenomenon: "going postal," "climbing the bell tower," "going through the whole gym bag," and "cleaning O'Tolley's" are a few common examples.

Until homids succumb to the First Change, their minds are assaulted by messages from the Rat Incarna, whisperings from Rat-spirits, and visions of the history of their race. The final transformation may not occur until days, weeks or even months after surviving the Plague. Visions of the Birthing Plague prepare a human for the radical change he's going to undergo, spiraling him down a descent into madness. The Ratkin tears himself away from every burden in his life, until the cathartic moment when he realizes the monster he has become.

If a pack of Ratkin can intervene, the poor beastie can find some purpose in life. Unfortunately, as the number of Rats in the world steadily increases, more lost children are disappearing. As loners and survivalists, they remain in hiding or wander the streets, dealing with other supernatural creatures only as necessary. A few wererats continue to hear voices and see visions long after they learn to shift. These madmen often resort to shocking atrocities when they misinterpret what they see and hear. A lost Kinfolk might kill humans in a glorious frenzy of revenge, indulge in religious mania or just barricade himself in his home with heavy weaponry until the forces of order come to take him away.

Eventually, most homid Ratkin give up on their fellow humans entirely. The Age of Man is over, after all. The human race is doomed. Once a Ratkin's alliance shifts to that of his brothers and sisters, there is little reason to resist lying to, stealing from, or betraying other human beings. They are less important than wererats, after all, and should be exploited to further the Ratkin race. A few, however, continue to have pangs of conscience about such practices, placing them in a situation where they must lie to both Ratkin and humans to survive. No wonder trust is so hard to come by. Perhaps when the world is healed, and the wererats survive the Apocalypse, the society that results will be a much kinder one... but not yet.

Rodens Ratkin

"Hey, I know where you live! I live where you live!"

—Ralphie Roach, *Joe's Apartment*

Baby Kinfolk

Some wererats receive visions of where their lost Kinfolk may be. One of the most common visions of this sort is of a human baby born to Kinfolk parents. When this happens, a deceit of Ratkin scurries to the scene as quickly as they can, preparing to abduct the Ratkin relative before it grows up among ordinary humans. Though many are careful to undertake these missions under the cover of the Veil, enough of them have been sighted to start a few urban legends about baby-snatching rats.

Though Ratkin can live in almost any environment in the world, the largest concentrations of rodens Ratkin are in urban environments. Humans and rats co-habit and compete for control of many of the same cities. The scientific term for animals who live in human settlements is *commensal*. The vulgar terms are less kind. Rats don't recognize the boundaries of human civilization, and tend to get territorial when they claim a breeding ground as their own. Rodens Ratkin share the same attitudes. Human laws mean nothing to a wererat trying to increase the population of his colony.

When a rodent-born survives his first Infection, his perspective on the world drastically changes. Rats are already quite intelligent, but the Birthing Plague overwhelms the rodent's intellect, vastly expanding it to the point where it's on par with the average human... or better. In rare cases, the infected rat's mind may catapult him to the realm of a supergenius, earning him a name like "Algernon" or "Brain." Suffice it to say that the experience can give the average *Rattus norvegicus* a host of ideas.

Despite this benefit, old habits die hard. Rodent-breed Rats can never quite understand the ethics and mores of human society. They do not understand the idea of property, particularly the idea that anyone can define their home just by securing four walls. Rats, they argue (as soon as they are capable of articulate speech), should have the freedom to travel anywhere. Locks, doors and security systems are only suggestions. Breaking and entering is a sacred obligation. Ownership is situational. And, most importantly, in any conflict between humans and rats, the rodents are always right. Human civilization was a mistake, after all, a result of the Garou's ill-conceived Concord, and with the Apocalypse close at hand, it's doomed anyway. Like lupus Garou, they are restricted in the Abilities they can purchase at character creation.

After living with vast numbers of relatives, all but the most cage-bound housepets (or experimental test subjects) also find the idea of privacy to be confusing. Anything you can do in front of another rat, one would suppose, one should be able to do in front of another Ratkin... or a human, presumably. Bathroom humor aside (rats can't control all of their bodily functions, but Ratkin can), rodens in Homid form are puzzled by ideas like nudity taboos, improper mating habits, and the concept of changing clothes in private. In the interest of safety and survival, Ratkin of other breeds must watch them closely.

Rodens are also far more common than homids, especially in wererat colonies. Since rats are more reproductively precocious than humans, rodens outnumber homids five to one. (Your rat pack doesn't have to abide by the same ratios, of course, but they will be regarded with suspicion if they don't.) Overall, rodens Ratkin consider themselves far more honest than their homid cousins. Life among humans makes human Kinfolk treacherous little bastards to begin with, and after the First Change, homid Ratkin are known for their highly-developed abilities of deception. Rodens, on the other hand, don't lie about who they are; a rat, by any other name, would smell the same.

There is one exception to this honesty: Never argue with an elderly rodens about colony politics. The ones who spend too much time living near Ratkin nests tend to get *nasty* about their social status, and demand respect. They are *privileged*, especially if they are elders, and won't let you forget it. That's

The Caged Folk

Most rat Kinfolk have the intelligence of the average rat. They can be trained to do simple tricks, respond to their names, or even spy on people, but they can only communicate in simple sentences. As rumor would have it, though, there's allegedly one notable exception. Legends tell of family of Kinfolk that escaped from an elaborate experiment in the laboratories of Developmental Neogenetics Amalgamated. Through genetic manipulation, they have gained an abnormally high intelligence — slightly higher than the human average — and passed this blessing on to hundreds of Rat Kinfolk descendants.

Now the Nests pass on tales of a conspiracy of rodentia intelligentsia infiltrating the rodent population of North America. Secretly, it's said, they refer to themselves as the Caged Folk. Many are thought to have taken up positions as agents of espionage in research laboratories. Their mission is to breed frequently enough to raise the average intelligence of the rodent population, replacing the species *Rattus norvegicus* with the more evolved *Rattus superior*. Operating from secret nests, they educate their rugrats in reading, elementary science and rodent espionage. If these numbers are true, then this tiny group has probably already offered up a few of their own into the ranks of the Ratkin Engineers. They're always described as inordinately patient — insisting that their time will come.

one reason why some young rat packs prefer not to spend too much time hanging around a sacred site — sooner or later, one of the older rats will try hard to ensnare them in some convoluted intrigue. As any youngster can tell you, "When the trap snaps, someone else will get the bait."

Metis Ratkin

"Aarrgh! Stupid, stupid Rat Creatures!"

— Bone, every other issue of *Bone*

Metis are always infertile. They also begin life physically weaker than other rats, lacking the genetic diversity that makes other wererats so robust. For these two reasons, they are subjected to the Rite of the Birthing Plague shortly after birth. Unfortunately, they are also the least likely of the three breeds to endure it. If a metis Ratkin survives Infection, the colony rejoices. Despite this, all metis are still prone to psychological and physical challenges. Somewhere in the midst of all this happiness, such minor details are ignored. Because larger swarms and armies are desperately needed for the final battle of the Apocalypse, metis Ratkin don't suffer from the social stigmas inflicted on metis of other Changing Breeds.

Rat breeders are well aware of the danger of limiting a gene pool of offspring. Without "hybrid variety," children born of close relatives are often less robust, have less resistance to disease, and have weaker constitutions. Physically, however, metis wererats are larger and bulkier than their relations; their Crinos-form Attributes reflect greater muscle power but less overall resilience.



Raised from birth in a Nest, metis Ratkin are the most intimately aware (sometimes literally so) with the workings of wererat society. When a rat pack has to deal with a Ratkin colony, their metis (if any) is often chosen to represent the group. Metis characters should get a -1 difficulty on all Etiquette and Politics rolls of this kind. Each metis must begin play with at least one point in the Colony Background; this Trait reflects the population of the sacred site from which he came.

Metis are usually on excellent terms with the local female population, particularly the rodents responsible for breeding and raising children. Many a metis learns to describe the workings of Ratkin society by telling stories to young rodent pups. Unfortunately, until the metis decides to leave the nest, he is expected to show deference toward and respect for his rodens elders. Ratkin elders have little, if any, respect for metis and expect to be treated like royalty. If a metis is actually accepted by a rat pack, he is free to travel where he pleases. Until then, a metis learns how to deal with the local old folks.

Humans aren't much better than elders. They have a low tolerance for anyone who is different, diseased, insane or deformed. For all their pretense at humanity, they've overpopulated most of their cities so badly that people "fall through the cracks" every day, ending up starving and homeless on the street. When metis enter human society, they always do so under the guise of being "down and out." They tend to have the most sympathy for the disenfranchised members of human society, which usually elicits scorn and censure from other wererats. Then again, only a metis can truly understand rejection and ostracism.

Deformities: Every metis wererat has a deformity, one that is visible in all three of his forms. This affliction might be easily concealed when the metis interacts with human society, but every metis is *required* to openly display his or her genetic flaw when visiting a Ratkin colony. Failure to do so invites punishment from the highest-ranking Knife-Skulker present; pray that it's only ritual scarring. For Storytellers using Renown rules, hiding a metis deformity results in the loss of three points of Obligation Renown.

Examples of metis deformities abound; they suffer from the same genetic afflictions as other metis shapechangers. Here's a few ideas to get you started: *hairless, club foot, third eye, albinism, reticulated "rhino" skin, abnormally small, gigantic and bloated, tiny hands in Rodens form/paws in Homid form, human face in Rodens form/rat features in Homid form, hooved feet, tiny horns*. A metis can usually conceal his deformity when traveling among humans, but among other rat bastards, they take pride in their afflictions, competing to see who has the most impressive disfigurement.

Forms

There were rumors, too, with a baffling and disconcerting amount of agreement. Witnesses said that it had long hair and the shape of a rat, but that its sharp-toothed bearded face was evilly human, while its paws were like tiny human hands.

— "Dreams in the Witch House," H.P. Lovecraft

Ratkin love shapeshifting, as it allows them to infiltrate human, rodent and supernatural societies with equal facility. Any Ratkin can assume at least three forms. The first of these guises, **Homid** form, allows a wererat to interact with the world

as a human being. When wearing this shape, Ratkin always have some tell-tale feature that gives away their rodent heritage: sharp teeth, bright wide eyes, a long nose or sharp little fingernails are all common traits. These physical imperfections are never as exaggerated as *metis deformities*; they are subtle enough that only another wererat would easily notice them.

Like Garou, a Ratkin can shapeshift part of her body to take advantage of rodent features in Homid form. This might involve sprouting a tail to grab something off a shelf or releasing whiskers to feel along a wall in the dark. To do this, burn off a point of Rage and roll Dexterity + Primal-Urge, difficulty 7. For Gaia's sake, don't botch the roll; it's embarrassing.

The **Crinos** form is a shocking amalgam of rat and man. A Ratkin's *Crinos* form is usually a full foot taller than its Homid form, although many wererats typically slouch to conceal this extra height. Clawed paws curl, contorting into tiny hands. Whiskers twitch, sensing the slightest breeze. The sight of a Ratkin in Crinos form invokes a weakened version of the Delirium in humans who see it, and with a curious twist. Many of the memories formed by Ratkin sightings are influenced by urban legends, tainted by fears of sprawling cities infested with chaos and madness. Some of these stories are repeated as incidents witnessed by a friend of a friend of a friend....

Ratkin in Crinos can actually use their tails to flip switches, push buttons or grasp small objects. Unfortunately, any Dexterity rolls involving tail manipulation are at a +3 difficulty, and the tail's effective Strength equals Homid form Strength -1.

The **Rodens** form often resembles a normal-looking wharf rat. Experts in the ways of wererats can often guess a Ratkin's aspect from this form. Pustulent Plague Lords lick at their sores and buboes; nefarious Engineers carefully groom albino fur and blink weak eyes; shadowy Knife-Skulkers shift their fur into shades embraced by darkness. In absolute darkness, only subtle scents distinguish one rat from another. A Ratkin's Rodens form might be a bloated beastie the size of a housecat, a furtive wharf rat clutching at shiny gewgaws with unnaturally gnarled paws, or an oily swamp rat leaping out of a public toilet to escape the sewers below. Ratkin in Rodens are notoriously difficult to kill; unfortunately, their natural resilience doesn't help them much against supernatural creatures or serious attacks. Although Rodens-form wererats add two to Homid-form Stamina, they cannot use these extra dice when soaking damage from bladed weapons, firearms, or the teeth and claws of supernatural creatures.

Normal rodents have prehensile digits, which can be used for climbing and grasping food, but their "thumbs" are underdeveloped, and cannot grasp. Rodens-form Ratkin, on the other hand, can grasp and use tools with primitive thumbs. The smartest ones can devise tiny tools to aid them in their secretive tasks. Although this is rarely attempted, Ratkin in Rodens are also extremely good at hiding and skulking; at the Storyteller's option, any Ratkin in this form might reduce the difficulty of Stealth rolls by 2 or 3.

Experienced Ratkin are able to assume a fourth form. This protean ability doesn't fully develop until the wererat is a "Tava Ratkin," or Rank Three wererat. Which shape the wererat assumes depends on his breed. Homids learn the Rat Man form to exploit humans with increased guile and deception. Metis shamble in the



Form Statistics

Crinos	Rodens
Str: +1*	Str: -1
Dex: +4	Dex: +2
Sta: +2*	Sta: +2
Cha: -2	
App: -1	
Per: +1	Per: +3

*Metis Ratkin add two to their effective Strength in Crinos, but add only a single dot to Stamina in that form; they're bulky and powerful, but without real long-term endurance.

lumbering Rat Thing form. Rodens Ratkin indulge in extreme violence after assuming Itchy form. These three "skins" are learned as Breed Gifts, and are detailed further in Appendix One.

The difficulty to shift forms is always 6. Since Ratkin only have three forms, the shifting from Homid to Rodens (or back) only requires two successes on a Stamina + Primal-Urge roll. Spending a point of Rage will automatically guarantee an instantaneous change. A wererat can't shift in an area where there isn't enough room for Crinos (as she can't achieve the midpoint between human and rat), but fortunately, many Rat Warriors have mastered the art of leaping out of a confined crawlspace in Rodens form and shifting into Crinos form in mid-air....

New Background: Colony

All metis begin the game with the Colony Background; it is optional for other Ratkin. This Trait describes the size of the nest where you are born. Presumably, if you're a pup and you get in

trouble, you can send a messenger or Rat-spirit "back home" for help. Once you join a rat pack or complete your Rite of Passage, however, your colony won't automatically answer all of your cries for aid. In addition, your Storyteller is under no obligation to set his adventures anywhere near the nest where you were born. If you are fortunate, he may actually assign you a rating for your Colony Background if your home is going to be the center of his chronicle.

Nests have a size rating, just like Garou caerns do. With werewolves, a caern rating reflects the amount of spiritual energy that's stored within it. With wererats, a nest rating reflects the amount of chaos that's concentrated at the center of the area, and this depends on the number of Ratkin who live there. Nests lower than Level Three tend to be very informal and disorganized, and are typically ruled by the local elders. Once a nest gets too populated, however, wererats usually clamor for one rat to rule them all. The result is a formal *tribe* dedicated to that one nest. For more details, see Chapter Two.

Nest rating	# of Ratkin	Description
One	1-4	little more than crash space (also known as a "midden")
Two	5-10	a temporary scrape defended by Tunnel Runners
Three	11-25	a thriving colony, possibly a young tribe
Four	25-50	a healthy warren of rodents
Five	50+	a surging infestation advised by an elderly council

For every Ratkin who lives in a colony, there may also be a score or two of normal rats and rat Kinfolk nearby. Although Garou with the Kinfolk Background can call upon their relations to help them, swarms of rats don't automatically rush into

battle whenever someone keens. If a Ratkin correctly petitions the colony where she was born, the Storyteller may roll the rodent's Colony Background to determine the degree to which the local Kinfolk and spirits are willing to help out. Summoning violent armies of rats to attack is far more difficult; it requires a damn good reason and the Rite of the Swarm, which is described in the *Rites and Rituals* section.

As one would expect, Ratkin colonies are very different from Garou septs. Garou prefer to guard vast sprawling bawns in the depths of the wilderness; most Ratkin vastly prefer to live in human cities, where the action is. Garou refer to urban werewolves as *urrah*, or "tainted ones"; Ratkin consider "country mice" to be cowards. Garou caerns are large enough for nine-foot werewolves to revel in epic moots; the chambers of a Ratkin nest are usually connected by complicated systems of underground tunnels, intentionally preventing anyone from entering most areas homid form. Human crawlspaces have only limited access to a few areas of the average Ratkin nest.

Finally, Garou caerns are blessed with Moon Bridges that span entire continents, allowing rapid travel between them. Ratkin nests don't have such privileges. Tunnel Runners may spray-paint sigils to hint at where a local nest may be, but traveling between distant nests can take weeks. A Tunnel Runner has to depend on circuitous Umbral bolt holes, hitchhiking, interminable bus rides and furtive train hopping when leading his pack to a nest of wererats. As one would expect, only a Bone Gnawer or a Ratkin has the patience to ride a Greyhound bus to get to the next sacred site.

New Background: Freak Factor

On a Ratkin's character sheet, deviance is measured by a Trait affectionately known as the Freak Factor. Any truly demented Ratkin, from a wererat anarchist hearing the whispers of the Rat God to an exile from the depths of the Umbra to those embracing the Freak aspects of wererat society, can be evaluated on this scale. Storytellers don't have to allow Freaks in their chronicles; instead they may choose place a limit on the Freakishness of characters. One the other hand, Storytellers who enjoy stranger tales may instead *require* all characters to take this Background.

• **Unhinged:** Ratkin with Freak Factor 1 have a highly developed relationship with their Totems. If you're Unhinged, your god is still calling you. After your First Change, the voices just wouldn't stop. Whenever you are uncertain of a course of action, you may hear voices instructing you with advice. For players who are new to the World of Darkness, this blessing can be massively useful — a godsend, if you will. Nonetheless, as one would expect, characters who are tormented by voices are often treated as insane. All Twitchers have this psychological "enhancement."

•• **Unstable:** Rage comes a little too easily for these Ratkin; this is both a blessing and a curse. A seething anger isolates you from ordinary humans, but it also makes you primed for battle at a moment's notice. Whenever a character with this Background gains a Rage point, roll a die; on a 10, he gains an extra point of Rage. Unfortunately, he also makes Frenzy rolls at difficulty 4. Ratkin at Freak Factor 2 don't play well with others, but they're absolute bastards in a fight. All Twitchers are Unhinged *and* Unstable; thus, they must pay three Background Points for their Freak Factor during character creation.

••• **Unearthly:** If you're a Ratkin at Freak Factor 3, you're blessed with messages from Rat-spirits in the Umbra. Spirits follow you everywhere you go, and you receive repeated messages from places where urban spirits congregate. Jaggings and Gafflings who serve Rat find it easier to communicate with Unearthly Ratkin, spending one less point of Power on any Charm involving communication. If they don't already have it, Unearthly characters gain the Shadow Seer Gift: Spirit Speech. In addition, Unearthly characters gain Gnosis quicker; whenever the wererat gains Gnosis, roll a die; on a 10, she gains an extra point of Gnosis and makes a Rapture roll (see Chapter Five).

•••• **Unbalanced:** Wererats are pure creatures of the Wyld. Ratkin at Freak Factor 4 also have an intuitive understanding of either the Weaver or the Wyrms. Plague Lords understand disease and corruption; thus, they have an unnerving understanding of the Wyrms. Ratkin Engineers scavenge and scrounge technology in amazing ways; thus, they develop an unnatural love for the Weaver. Plague Lords and Engineers must have at least four points in this Background during character creation. Unbalanced characters of other aspects receive a fourth Gift during character creation: Sense Weaver or Sense Wyrms, depending on their preference.

••••• **Unnatural:** You are not from this world. The physical world just doesn't make sense to you; you consider the strangeness of the Deep Umbra to be the norm. Maybe one of your parents was a Materialized Rat-spirit. Maybe you've spent a little too much time in the spirit world and have forgotten who you are. Perhaps you are an exile from a Deep Umbral Paradise Realm, or quest for a personal Lost Kingdom that only you can remember. Thus, you're Unnatural. As a side effect, you always get a -2 difficulty when stepping sideways. All Munchmausen are required to buy this Background and play it to the hilt. At the Storyteller's option, Unnatural characters may also have a bonus at interacting with chimerae and dream realms.

This background does more than grant simple advantages; it reflects the rarity of Freaks in the world. Playing Munchmausen, for instance, requires five Background Points because there are very few of them in existence. Ratkin of the four traditional aspects can also purchase a Freak Factor, but they obviously don't benefit from them as much as Freaks do. In addition, the effects of this Background are not cumulative. The benefits of Freak Factor 4 don't include Freak Factor 1; thus, a Plague Lord doesn't necessarily hear voices... unless the player wants to buy that Background separately for his character. Yes, you can drop fifteen freebie points and purchase all levels of Freak Factor concurrently — but do you really want to run a Ratkin that messed-up?

New Background: Plague

No matter how they justify their shocking atrocities, wererats still find enough common ground to work together. To further this, full-blooded Ratkin who are aware of their heritage have established tightly-knit clans that range throughout the world... and beyond. These extensive networks of wererats are known as "families" to the Ratkin who trust them; to everyone else, including the characters they're *Ratkin plagues*, conspiracies of rodents that stretch across entire continents. As part of the fulfillment of the Ratkin bard's ancient curse, nine deadly plagues have spread throughout the world.

Each Ratkin plague has its own distinct methods of preparing for the Final Days. The Nezumi clan of the Far East, the fanatic survivalists of North America, Great-Grandmere's minions in Europe — each brood learns of their destiny differently. Ratkin plagues offer support in times of danger, but they may also demand burdensome obligations from the rat packs they encounter... and punish those who do not uphold them. Just as other supernatural creatures sometimes regret making a deal with a pack of Ratkin, many deceits of wererats come to regret going to a Ratkin plague for advice or assistance. Beginning characters rarely belong to one of these groups; usually, they are the province of the Storyteller.

Despite geographical distances, all Ratkin families belong to the same race. A Tokyo Nezumi still regards a South American Ratkin with familial affection. An inbred mountain rat may recall through blood memory the name of a swamp rat he's just met for the first time. Though their network of communication across the globe is far from perfect, it's good enough to keep them one step ahead of most other supernatural alliances. Most wererats do not consort with the local Ratkin plague, and in fact prefer to stay clear of them unless they're desperate for help. Wererats never forget a debt.

The Plague Background shows the relationship between a Ratkin character and the nearest rat family. If a character gets really stuck, he can roll his Plague Background (against a difficulty of 6) to see if a local relative can help him out; this roll cannot be made more than once during a story (i.e., each chapter of a chronicle). If he's very far from where he was spawned, the Storyteller may increase the difficulty of this roll by one or two. Unfortunately, such help *always* has a heavy price. Rat families often demand that any deceits of Ratkin "just passing through" should help them out with their latest dilemma. In a typical story involving one of these groups, the Ratkin have a few options: Do they help the plague, ignore them, or *actively try to frustrate them in their efforts?*

To help you decide whether to call upon these relations, the largest Ratkin plagues are listed below. Not all Ratkin are actively involved in family activities, but if a wererat stays too long in one part of the world, his pack might hear from a frantic messenger demanding they get involved in a family affair.

The Rat Race (North American Ratkin) — Servants to their heretical visions of the Rat Incarna, these violent Ratkin are fascinated by tales of the End Times.

Gamine (European Ratkin) — Led by their matriarch in the sewers of Paris, Madame LeFarge's cunning rodentia carry out elaborate games of intrigue and espionage.

Borrachon Wererats (South American Ratkin) — The wererats who serve this kingdom live in the most impoverished areas of South American cities. They act as saviors to the poor... and their hidden masters.

Rattus Typhus (African Ratkin) — In a kingdom led by the Plague Lords, wererats profit from the suffering of humans. Constantly mutating the Birthing Plague, they collectively attempt to evolve a new race of wererats.

Nezumi (Japanese Ratkin) — Masters of Low War, Nezumi step in to correct the mistakes made by the shapechangers of the East. Most have no qualms about working with other Asian shapeshifters. (This plague is further detailed in the *Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East* sourcebook.)

Thuggees (East Asian Ratkin) — Descended from the criminal cults of historical India, these insidious servitors obey the whims of a criminal mastermind.

The Horde (Eurasian Ratkin) — While werewolves rage across Russia, Ratkin infest the courts of the powerful, exploiting their political connections. They roam freely throughout the wilderness of Russia, ultimately serving no one but themselves.

De La Poer's Disciples (Antarctic Ratkin) — Munchausen command an Umbral Kingdom in the Antarctic where tales of travel and terror are the most precious commodities.

Ratkin Ronin (The High Seas) — As outcasts of the Nezumi, these "wave rats" take to the high seas to live as scoundrels and pirates.

Totems

When a Ratkin joins a pack of his brethren, he must choose his god. Totems are powerful animist spirits that watch over the shapechangers who serve them. During the Rite of Dedication, a deceit of Ratkin pledges to fulfill a task on behalf of one of these Incarna. If a Shadow Seer is present, she may strongly influence the final choice. In return, the totem offers a temporary *boon* to aid the rat pack in their task, but also enforces a *ban* that the pack must uphold as long as it serves that Incarna. The three most commonly invoked totems are Rat, City Totems and Grandfather Thunder.

Of course, an Incarna may instead summon a rat pack to use as its servitors, choosing wererats who can serve its cryptic desires. This happens frequently with Ratkin Kinfolk. A potential minion may be *called* to serve, first by mysterious voices, then by revelations and dreams, and finally by feverish madness. Some wererats refer to this phenomenon as "hearing the Voice." Throughout such events, they receive hints of their *heritage long before their Birthing Plague*. Some are driven insane by the overwhelming call of cosmic powers. Once a Ratkin undergoes the First Change, the voices usually stop. Some, however, never escape the chattering madness in their heads... and feel blessed by that affliction.

If a human has religious beliefs before Infection, they'll be put to the test. The beliefs of the devout are either slowly corrupted to fit with the wererat's new mythos, or torn apart in a crisis of faith. A few Chosen Ones manage to integrate biblical or scriptural prophecies into their revelations, ensuring religious fanaticism. Some truly faithful individuals resist the *call with all the will they can muster*; these are driven the furthest into Rat Madness. Cynics bend; the devout break.

It should be noted that the call of a totem is far more than a simple voice in someone's head — it is a spiritual connection unlike any other. Intuitively, a Ratkin will never confuse any other voice in his head (whether that's vampiric telepathy, a mage's Mind Sphere, or whatever) with the call of his totem. When the Incarna speaks, the urge to follow is primal, a primitive instinct that is difficult to deny.

Dedication

A Shadow Seer performs the Rite of Dedication when her rat pack is first formed. This temporarily allies all of the wererats

present to the same Incarna. The pack must declare one goal they intend to fulfill in service to their totem. This could anything from a simple task (such as stealing a fetish from a pack of werewolves) to an epic one (like finding a lost Rat Kingdom in the Deep Umbra). The quest must be fulfilled or abandoned entirely before the rat pack can be dissolved. Every rat in the pack then serves that totem until the task is fulfilled. Seers commonly learn the Dedication Rite as their first ritual.

Those who serve Rat follow the ways of war; those who serve City Totems explore their domains religiously; those who serve Grandfather Thunder form insidious cults and learn dark truths. Following a powerful Incarna usually results in alliances with a host of minor spirits, as well. The Seer can petition them to aid his pack in times of great danger. This alliance, like all others among the wererats, is only temporary. When a Ratkin decides to leave his pack, or when his pack is dissolved, he immediately resumes his personal relationship with the Rat Incarna.

Rat!

As one would expect, Rat is the most commonly invoked totem among wererats. Ratkin who serve this Incarna receive visions from her, or revelations explained by mad whispers in their minds. Rat is known to some as "the Rat Goddess," or She Who Unleashed the Birthing Plague on the World. Through her mystical vision, many individuals can coordinate to achieve one epic task. Each participant may not know why he has been called, but definitely knows that if a god is working through them, the deed must be important. Rat thrives wherever chaos is strong; her spiritual servitors are thoroughly familiar with the ways of the Wyld.

Boon: Packs who serve Rat can call upon five extra Willpower points per story. Werewolves that serve her learn the best way to bite their foes; this lowers the difficulty of all bite attacks by 1. Deceits of Ratkin, on the other hand, receive knowledge that ensures their safety, adding two dots to the Survival Ability. Every member of the dedicated rat pack gains a deeper understanding of the fate of the world; thus, each Ratkin gains one point of permanent Cunning until the pack chooses a different totem.

Ban: As one would expect, any werewolf serving Rat cannot harm ordinary rats. Their totem may call upon them to punish guilty Ratkin, but mundane rats are sacred. This ban isn't much of a limitation for Ratkin, so instead, wererats serving the Rat Incarna must give aid or comfort to the homeless at least once each day. Some do this willingly; others do it grudgingly. If the Ratkin fail to do this on any given day (if they are on an Umbral quest or the wilderness there may not be any homeless for them to aid), they must work extra hard helping the next homeless people they meet in order to make up for their failure. In addition, a Ratkin may not harm a Bone Gnawer serving Rat unless they receive Her blessing to do so. Because of this, some devout Bone Gnawers respectfully address Ratkin as Avatars of Rat. In a way, they are.

City Mothers and Fathers

A rat pack that spends a great deal of time in an urban metropolis may adopt the local City Mother or Father as their totem. It's just as possible that a City Totem may call Ratkin to its aid, especially when all other solutions have failed. City

The Rat God

Gender is always a tricky concept where Totems are concerned. Most followers of Rat know Her as the Mother of All Ratkin, one of the most faithful children of Gaia. Bone Gnawers and most Ratkin always refer to Rat as "She." Only the insane refer to Rat as "He." The most delusional refer to their totem as the *Rat God*. Such blasphemy is particularly common among Twitchers and highly-violent Warriors. Many Ratkin in North America have been adopting this delusion with increasing frequency.

Any Ratkin or Rat Kinfolk who refers to the Rat God as He should be treated with caution. His messages from Rat have obviously been distorted by the madness of the Wyld. Actually *convincing* one of the Rat God's followers of this, however, is difficult in the extreme. More patient rodents insist that if these commands are twisted by the force of the Wyld, they are still valid. Thus, great atrocities are committed in the name of this fictional (or perhaps merely mythical) deity. In North America, the Rat Race arms for battle extolling the Rat God's name.

Mothers often hold secrets only the streets remember. City Fathers treasure memories long forgotten by all but the oldest residents. Though many Ratkin wait for the days when the cities of men will fall, surviving the urban jungle is a strong motivation for invoking a City Totem.

In exchange for helping the city heal itself, Ratkin and Bone Gnawers typically learn the safest places to hide or sleep. When the *city itself* is on your side, living on the streets becomes much easier. These Incarna are intimately connected to the progress of major cities, and their spirits are dangerously familiar with the workings of the Weaver. Fortunately, they all know that any city needs at least a little bit of chaos to survive.

When City Mother or Father manifests itself, it usually takes on many of the attributes associated with its domain. For instance, Atlanta's guardian totem often appears as a sultry southern belle surrounded by the flames of the Civil War, but she may also appear as a young black activist insisting on justice and equality. The city of Seattle could manifest itself a pale street kid stalking in the rain, a burnt-out programmer shaking from too many double-lattes, or the tired and weary shape of Chief Seattle himself.

Boon: Rats dedicated to a City Totem can use three additional points of Willpower during a story. They also receive three dots of Area Knowledge specific to that domain. A follower may also use a variant of Chimera's Boon: once per day, the rat can assume the guise of an archetypal denizen of that city.

Ban: If the pack leaves the city, for any reason, the bond with the City Totem is dissolved. The alliance may be renewed if the pack volunteers to undertake a quest to heal the city. When the quest is over, they must leave a gift showing their devotion at an appropriate site. Ratkin petitioning the City Father of Seattle, for instance, might leave a feast for the Fremont Bridge Troll, a hundred paper airplanes in the parking lot of the Benning Corporation, or a giant tub of coffee in front of a local franchise of Queequeg's Coffee.

Thunder

Secretive gatherings of wererats have been suborned by Grandfather Thunder, gathered into insidious cults of questionable morality. In return for this devotion, his servitors learn subtlety, guile and cunning. Grandfather watches over everything that is obscured by shadows, and his Stormcrows spy on hidden places where intrigue takes place. Sometimes he calls up Ratkin to act as thieves or assassins for schemes his followers devise. Knife-Skulkers make for excellent Shadow Lord allies — Skulkers and Lords both believe in enforcing justice outside the legal restrictions of Garou moots. Thunder has no sympathy for those who succumb to the Wyrms, but many of his minions are skilled at guessing the motivations of the Wyrms' servitors.

The benefits and ban of Grandfather Thunder are listed in the *Werewolf* rulebook (pg. 260). Grandfather Thunder is especially popular with the weakest Ratkin, particularly the runt of a litter. Exploiting the weaknesses of those in power is vitally important to the straggler of a pack (as we will later see).

Rites and Rituals

Each Ratkin character begins play with one rite, determined by his or her aspect. Wererats are more ritualistic than most other Changing Breeds. They find it even more important that the "appropriate" Ratkin knows specific rites. Most prefer that only a Ratkin of the "proper aspect" perform any given rite. Since the wererats don't have many allies in the physical world, it's even more important not to offend the spirits. Unfortunately, constant exceptions are made. Lone wanderers, for instance, find the Contract Rite essential, and Nests without a Plague Lord have always invoked the Birthing Plague whenever necessary. Thus, the spirits are capricious, and there's never a guarantee that any given ritual work exactly as desired.

Rat packs love to accumulate additional rites. These can be learned from Ratkin mystics, usually as a reward for performing a mystic quest or protecting a wererat colony. Actually performing a ritual requires five minutes for each level of the rite; some cruel Storytellers may ask their players to mime or imitate how a rite is being performed.

Contract Rite

Level One

This is the first rite a Knife-Skulker learns, although no lone wanderer would take to the road without it. The Contract Rite is a method by which a Ratkin can sell his skills to another group of supernatural creatures. A particularly skeptical wererat may even take out a contract with his own rat pack before he joins. Before working with any other group of individuals, a Ratkin always has the right to ask "What's in it for me?" The most common types of compensation include safe passage through a domain, access to a sacred site, supplies, talents and exchanges of favors.

When an area is overrun with Ratkin, swarms of wererats hire themselves out to anyone who can meet their demands. Retinues of courtiers and other traditional rat packs insist that their Tunnel Runner should approach a group initially, but their Knife Skulker should negotiate the final Contract Rite. Anarchist rat packs allow wererats of any aspect to perform this rite.

There is only one overriding proviso: a rat pack cannot betray other Ratkin as part of a contract. The Litany of Survival states that a wererat should betray others before betraying his own kind. Knife-Skulkers enforce this dictum with brutal efficiency.

The rite serves as a declaration, with the spirits as witnesses, of what each party in the contract intends to get out of the alliance. With rat packs, this is largely a formality; a wererat who breaks a Contract Rite loses Cunning Renown and damages his reputation, but is still free to make other contracts. A Ratkin dealing with other supernatural creatures, however, takes a big risk when performing this rite. Breaking a contract will result in the wererat being hounded by Rat-spirits until the terms are fulfilled. Wererats may dismiss such obligations as trivial, but other supernatural creatures often seek revenge for betrayal.

When other supernatural creatures enter into a Contract Rite with Ratkin, the most common goals involve gathering information, stealing valuables, or assassination. ("If you steal that fetish from the sept leader, I'll burn down the insane asylum and kill the vampire inside it." "Deal!") Ratkin can always sweeten any deal with a few carefully disclosed facts, giving their race a reputation, as one would expect, for "ratting" on former supernatural allies. This is considered sleazy by anyone other than Ratkin, who fully expect such behavior.

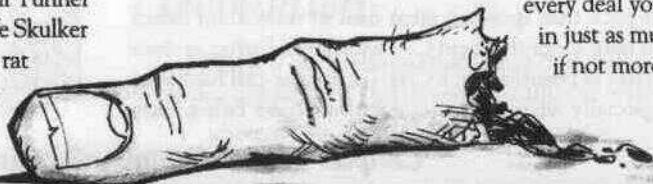
Two guidelines are essential for any outside species who want to make contracts with wererats: Never turn your back on a Ratkin, and never betray a contract. Other supernatural creatures who try to cheat wererats succumb to a very important clause: the right of a Knife-Skulker to seek redress. Any good contract includes a "punishment clause," and Skulkers love to enforce them.

System: At the end of negotiations, the ritemaster spends one Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Rituals. The spirits witness this transaction; your totem will acknowledge your pact by giving a member of your deceit a brief vision. Some bastards like to leave a few loopholes in an agreement; the totem's vision often relates to at least one of the flaws in the contract, as the Storyteller describes a scene that shows a situation where the contract could break down. The amount of detail and length of this vision depends on the number of successes on the final roll. If either party reneges on the contract, the totem will bless the ritemaster with a vision of the transgression.

If the contract breaks down, the method of enforcing the punishment clause is left entirely up to the Knife-Skulker. Some prefer to harry and harass those who refuse to hold up their end of a contract. A few favor ritual crippling (getting a victim alone and taking him down to Crippled with aggravated damage). The most effective method is simple assassination. Any one of these tactics spreads the message that no one double-deals the rats. For Storytellers who are using Renown rules, fulfilling punishment clause is a quick way to gain Infamy, but only if your totem acknowledges its approval of your act with a vision.

Wererats trade favors with other supernatural creatures like pack-rats trade shiny things, but any staunch Ratkin roleplayer is advised to write down *every pact* he's made on the back of his or her character sheet. No doubt the Storyteller will remember

every deal you've made in just as much detail, if not more....



Dedication Rite

Level One

This is the first rite a Shadow Seer learns, but any wererat can learn it from a Shadow Seer. It temporarily binds a rat pack to their totem and defines the collective goals they want to achieve. The ceremony is performed by a pack of rats gathered in a circle. Each member places an object in the center of the circle that represents his role in the pack. The ritemaster then walks around the gathering and speaks to the heavens, describing the great quest the pack intends to fulfill on the Incarna's behalf. The items then vanish immediately; they do not return to the pack members until the quest is fulfilled or formally abandoned. Once the pack has fulfilled its goal, they also have the option of "renewing the pact" or declaring allegiance to another Incarna. Renewing the rite doesn't require another ritual roll; changing totems, however, requires the pack to perform this rite all over again.

System: The ritemaster spends one Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 6) at the climax of the ritual. Each success gives one temporary Background point of Totem, which is used to purchase the pack's totem. There's a chance the mystic may not get enough successes, so after the roll, each pack member may sacrifice one point of Willpower to add one extra success for each Willpower point spent. These Willpower points are not refreshed until the pack achieves or formally abandons its quest. Allying with a City Father or Mother requires 3 points; declaring a pack's allegiance to Rat requires 5 points; serving Grandfather Thunder requires 7. A few strange packs serve other Incarna; the cost required for these false gods are the same as those listed in the core rulebook.

Retinues of courtiers (see Chapter Five) require Shadow Seers to perform this rite; in a formal, traditional rat pack, if a wererat of another aspect performs this rite, he will lose two temporary Obligation Renown.

Rite of Artifice Dedication

Level One

This rite allows a ritualist to bind an object or article of clothing to a fellow Ratkin. By laying paws on any mundane item, the ritualist can ensure that it will remain with the dedicated rodent while he shifts between forms. If the ritualist desires, it may simply vanish when the Ratkin is in a specific form. There is one major difference between this rite and Talisman Dedication: if desired, the size of the artifact can be greatly reduced when a wererat shifts, down to a size that even a ratling pup can use.

For instance, a homid Ratkin's favorite battered hat might reform as a very, very tiny hat when the beastie is in Rodens form, or just disappear out of harms way until the traveler is in Homid form again. One word of caution: Any rat in Rodens form who carries tiny items is advised to stay hidden as much as possible. At best, being seen might possibly invoke the Delirium (even if the wererat is not in Crinos); at worst, someone will call the bad men in lab coats to come and take you away.

System: The ritemaster must be in Rodens form, and the recipient of this rite must be in Homid. Each of them spends one Gnosis; the ritemaster rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty 7). Normally, binding an object only requires one success, al-

Borrowed Rites

Not all of a Ratkin's rites are necessarily those in common use by her Breed; for instance, several Ratkin know the Rite of Summoning, and a rare few practice the Rite of the Fetish. However, these are relatively few, as the Ratkin are truly comfortable only with the rites they know best. Oddly enough, there are no known rites of punishment among Ratkin — the Ratkin know a thousand ways to punish their own, but prefer to keep that "among rats" rather than formally invoking spirit witnesses.

though particularly large objects may require more. If the roll is botched, the item is still bound, but becomes defective in some way. Other than these differences, the rite functions much as the Garou Rite of Talisman Dedication.

Rite of the Birthing Plague

Level One

Once a rat pack has learned to properly serve one of the three major Incarna, they're ready to help bring more lost children into the fold. After the fulfillment of a rat pack's first contract, a Rat Gaffling will seek out the pack and teach them the Rite of the Birthing Plague. He may also immediately tell them where a prospective wererat might be found. Rescuing lost Kinfolk brings great Renown, and the rat pack will no doubt immediately school him on what they've learned so far. Plague Lords typically learn this ritual as their first rite.

Performing the ritual summons a Rat Gaffling to bite a prospective Ratkin and determine whether a new wererat can be created. The victim is usually either rat Kinfolk, human Kinfolk or a newly spawned metis wererat. If it is performed on a human, the results are deadly. Once bitten, the subject is ravaged by the disease, which consumes mind, body and spirit alike. If the victim dies, there's one less human or weakling rat in the world. If the victim survives, he slowly transforms into a full-blood Ratkin. Hallucinations from the plague offer revelations of the new wererat's life. Garou, other shapechangers and their Kinfolk are not affected by this rite; they've already found their calling. Humans can be wounded with this rite, but they won't become Ratkin unless they are Ratkin Kinfolk. Ratkin infected a second time with this rite are unaffected by it; they have already pledged to serve their aspect for the rest of their days.

System: First, a Ratkin must successfully bite or claw a chosen victim. If the attack does any damage, the ritemaster then rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty 7) to spread Infection. The virulence of the disease depends on the number of successes.

— One success inflicts the victim with one aggravated health level of damage.

— Three successes inflicts enough aggravated damage to take her down to the Wounded health level, bestowing a fever dream of terrible visions and a full day of unconsciousness.

— Five successes inflicts enough aggravated damage to take the victim down to the Incapacitated health level. The dreams continue until the victim is resuscitated.

If the victim is Ratkin Kinfolk, she then has a one-in-ten chance of becoming Infected; roll one die against a difficulty of

Infection and Madness

Any Infected Kinfolk is continually on the verge of losing control. Kinfolk characters caught in the throes of the Birthing Plague have an effective Rage 4 and Gnosis 4 until they undergo the First Change. They can't spend these points, but they can make frenzy rolls and Rapture rolls based on these two traits.

10. If the roll fails, the Kinfolk may still survive. Roll Stamina (difficulty 6); three successes means the victim survives, but only after a protracted illness. If the roll scores fewer successes, the victim takes one additional level of aggravated damage each day until cured or killed.

Those who aren't actually Kin have a much rougher time surviving; normal mortals wounded by this rite make the Stamina roll to survive at difficulty 8.

Rite of the Bolthole

Level One

This is the first rite a Tunnel Runner learns. It does more than simply open a bolthole from the physical world to the Umbra; it also provides a short-cut for Ratkin who need to travel long distances. Spirit tunnels are a relatively safe form of travel, since only the smallest and most perceptive spirits can use them.

Any Ratkin who holds hands (or joins paws) with the ritualist and his fellow-travelers can also enter the spirit tunnel, which closes behind the deceit of wererats. After the pack tunnels into the Umbra, the path changes behind them; they cannot turn back, nor can they follow the exact same route later on. A Ratkin doesn't *have* to use this rite to step sideways, but if he does, he may find traveling through the Umbra much easier.

System: Performing this ritual requires two components: a shiny thing and privacy, the two most valuable goals a rat can attain. Spend a point of Gnosis; a Perception + Rituals (difficulty 6) roll determines how well the rite succeeds. If you want to use an Umbral tunnel as a "short-cut" through the physical world, the Storyteller first calculates how long the journey would normally take on land. He then reduces that travel time based on the following table.

Short-Cuts Through the Physical World

Successes	Travel time reduced by...
One	1/5
Two	1/4
Three	1/3
Four	1/2
Five+	2/3

If the Ratkin is trying to travel from the physical world to a specific realm in the Near Umbra, the number of successes shows the chance of arriving at the specified destination. After you've made the initial Perception + Rituals roll, roll one die against the difficulty listed on the short-cut chart (or roll percentile dice against the listed percentage); on a successful roll, you arrive safely. If you miss this "accuracy roll," the Storyteller gets to choose an Umbra realm as your new destination. Good luck getting back.

Short-Cuts Through the Spirit World

Successes	Difficulty for Second Roll (accuracy)
One	8 (20% accurate)
Two	6 (40% accurate)
Three	4 (60% accurate)
Four	2 (80% accurate)

If you want to travel to the Deep Umbra, you can declare an Anchorhead as your destination, but after that, your travel time would be the same as for any other shapeshifter. Passing through an Anchorhead Realm requires the assistance of a Level Three Tunnel Runner, an Uneathly Ratkin, or any Munchmausen.

If a Ratkin botches on a Bolthole Rite (or botches a Gnosis roll to step sideways), the player rolls one more die. On a roll of a 1, the rite has botched so badly that a temporary Stairway Realm is created. On any other roll, the pack is just caught in the Gauntlet, just like Garou stepping sideways. Ratkin, unfortunately, don't react as well to being caught in the webs between these two dimensions....

Rite of the Cardboard Palace

Level One

This classic rite is taught by Bone Gnawers (and comes straight out of the **Bone Gnawers Tribebook**). The ritemaster can transform something as flimsy as a cardboard box into a decent place to sleep. Rodens Ratkin don't need such palatial estates; a milk carton or tissue box provides plenty of room.

System: A roll of Intelligence + Survival (difficulty 7) can turn an ordinary shelter into a comfortable home for the night, keeping the people inside it warm and dry. It can be used on someone else's shelter, or your own. Of course, a home for one human can become a home for dozens of rats.

Rite of the Pain Dagger

Level One

This is the first rite a Warrior learns, and only Warriors may perform this rite, regardless of whom they serve. The ritual creates a sacred dagger similar to a Garou *klai*. A Ratkin *cannot* join the Warrior aspect until she has successfully performed this rite. The ritual binds a War-spirit, Pain-spirit, Rat-spirit or Disease-spirit inside a ceremonial blade. The dagger can be created out of any material, but it must have special spiritual significance to the creator. A Warrior cannot own more than one Pain Dagger at a time; if the weapon is destroyed, he loses Renown, but he can create a replacement.

The Pain Dagger is a sacred blade, an expression of the purity of a Ratkin's devotion. The blade is used ceremoniously in battle; once it is drawn, the Warrior's pride is at stake. If the Warrior uses his Pain Dagger irreverently (duct taping it to his boots, mounting it on the hood of his car or using it to pry open cans of food, for instance), he will bring shame upon himself. The spirit inside the blade must be treated with respect; if a Warrior doesn't do this, the spirit will protest, and the wererat will lose at least a point or two of Obligation Renown.

System: Spend one point of Gnosis to create the dagger, and a second point to bond the dagger to the Ratkin. The Warrior then sits in meditation, reflecting on his martial



training. Roll Intelligence + Enigmas; the difficulty is the local Gauntlet. If the Warrior's heart is pure, a spirit will materialize and challenge the warrior to single combat. Once the entity is defeated, it takes up residence inside the blade.

Finish by rolling Wits + Rituals (difficulty 7). If the wererat fails, the spirit will inhabit the blade for twelve hours before escaping. If the wererat succeeds, the binding is permanent, and the "spirit blade" will inflict aggravated damage. A typical Pain-Dagger inflicts Strength + 3 damage, but the weapon can inflict only non-aggravated damage to the Ratkin who is bound to it. Each time the weapon is unsheathed, it draws a point of Gnosis from its user; if the user has no Gnosis left, the damage is non-aggravated.

At the Storyteller's discretion, a particularly powerful spirit may also be able to use one or more of its Charms while bound inside the weapon, providing the Warrior also spends Background Points for these extra effects. For mathematically-inclined Storytellers, the cost is equal to the Power cost of the Charm. (For instance, a War-spirit who can also inflict the Blast Flame Charm costs two extra Background Points for each die of damage possible.) If the Warrior hasn't set aside these points, she'll have to save up the experience points to pay for them. This spiritual power can only be used once each time the blade is drawn.

A Warrior can bind one of the following Charms into a Pain Dagger as long as she's summoned the right spirit: Airt Sense, Agony (see Chapter Two), Armor (2 points maximum), Blast Flame, Create Fires, Create Wind, Freeze, Ice Shards, Infection (see Chapter Two), Shatter Glass, Throw Glass or Tracking. As one would expect, other Charms require special permission from the Storyteller; discretion is advised.

Rite of Crash Space

Level Two

While werewolves build elaborate caerns to support entire septs of Garou, wererats can't afford such ostentatious surroundings. If the Rite of the Cardboard Palace isn't enough for you, a ritualist can transform any hidden home where rats can rest, recover and meditate. These hidey holes are often used by rats who are about to give birth, establishing a peaceful site for raising dozens of pups. While Garou can meditate just about anywhere, wererats have to remain someplace relatively safe when meditating to regain Gnosis. The shrine at a Ratkin colony or crash space blessed with this ritual are the two most common choices.

System: Creating crash space requires a point of Gnosis and an Intelligence + Survival roll (difficulty 7); the home is safe for one week for each success. After ten minutes of scurrying about and gnawing at the appropriate corners, the shelter is cozy enough to serve as a place of meditation. The wererat must also erect a shrine out of nifty stuff from around the neighborhood.

Once this is done, any Ratkin resting in calm meditation at this site can regain Gnosis. Any wererat can attempt this by rolling Intelligence + Enigmas; for each success obtained, the Ratkin gains one point of Gnosis after an hour of contemplation and quiet time. Under the optional Ratkin Psychology rules, a reflective and calm wererat will then appear saner and more stable to those who encounter her (see Chapter Five).

Rite of Investiture

Level Three

This Shadow Seer rite marks the ascension of a Rat King, the unquestioned ruler of a Ratkin Nest. Because it is a very formal rite, only a Shadow Seer Mystic — a seer who is at least Rank Three — may invoke it. If a wererat colony doesn't have a high-ranking Shadow Seer, they can either recognize him informally with a great feast, or summon a Mystic who can formally perform the appropriate rites. This rite spiritually binds the Rat King to his domain. Through the eyes of Rat-spirits who inhabit his realm, he may see what transpires there (much like the user of the Garou Rite: Badger's Burrow).

System: The new Rat King must have the support of all of the colony's elders (that is, the eldest Ratkin present of each aspect) before he can assume the throne. Elders typically perform contract rites with the heir apparent in return for this support; if not, they are typically killed by power-hungry rodens rivals. The Shadow Seer then spends a full fifteen minutes praising the new Rat King as he proceeds slowly from the local shrine to a throne in the largest chamber of the nest. At the end of this procession, she rolls Manipulation + Rituals (difficulty 6). If the spirits concur, all of the elders present receive a magnificent vision from the Rat Incarna proclaiming the glory of the new king.

Rite of the Purified Body

Level Two

This rite cleanses another's body of all poisons, whether magical or natural. It can counter the Rite of the Birthing Plague for those who haven't become Ratkin (after the final Stamina roll) or the effects of a Plague Lord Epidemic.

System: This is a Rite of Accord performed by a healthy Ratkin, who spends one point of Gnosis. The roll is Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 7).

Pact of Vengeance

Level Three

This Knife-Skulker rite is performed when a member of his rat pack has been killed. If the Skulker belongs to a colony, he may also perform it when the local Rat King has been slain. The ritualist calls out to the spirits for justice and learns the identity of the murderer instantly. This rite is one of the reasons elders hire out assassination contracts to rats that are "just passing through" their domain.

System: The roll is Perception + Rituals; the difficulty is equal to 4 + the killer's Rank. The amount of information revealed depends on the number of successes gained. Five successes summons an image of the murderer that everyone present can see; fewer successes will provide hints and clues that a rat pack may follow up on; a botch shows that the spirits wish for the murderer's identity to remain secret.

Rite of the Shopping Cart

Level Three

This ritual is just as common among Bone Gnawers as it is among Ratkin (and described in more detail in the *Bone Gnawers Tribebook*). For Ratkin Engineers, it is their first rite. It increases the amount of stuff any cargo-carrying device can hold. Shopping

carts are the most commonly-used modes of transport, but some Tunnel Runners take to the road with cardboard boxes or backpacks bulging with unidentifiable possessions.

System: Roll Manipulation + Rituals (difficulty 7) and spend a Gnosis point. Each success allows you to carry another ten pounds of trash, junk, loot or stuff. If you like, each success can also represent one hidden rat. Some humans object to anyone traveling cross-country with a rodent companion; this rite makes "rat smuggling" much easier.

Ritual of the Shiny Thing

Level Three

Rat packs disagree all the time. Through confrontation, the members of a pack drive up their Rage, turning their anxiety into raw energy. When an issue desperately needs to get resolved, a Ratkin with this rite may invoke it to settle an issue once and for all. The mystic may use the Ritual of the Shiny Thing to resolve any dispute between wererats in her local nest, or find a temporary leader of a pack, if necessary. Performing the rite relieves angst and prevents pack members from turning on each other like... well, you know.

The invocation is very informal, something along the lines of "I demand... *The Shiny Thing!*" At that moment, all the pack members bolt, looking for the shiniest, most impressive object they can find. The master of the rite waits behind, watching for the first three Ratkin who return from their quest. Only the first three rats who return have a chance of "resolving" the rite. Once the rest of the pack returns, they then vote on which item is the most impressive. That item becomes the Shiny Thing, a relic which must be carried (or displayed) by the new temporary pack leader. The keeper of the Shiny may then pass judgment on how to resolve the most immediate problem.

A pack may add additional restrictions on this rite when it's performed. In most packs, the Shiny Thing must not be given freely or stolen; it must be found. The item must be discovered after the rite is declared — no fair hoarding every shiny thing you find for the next observance! Rat-spirits watch over the Ratkin involved to make sure the proper rules are obeyed. As a side note, wererats may not use the Scrounge Gift to fulfill this ritual.

On rare occasions, the ritemaster may demand a specific object. For instance, some Munchausen claim one of the most famous invocations of this rite occurred during a winter long ago, when a tyrannical Rat King wanted to find an heir to replace him. He promised his throne to the first Ratkin Warrior who could bring him... a shiny new nutcracker! The rest of the story has been told as a Christmas legend ever since, though with a decidedly different ending.

System: The ritemaster asks the spirits to watch over the poor fools who go dashing off on this mystical scavenger hunt. Each player announces where his character is searching, what he is looking for, and what Dice Pool he thinks he can use to find the item (e.g., "Frankie's going to use Perception + Medicine to find surgical tools in the doctor's office." or "Johnnie's using Manipulation + Subterfuge to seduce the clerk at the jewelry store.") The Storyteller may, of course, suggest an alternative dice pool. The Ratkin with the most successes on this roll are considered the "first ones back." The rest of the characters then vote on the most impressive shiny thing. Afterwards, whenever there is any

doubt about who's leading the pack, the victor of this rite may gleefully hold the shiny thing aloft to proclaim his leadership.

Some demented Storytellers (particularly in live-action games) may insist that this rite requires the *players* to bolt off after a shiny thing. Such items should always be mundane — finding something more unusual than a popsicle stick or gum wrapper on the spur of the moment can be harder than you think.

Rite of the Swarm

Level Four

This maddening call may only be invoked by a Ratkin of the Warrior aspect. Breeding armies of rats is a sacred duty; every rat Kinfolk in a colony dreams of spawning more soldiers for the Army of the Apocalypse. The Rite of the Swarm must be justified before the spirits will allow it. The Warrior must give a brief tirade about the victim who is to be overwhelmed by the swarm. This may include a call for justice, a statement of his crimes, or simply a series of insults about the crimes of his race.

System: The Ratkin first spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Animal Ken. The first creatures to be called up by the swarm are the normal rats of the area. If the cause is just, Rat-spirits will materialize in the host of rodents to direct it toward the appropriate victim. Roll Charisma + Rituals; the size of the rats depends on the number of successes. The Storyteller consults the section on Swarms in Chapter Five (see p. 101):

- one or two successes call up “average rats”;
- three or four successes call up “huge rats”;
- five successes produce a swarm of “big-ass rats.”

Rite of Warding

Level Varies

Ratkin pride themselves on hiding their nests well; the Rite of Warding makes it difficult for any creature to find where a colony is hidden. This rite is performed every time the population of

a Ratkin nest surges. The strength of a Ratkin sacred site depends on the number of wererats who live there, focusing chaos on the spiritual center of the nest. Once the local population has grown enough, the local mystic then performs this rite in tribute to the Rat Incarna. The ritemaster must be of a Rank equal to the new level of the nest.

Rat-spirits will then infest the spiritual center of the nest. If the Rat-spirits don't think that the site is a good one, they may demand that a local rat pack undertake an Umbral quest on behalf of the local wererats. Fulfilling this quest may decide the proper name of the nest, the name of a new tribe, or even the title of the next Rat King.

System: Roll Charisma + Rituals; the difficulty is equal to (5 + the size of the local colony). Remember the number of successes; it's the colony's “Concealment Rating.” If *anyone* who is not a Ratkin tries to use a skill or supernatural ability to determine the location of the nest, subtract these successes from the roll. The rite must be performed once each month to maintain this effect.

Shiny Things and Other Fetishes

Ratkin rarely create their own fetishes, preferring to steal what they can get from the unwary. Wererats can use fetishes created by any supernatural creature, but with a higher degree of difficulty. To activate a stolen fetish, a Ratkin must either spend an extra Gnosis point or make the standard activation roll, but at a + 3 difficulty. For more nifty items to swipe, check out the Appendix of the *Werewolf* rulebook, the *Werewolf Players Guide*, the other Changing Breed books, or *Tribebooks*. There's plenty of loot out there for you to rip off.

Pipes of the Swarm

Level 1, Gnosis 4

For a young rat fueled by the need for vengeance, learning the Rite of the Swarm requires too much patience. Unfortunately, several talented young Seers have learned a short-cut. This mystical pipe has an angry young Rat-spirit trapped inside. Activating the fetish requires a powerful set of lungs, an atonal melody, and a





successful Gnosis roll. Usually a Ratkin needs a damn good reason to summon a swarm, but not if he's using this fetish. The spirit is pissed off enough to summon one regardless of the circumstances.

For each success on the activation roll, the swarm has one health level; these are "normal rats," as described in the *Swarm* section of Chapter Five. As one would expect, most rats who trade these items claim that *theirs* was the original fetish used by the Pied Piper centuries ago.

Circular Saw Launcher

Level 2, Gnosis 5

Ratkin Engineers pride themselves on ingenious engines of destruction. This device is composed of a long piece of plywood, a makeshift gun stock, several industrial strength rubber bands, and a circular saw blade. When properly used, the weapon launches a flying circle of steel through a method similar to the Gift: Shadow Throw. Any spiritually aware Ratkin can use it.

Once the blade is activated, aiming it requires a Dexterity + Occult roll, difficulty 7. If the Gnosis roll fails, or the aiming roll botches, it will injure the user instead of its intended victim. The whirling blades inflict three dice of aggravated damage, plus one for each success on the attack roll.

Rat Mask

Level 3, Gnosis 6

Shadow Seers who have reached the pinnacle of their craft bind spirits into these fetishes. Such items are highly treasured by young adventurers and may only be used by Ratkin. A Rat Mask is shaped to resemble a parody of a human or other creature. Upon completion, the creator gives the mask an archetypal name, an apt description of what it represents. Examples include the Ubiquitous Tourist, the Overworked Mother, the Swaggering Tough Guy, the Beer-Swilling Yokel, and so on.

As long as the Ratkin can do a passable impersonation of the mundane in question, no one will think of doubting the disguise. Anyone with the least amount of supernatural insight (either through *Auspex Discipline*, the *Spirit Sphere*, *Spirit Sight*, or some similar contrivance) may see the mask for what it is by actively looking for the mask wearer's true identity. The number of successes he rolls must exceed the number of successes on the Ratkin's initial Gnosis roll (difficulty 6).

Nezumi Kite

Level 4, Gnosis 7

Though devised in the distant past of the Japanese Ratkin, this fetish is as useful today as it ever was. On the ground, it is a quite visible, obviously bulky one-man kite. Once airborne, however, it is ideal for secretive reconnaissance. The Nezumi Kite may only be used at night and can only carry one person in *Homid* form (or possibly several in *Rodens* form at the Storyteller's option). Spirits of the night keep it from being seen, cloaking it with a variant of the Ratkin Gift: *Cloak of Shadows*. Spirits of the air keep it aloft; it can sail wherever the user desires after it is detached from its string. The kite can only move as fast as a gentle breeze, but can land almost anywhere.

Mystery Machine

Level Five, Gnosis 8

This is one of the most valuable items a Ratkin can have: crash space on wheels. To mundanes, the Mystery Machine looks like a battered, dilapidated van, but wererat rituals turn it into a haven for a traveling rat pack. Though there is only enough room in the back for two or three humans to sleep comfortably, there is plenty of room for a deceit of rat-form wererats.

The engine can only eke out mediocre gas mileage, but in a pinch, it can run on pure Gnosis. Praying or meditating inside the interior of the van will keep it running for a full day for each point spent. The vehicle is also difficult to track; the driver can activate the fetish, invoking the Gift: Silent Running to obscure it up to three times a day. The inside of the conveyance has been blessed so that those within can meditate safely. For anyone inside, lower the difficulty of all meditation or Rapture rolls by 1.

The spirit of the van has also been awakened; it is fully visible in the Umbra while traveling through the physical world. Flashing the high-beams will allow the driver to take the vehicle into the Umbra; this requires each passenger to spend a point of Gnosis. The driver must then make a successful Gnosis roll against the difficulty of the local Gauntlet. While in the spirit world, the driver may activate the Charm: Airt Sense to prevent the vehicle from getting lost. Currently, there are only a tiny few of these fetishes in the world; Tunnel Runners have been known to kill to obtain one.

Merits and Flaws

Cagebound (3 point Merit)

You were born in a cage and raised by humans. Months of handling and affection have made you well-tempered, patient and sweet. Then the Birthing Plague changed everything. The Call of the Rat God was irresistible, and you had to leave behind the human with whom you had bonded. Fortunately, your tragic story has a happy ending. Your peaceful upbringing helps you enter Rapture, use Blood Memory, and gain Gnosis through meditation: you get a -1 difficulty on all of these rolls. You are also highly-knowledgeable about human society, though this knowledge is limited to what you saw in the room where you lived.

Caged Folk (3 point Merit)

If the Storyteller is willing to admit to the existence of the Caged Folk, you may purchase this Merit with her permission. You may select highly intelligent rats as your Kinfolk or Contacts. They generate their stats just like any other Kinfolk character, and can solve problems as efficiently as any human. Not surprisingly, they see all of human society through rodent eyes, misinterpreting the reasons humans do things. They are also fanatic about concealing their true intelligence, forever wary that men in white lab coats will find them and take them away. For more details, see the sidebar on the Caged Folk in this chapter.

Amnesia (1 point Flaw)

When your Infection first set in, it wiped out all memory of who you used to be. Brief glimpses and clues of your former

identity torment you, but the real truth of who you are is elusive. You've got the nagging feeling that there's something dangerous in your past just waiting to catch up with you. The Storyteller has the option of not letting you buy off this Flaw until you figure out the mystery of your character's past. If you decide to take this disadvantage, she'll no doubt want to resolve this plot thread, using plenty of flashbacks to set up and foreshadowing to follow through.

Adrenaline Addict (2 point Flaw)

Curiosity killed the rat. You are fascinated by inherently dangerous stuff and feel a strong need to investigate it. If you're a rodens or metis Ratkin, this means that when you shift into Homid, you've just got to check out things you didn't grow up using. Shiny things like butcher knives, automobiles and chainsaws fascinate you. If you're a homid Ratkin, you like to take stupid risks while wearing your Rodens form; you love thrillseeking and have little concept of what's "safe" for a small rat.

As with other disadvantages, your Storyteller may set up a signal or code word to tip you off when a dangerous opportunity arises. You can pass up these dangers, but must act out this Flaw at least once a session. If you don't, the Storyteller will ask you to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) to avoid acting on impulse and rushing into life-threatening situations. Some Ratkin Engineers start with a variant of this disadvantage; if they do, they don't get extra points for taking it as a Flaw.

Rat Fink (2 point Flaw)

You have a compulsion to gather secrets about *everyone*, including the members of your own rat pack, and you have no qualms about betraying someone's confidence if you can benefit by it. Granted, this means that you aren't trusted by anyone, including your so-called friends, but it also means that you can score a lot of extra Contract Rites. Many strange people will owe you favors as a result. You've got a compulsion to gather information on anyone you deal with; you've got to know *everything*. This Flaw does have one limitation, though: you won't betray the secrecy of a colony. The fact that Knife-Skulkers will hunt you down for such behavior is incidental — you may enjoy a good dark secret now and then, but that doesn't mean you'll risk the survival of the Ratkin race. You're devious, but not stupid.

Technological Delusions (2 point Flaw)

All Ratkin rebel against the order that binds human society, but you take it to extremes. You see evidence of technological threats everywhere and act on these impulses. You've deviated from human society enough that you've obtained some rather strange views about how it works. This Flaw is especially vicious among rodens Ratkin, who don't grow up using human tech every day. Perhaps you believe that televisions are used to monitor the people who watch them, that radios broadcast mind-control messages, or that automobiles are programmed to make the drivers think they actually control them.

If you don't play your character as sufficiently delusional, the Storyteller may allow you a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) before he starts hitting you with evidence of this dementia that

no one else can see. If the roll fails, you will begin to see and experience things that are not there. Some Twitchers and Munchmausen start with variations of this disadvantage; if they do, they don't get extra points for taking it as a Flaw.

Kleptomaniac/Pack Rat (2-3 point Flaw)

Rats get attached to all sorts of little knickknacks humans leave lying around. One sign of a thriving infestation near someone's home is the sudden disappearance of small personal objects. Your character has an extreme version of this trait. If she's got the 2-point Flaw: Kleptomania, she can't resist continually snatching up tempting objects wherever she travels. If she has the 3-point Flaw: Pack Rat, she has an additional compulsion: she must leave behind an object for each object she takes.

The Storyteller should set up a signal or code word to designate a "tempting object" in the story. Each time the Storyteller uses this code word, your character has the chance to steal something nearby. If you disregard this signal, the Storyteller will have you roll Willpower (difficulty 9) to avoid snatching up the nearest shiny thing. Often these items will be harmless, but some of them may be hazardous, illegal, or just plain demented. Many Ratkin Engineers automatically have this disadvantage; if they do, they don't get extra points for taking it as a Flaw.

Pack Instinct (3 point Flaw)

You do not like to act separately from the pack. Doing so requires a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). You can praise or condemn ideas suggest by other pack members, but can't volunteer ideas on your own. If separated from the pack, you panic, acting like a creature with either Calm or Feral Instinct (as listed in Chapter Five) until you find at least one other member of your pack.

Incoherent (4 point Flaw)

When rodents Ratkin succumb to their Infection, they experience a dizzying increase in their intelligence. Most of them absorb the local language very quickly as a result. However, a few remain linguistically challenged. The best they can muster is a repertoire of grunting noise, inchoate babbling and wheezing noises. Their crudely formed Homid mouths just can't wrap themselves around human words. If your character takes this Flaw, be prepared to communicate solely like a freak who's been raised by rats.

Ratkin Philosophy

Ratkin philosophy is shaped by one of the most important events in human history: the Apocalypse. No two groups of Ratkin interpret the significance of this prophecy the same way. Every Ratkin a rat pack encounters may have a different

interpretation of what this event means. While the Garou are a doomed race, continually looking to the failures of their past, the wererats have no choice but to look to the future. Only a handful subscribe to the most commonly held belief, that the Apocalypse heralds the end of all creation. The rest freely indulge in maddening delusions... or forbidden truths, depending on who you ask.

If you're not a wererat, it's best not to discuss religion with one of Rat's children — many tend to be rather fanatic about the subject. Some of the most commonly held interpretations are listed below. When creating a Ratkin character, feel free to mutate these delusions as severely as you like. Twitchers have particularly odd religious beliefs, using them to justify shocking atrocities on a regular basis. What do you believe?

Dreams of a Thousand Rats

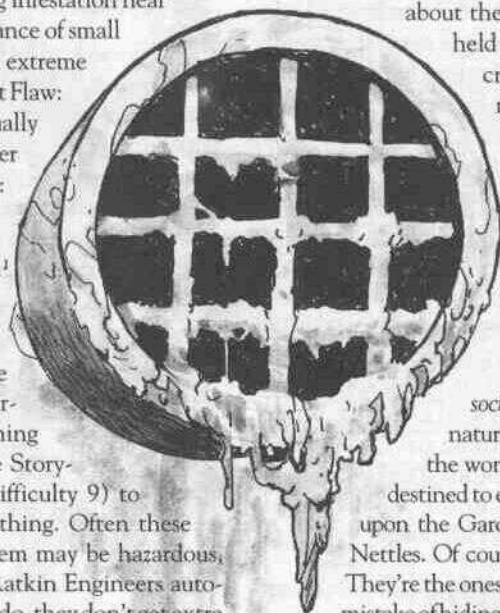
The Apocalypse is the end of Garou society. Ratkin who believe this feel it's only natural that the Wolves should fear the end of the world. Ratkin legend states that the world is destined to end because of a curse Ratkin bards placed upon the Garou before their final end at the Field of Nettles. Of course the werewolves fear the Apocalypse. They're the ones who set it in motion when they made the mistake of hiding behind the Concord, and they're the ones who will reap what they have sown.

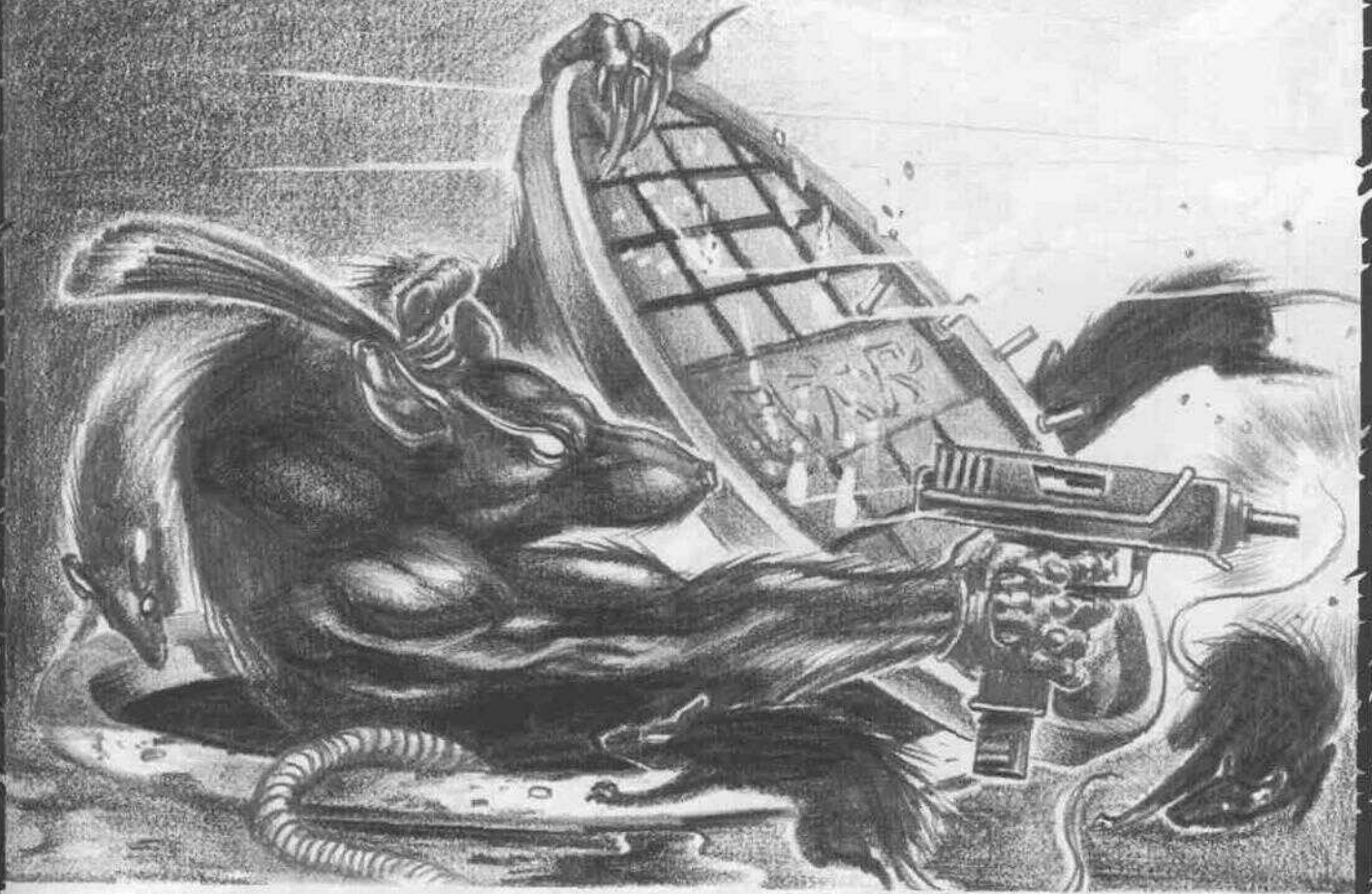
The Apocalypse is the end of human society. The Wyrms has been trying to break free from the Weaver's webs for a long time. The only reason its servitors are so hell-bent on destruction is because the webs of human society have confined it. If the minions of the Wyrms can destroy that society, ending the Age of Man, its madness will end, and the world will be in balance again.

The End Times will bring the destruction of the physical world. The Apocalypse is punishment for mankind's sins of the flesh. The deepest realms of the Umbra, however, aren't dependent on what happens to the race of man. Many Deep Umbral realms will perish, perhaps, but no doubt a few will survive, along with the lost infestations of Ratkin who live there. Then the world will belong to the rats, as it always should have.

The End Times will bring the annihilation of the spirit world. Faith has been dying in the world for millennia. The Gauntlet between the two worlds grows thicker as the world dies. Eventually, it will be impossible to cross between the two realms. All Ratkin left on Earth will thus revert to their true heritage, leaving them to be judged as men or rats.

The Final Battle will allow another race to take over the Earth. Ratkin spies have learned of other creature's legends that seem to correspond to the Garou's delusions. Will millennia-old vampires rise from slumber to devour all of their childer? Are there ancient races in the void of space that will overshadow all that humanity has achieved? Striking at human society will help these other creatures take power; life will probably change very little for the wererats, who can survive almost anywhere.





If this world is destroyed, there are others to infest. Who says this world is the only one? If the Apocalypse destroys everything the Garou know, who's to say the Ratkin couldn't just emigrate... again? A variant of this belief depends on the idea of spirit quests: those who complete them have earned their place in "rat heaven," and will rejoin their distant relations in Paradise.

We are all doomed; revel in destruction and madness. For some odd reason, the Garou seem to think that dying while fighting the Wyrn carries a sense of honor. Unfortunately, if no one lives to remember your honorable deed, there's really no point in it. If the Age of Man is over, there's no real reason to respect human law, short of avoiding getting caught for breaking it. Unleash as much chaos as you can. If the world is doomed, you may not even need to suffer the consequences for what you do.

Um... it isn't time yet. Millennialism is a recurring fad. Some werewolf sects believed the end had come when the *Rattus rattus* Plague Lords helped kill off a third of Europe during the Black Plague. Some sagacious mages thought Tezghul's "sorcerer's crusade" in the 15th century would tear apart human society. Various cults, from the victims of Heaven's Gate to programmers preparing for the Y2K virus, have their own delusions of impending disaster. Whatever. Prophecies are often misinterpreted, and can be made to fit any devious purpose. Keep setting back your deadlines if you like; the Apocalypse might still be a long ways off.



Chapter Four: Aspects and Renown

So tricky were some of the traps the rats set and by circumstantial evidence so deft their wielding of their weapons, that many folk began to insist that some of them, especially the rare and elusive albinos, had on their forelegs tiny clawed hands rather than paws, while there were many reports of rats running on their hind legs.

— Fritz Leiber, *The Swords of Lankmar*

Life Among Rats

Most of the Changing Breeds have fallen apart, letting dissent between tribes tear them apart. The Ratkin care little for such disagreements; in fact, they revel amidst the chaos. Wererats don't care where you come from. What you can actually do is far more important. Granted, they're preoccupied by what you can do for them; nonetheless, fulfilling your chosen occupation in wererat society is far more important than whether you come from a tribe that's stronger or weaker than any other.

After surviving the Birthing Plague, each wererat must decide which aspect of Ratkin tradition she will carry on. Unlike werewolf auspices, Ratkin aspects are not decided by anything as incidental as moon phases. A wererat must actively choose her aspect based on the visions, hallucinations and revelations she receives after Infection. A Ratkin cannot undergo her First Change until this issue is resolved... until then, voices and visions torment her, attempting to influence her decision.

The beastie may track down an apprentice or mentor to help her decide. She may even fulfill an apprenticeship for a

year and a day before undergoing her Rite of Passage. Until that time, she is just a *pup*, a confused ratling who must be subservient to privileged Ratkin. A pup has the option of living in a colony of her kind, striking out on her own to learn wisdom in the wild, or straggling along with a rat pack to serve as its runt. Some Ratkin make fabulous mentors, but such relations never last past the Rite of Passage... they are doomed to self-destruct.

A Ratkin's Rite of Passage is usually a solitary exercise, although a rat pack may approach a colony together to offer their services. The experience is little more than a challenging contract to prove one's mettle. Any Ratkin who survives this trial may learn the first ritual of her chosen aspect. Since the Impergium, there have been four traditional aspects respected in the courts and colonies of wererats: Tunnel Runners, Shadow Seers, Knife-Skulkers and Warriors. These aspects color their lives in many ways, and a Ratkin's maniacal devotion to her cause can even start affecting her Kin and how they live their own lives.

Tunnel Runners

"Man, there's a lot of people who are running out. I could run. I could run right out tonight.... It's right to run."

— Dawn of the Dead

Background: Runners are the messengers and mavericks of Ratkin society, the scouts and spies. Throughout their history, wererats have stayed hidden within secret colonies, breeding thousands of children for the glory of Rat. Not everyone can stand so much isolation and seclusion. Instead, Tunnel Runners roam the Earth, blending into the many societies they encounter as they search for signs of the coming Apocalypse. Along the way, they work whatever scams and schemes they can to survive. Forever on the fringes of human society, they watch and wait... until swarms of their hidden allies are ready to exploit the information the scouts have gathered.

After the liberation of Infection, Runners take to the road, often with a temporary group of companions in tow. Whether they choose to hitchhike, hop trains, steal cars or suffer interminable cross-country bus rides, cunning travelers use Blood Memory to navigate vast stretches of geography. Within the largest cities, pipes and sewer tunnels act as wererat superhighways. Later in life, experienced mavericks are essential in helping their rat packs travel across country, blend into human societies, and outwit the locals who live there. Drawing upon the revelations of Rapture, they may even recall details of places they've never been. Sometimes their prophetic visions manifest as an insatiable wanderlust, or recurrent waking dreams that can distract them from all other concerns.

Runners are also the most qualified for dealing with the treachery of other supernatural societies. After all, mavericks are known just as much for their quick wits as their stealth and subterfuge. If a Ratkin stays in a city long enough, she may find other outcasts to help her. A Runner might even ally with a Bone Gnawer werewolf or a Nosferatu vampire — though not both. As masters of cultural adaptability and social subterfuge, *Tunnel Runners continually scout out dangerous realms where the secrets of the night are occulted.*

After years of rambling, Tunnellers act as emissaries between distant colonies of Ratkin, preserving the diplomatic roles Ratkin bards fulfilled eons ago. Wererat society would fall apart without messengers to keep contact between distant tribes. To preserve the hidden locations of rat infestations, they use many secret methods of traveling from city to city, including extensive Umbral tunnels only the wererats can access. Once a Runner has earned enough Renown, he may decide settle down and organize the local scouts, living vicariously through the young pups' tales of peril. From the nest to the grave, a Tunnel Runner's life is a never-ending road trip, a chaotic journey through a world that only a servitor of the Wyld could survive.

Territories: After the revelations of the Birthing Plague, all young Runners learn by wandering through the world. Some do this to escape lives they cannot stand; others quest for ideals they may never achieve. Every young Ratkin has a vision of at least one site on Earth that represents what he or she is

looking for in life. This is the closest equivalent to a "territory" a Tunnel Runner pup has.

Later in life, a city, continent or vast spirit realm may serve as a Runner's stomping ground. Many Tunnellers have been living on the streets since their youth, preferring the freedom of the road to the treacherous ways of human society. Even older Tunnel Runners find it difficult to stay in one nest forever. Highly-esteemed scouts continue to patrol the same domains for years. If there's a great place nearby to find food, adventure, or perils that threaten the young, a wise scout or spy will find them quickly.

Culture and Kinfolk: For all Ratkin, relationships on the road are temporary and superficial. Runners continually reinvent their identity, leaving their emotional baggage behind. Despite this, long-term friendships that survive common adversity are as hard to kill as rats themselves. A scout or wanderer who hasn't seen an old friend or lover in years immediately picks up the relationship exactly where it left off.

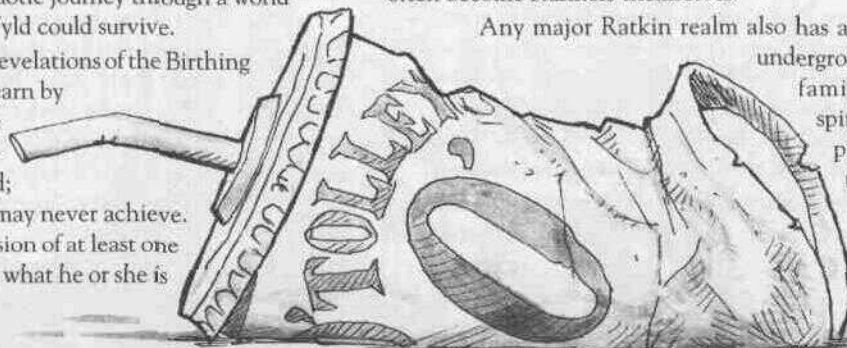
All Tunnel Runners share a sort of informal shorthand that allows them to quickly share information on places they've been, drawing off the Blood Memories of their profession. The wisest leave sigils and graffiti for other wererats to follow. A Runner Ratkin who's never been to a particular city may have access to all sorts of scattered information he never realized he possessed.

The Kinfolk Runners breed learn to keep their distance from any long-term social commitment. Each year, they move from city to city, use and discard temp jobs like old clothes, and evolve a series of personas for different situations. Not all of them are impoverished and homeless; as long as you know where to find crash space, you're never really helpless. Rat relatives pride themselves on being well-traveled, possessing extensive knowledge about the seediest places in the world. They are fascinated by places inhabited by other creatures, especially humans. Some are smart enough to emulate the people they live near; others come up with bizarre explanations to explain human activity.

Organization: Once a Ratkin colony is large enough, it will formally declare itself as a Ratkin "tribe." This involves investing its highest-ranking Tunnel Runner as a Scout, an elder who coordinates the activities of Runners who travel in the region. Through the Second Sight Gift, this courtier may even enlist other wererats to act as his eyes and ears.

If a Ratkin nest is too small to have elders, then any Tunnel Runners "just passing through" are required to trade stories of their travels in exchange for the support and safety of the local colony. Instead of a straightforward military report on the strength of predators in the area, the data must be condensed into a format even a small child could understand. Young pups gather regularly to hear the stories travelers have to tell. The ones who are most impressed by these fanciful tales often become Runners themselves.

Any major Ratkin realm also has a local "Umbral underground" intimately familiar with the spirit world. When problems with the physical world grow too great, it's



tempting to just vanish into the ephemeral realms for a while. Tunnel Runners who run with packs have a habit of disappearing at odd moments while they're off pursuing strange side-quests; those of a spiritual bent return with tales of the local Penumbra.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Culturally Gifted:** A Runner who remains in one place for more than a day can develop a detailed persona that allows him to blend in. These alternate identities aren't very flashy, just the sort of quiet identity that no one questions. The wererat's physical appearance doesn't change; his social cues just mutate to help him blend in. Naturally, each alternative persona has its own name. The Runner is at a -2 difficulty for all Subterfuge or Manipulation rolls involving this facade. This bonus ends once he leaves town and changes his identity, although he can always resume it upon his return.

- **Wanderlust Visions:** The Rat Totem often bestows visions and revelations upon those who serve her. If a Tunnel Runner gets lost (either physically or spiritually), his totem may grant a vision of a way out or a destination that may help. This is purely at the discretion of the Storyteller, and requires a Gnosis roll. The type of vision granted may be influenced by the totem the Runner's pack currently serves. A City Totem may reveal a useful place to sleep a few blocks away; *Grandfather Thunder*, on the other hand, may send a traveler through hell... literally.

- **Traveling Light:** Tunnel Runners below Rank Three can never have a permanent home, and never have the Resources Background. Ratkin of Level Three or higher cannot have more than two dots in Resources; however, they usually develop contacts in several different colonies to help them out.

Appearance: You can often tell an inexperienced Tunnel Runner from his appearance. In Homid form, he always looks worse for wear, like he's been on the street for a long, long time. A massive backpack, several layers of clothes, or a pick-up truck or school bus loaded with blankets and trash bags tell other rats of a homeless brother's travels. It can also draw attention from police officers, irate merchants, and hostile humans.

Experienced Tunnel Runners learn to travel light and blend in. They can carry everything they need in their pockets, wash themselves six times a day (like any good rat), and keep themselves immaculately neat. Elder Rats pride themselves on being nondescript in rat form. Some like to ride in the knapsacks, hats or pockets of other travelers.

Rites and Rage: Tunnel Runners begin play with the Rite of the Bolthole; this grants more information about accessing the spirit world. Runner characters also start with Rage 1.

Beginning Gifts: Danger Sense, Scent of the True Form, Silent Running

Concepts: accidental tourist, journalist, backpacker, world traveler, slumming teenager, urban spelunker, thrill-seeking thief, supernatural spy, homeless wanderer, commune seeker, troubled escapist

Quote: "This isn't my world. I just hide in it. If you're looking for a place to run, talk to me."



Shadow Seers

The crone now motioned him to hold the bowl in a certain position while she raised the huge, grotesque knife above the small white victim as high as her right hand could reach. The fanged, furry thing began tittering a continuation of the unknown ritual, while the witch croaked loathsome responses.

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dreams in the Witch-House"

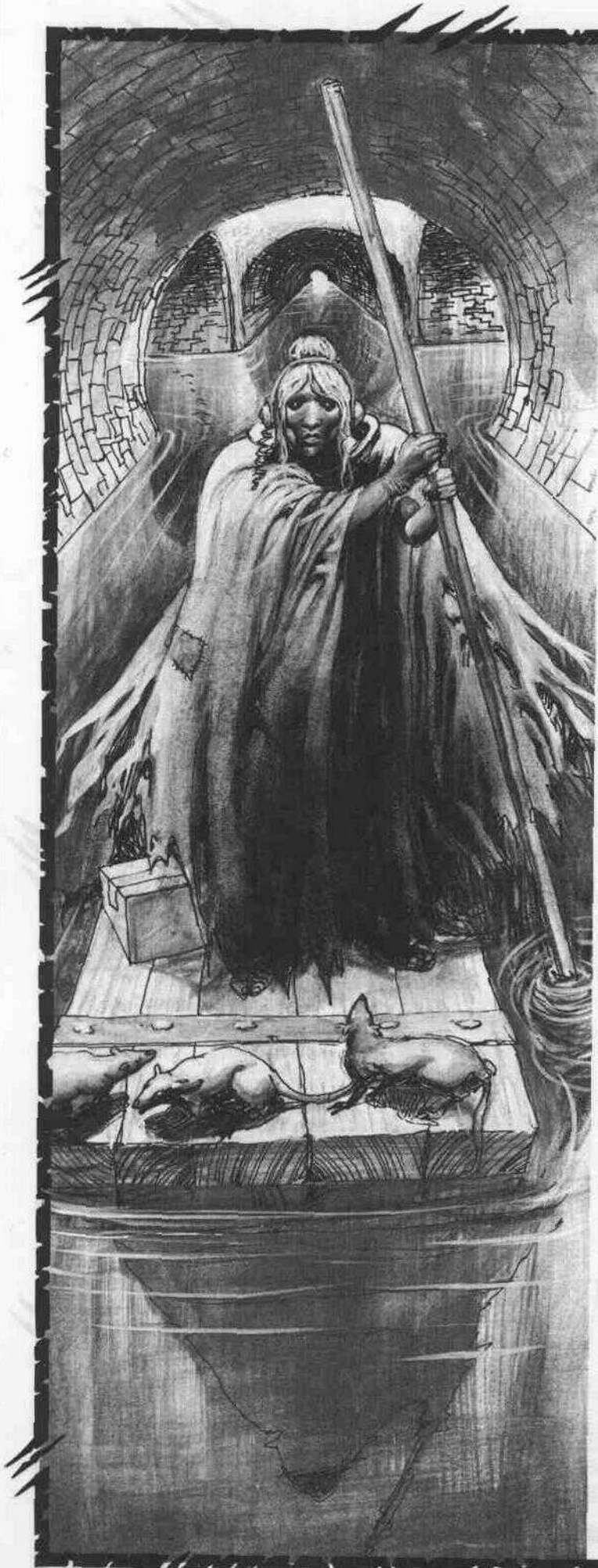
Background: Seers are the keepers of ancient secrets. Each is a shaman of Ratkin society, specializing in the lore of the local domain. From the urban environments of major metropolises to the rural mysteries of the wilderness, wherever Rat shamans travel, they maintain close communication with spirits, gaining advice from other spiritual survivors. Any Shadow Seer also acts as a caretaker for her fellow travelers, tending to their spiritual growth as much as their physical well-being.

Shadow Seers have an intuitive grasp of the ways of spirits, but are just as fascinated by the mysteries of human civilization. Not all of them agree on how to deal with the human race, especially the homeless population of a city. Some fervently believe that the Children of Rat should care for any who have been cast out from human society. After all, the wererats need all the allies they can get, and using what they learn to aid the down-and-out may very well work to their own advantage. Others insist that a human is still a human, and can never be trusted. Just because they're victims doesn't mean they're virtuous; they'll still rip you off when you least expect it. Every Shadow Seer has a strong opinion about this issue, one way or the other.

The aspect gets its name not only for its practitioners' love of knowledge hidden in the shadows, but also for the glazed look a Shadow Seer gets when she gazes into the night, trying to see spirits that aren't really there. Many are masters of Rapture; they seek wisdom the human race has discarded or left behind. Studying human beings helps Ratkin find their own spiritual failings... and plan the next raid for needed supplies. Rummaging through the refuse of human civilization, Shadow Seers trust Rat to help them find everything they need. When the Age of Man comes to an end, they'll help rebuild the world from the rubble left behind.

Territories: As one would expect, Seers prefer to travel to sites where spirits are easily contacted. Rural rodents seek out quiet places where they can commune with shadows undisturbed by human encroachment. Urban Shadow Seers, by contrast, are addicted to the chaos of the cities. They make their lairs in areas where the police fear to go, where the only law in both physical and spirit worlds is survival. Shadow Seers thrive wherever chaos is strong, and gladly help rat packs further the spreading of the Wyld wherever its purifying force is desperately required.

Culture and Kinfolk: It's quite common for a Shadow Seer to become more concerned with Umbral culture than the concerns of the physical world. Truly gifted Seers start to ignore all physical considerations, entering religious mania as their devotion intensifies. When such zeal passes, Seers snap back to highly pragmatic concerns, such as taking care of those around them who are suffering. The residents of a homeless shelter or pack of street kids can become an extended family for a very humane Shadow Seer... or a pack of victims for him to exploit and discard.



A Seer's Kin are often gifted with either spiritual insight or insanity, depending on your point of view. Human Kinfolk find revelations through mental illness, religious devotion, artistic ability or an otherworldly perspective. They often feel like they don't fit into human society before Infection. Rat Kinfolk tend to amass large collections of trinkets and nonsense, stealing anything that attracts their attention as they attempt to interpret human culture. Both prefer solitude and quiet to help them focus on their meditations... or their madness.

Organization: The largest nests are aided by elders called Mystics, tribal courtiers who attend to the spiritual well-being of their domains. Any large colony will always have a "spiritual center" where travelers can rest, meditate, and receive visions from their gods. Most Mystics are at least Rank Three Shadow Seers; they cannot truly learn to control the spirits before they attain this level of wisdom. Any Shadow Seer traveling near a tribal nest must stop by to report any unusual supernatural activities she has seen to the elder of her aspect. She may also be asked to contribute something she's found on the road to the local shrine.

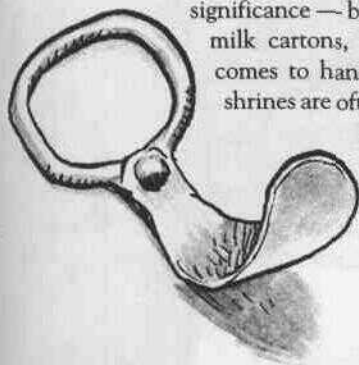
Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Spirit Sight:** Shadow Seers have insights into activity in the spirit world. By spending a point of Gnosis, a Seer can see what is currently happening in the local Penumbra. Here eyes turn white when she does this, and once this sight is activated, she can no longer see what happens around her in the physical world. Her body remains in the physical world; her spirit watches what transpires around it in the spirit world. Shadow Seers also call this phenomenon "disconnection." When it's done voluntarily, it's very useful for taking a quick peek into the Umbra. Unfortunately, it also leaves a mystic vulnerable to physical assault. Seers in Rapture sometimes snap into disconnection at uncomfortable moments.

- **Spirits Speak to Me:** All Shadow Seers begin play with the Theurge Gift: Spirit Speech.

- **Disconnection:** Shadow Seers feel the call of the spirit world more strongly than other Ratkin do. A Shadow Seer's Raptures are usually tied to activity in the Penumbra. When this happens, a Seer in Rapture often gets caught up in some petty intrigue involving the Gafflings and Jagglings nearby. Some wander around only seeing what transpires in the Umbra; others typically confuse the ways of the realm of flesh with the traditions of the spirit world. Either way, these incidents are often disguised as mental illness. In reality, a Seer's Raptures are moments of crystal clear sanity, a glimpse through the webs that obfuscate the real workings of the world — but they're still inconvenient.

Appearance: Everything is holy, so Seers have a habit of collecting common items that hold hidden spiritual significance — bottle caps, condom wrappers, milk cartons, cardboard or anything that comes to hand. Items that aren't used in shrines are often worn by mystics. Wearing new clothes is wasteful, so Shadow Seers shop for clothes like they seek for wisdom: searching through



the detritus of society to find valuables others have discarded.

Rites and Rage: Seers begin play with the Dedication Rite; this helps them ally their rat packs with the Incarnae and other spirits. Shadow Seer characters begin the game with Rage 2.

Beginning Gifts: Rat Mother's Touch, Sense Weaver, Sense Wyrn

Concepts: caregiver, street performer, artist, homeless crusader, hermit, naturalist, insightful messiah, insidious madman, secretive cultist, streetwise cannibal, loving mother

Quote: "You worry about fighting what you can see. I'll worry about fighting what you can't see."

Knife-Skulkers

"He pulls a knife? You pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way...."

— Malone, *The Untouchables*

Background: Other shapeshifters would consider Skulkers little more than assassins. That's a big mistake, one that arises from a fundamental misunderstanding of Ratkin culture. Knife-Skulkers are more than executioners; they often serve as judges and juries as well. Unlike creatures who are trapped by the deceptions of laws, Skulkers believe in justice. Knife-Skulkers do far more than recite the Litany of Survival. Witnessing injustice can stoke a Skulker's rage, forcing him to actively enforce the beliefs he professes.

When laws fail, Knife-Skulkers aggressively offer to "adjudicate" disputes. They gather information from a wide array of sources, including local Tunnel Runners. If they feel strongly enough, they will enforce their beliefs as they best see fit. Outside Ratkin society, if that's assassination, then so be it. Unfortunately, when passing judgment on their own kind, they have restraints placed on their activities. Acting on their own, a Knife-Skulker can only enforce *low justice* on other wererats. That is, they can only punish guilty Ratkin with minor punishments: harassment by Rat-spirits, branding, loss of property, ritual crippling are a few common examples.

If a Knife Skulker reports the crime to a Ratkin elder, however, or the ruler of a wererat colony, he can gain authorization for *high justice*. If the elder agrees, the Skulker can slay a wererat who threatens the safety or security of his own race. If they feel merciful, Knife Skulkers will often brand their quarry with a "death mark" before killing them. A criminal bearing this sigil may be given the chance to atone for his crime before other Skulkers catch up with him.

These harsh practices have millennia of precedent. During the Impergium, when other shapechangers couldn't fully resolve legal matters on their own — especially when another supernatural faction was concerned — calling on Ratkin justice served as a last resort. Now, as the world grows more insane, the Skulkers have become more brutal in their methods. Some enter formal contracts with those who need their services; others become vigilantes, receiving orders for high justice from a higher authority: the Rat Incarna herself. Sometimes both sides of a dispute will secretly hire freelancers to punish the other; this often forces supernatural societies into interspecies wars. Since the Skulkers are servitors of chaos, this serves their

gods well. Preserving their reputation for vengeance and retribution, Knife-Skulkers strike like a force of nature, proudly emulating the vicious nature of the Wyld.

Territories: Knife Skulkers aren't overly concerned with keeping "territory" of their own; they're pretty low-maintenance, as Ratkin go. They reason that it's better to have a few small, secure ratholes to hide your equipment and yourself than to go to the trouble of defending a larger turf. A Skulker is usually content to have one or two private sanctums, and little else — and they're very protective of those sanctums.

Culture and Kinfolk: If a Skulker is contracted to mete out punishment, he always has the option of terminating a contract and sparing his quarry. Most loathe this prerogative. Skulkers lose more Renown for breaking Contract Rites than other Ratkin. Even without this pressure, many secretly enjoy "pronouncing sentence" on anyone who offends them thoroughly enough. Like all Ratkin, they have little regard for human law. Justice is far more important... and unfortunately, far more subjective.

Though Tunnel Runners are more skilled at diplomacy, Knife-Skulkers are the wererat's experts at performing Contract Rites. Deceits of Ratkin are infamous for making pacts with other supernatural creatures, performing unsavory tasks in return for certain favors and privileges. Ratkin of other aspects have a certain amount of freedom to back out of Contract Rites, only suffering a minor loss of Renown for doing so. When another supernatural creature breaks a Contract Rite with a wererat, however, Knife-Skulkers prefer to apply the "punishment clause" of their contracts. Retribution must be fierce enough to convince the transgressor to never betray the wererats again. Both inside and outside wererat society, their reputation for vengeance is legendary.

Knife Skulkers are also held responsible for making sure their packs "Preserve the Veil," in deference to the first dictum of the Litany of Survival. Unfortunately, Skulkers disagree on exactly how to interpret these three words. Colony elders are fanatic about the Veil. If a deceit of Ratkin has forced humans into Delirium, elders may send out Knife-Skulkers and Rat-spirits to harass and punish the offenders. By contrast, highly independent and anarchistic wererats don't give a damn about subtlety; they'll do just about anything to bring chaos to the world. Skulkers must decide which side of this conflict to support... and which will score them the best Contracts.

Oddly enough, when they aren't fulfilling their duties, Skulkers seem like such *quiet* creatures. The Kinfolk they spawn are often the same way. Most know they can't change the world by openly practicing violence; if anything, they've got to be really secretive about their revenge. Epic carnage is best left to less sophisticated creatures, like Twitchers and Plague Lords. Even so, some secretly stockpile weapons and knowledge, waiting for the day they can mete justice on the world.

Organization: In large nests, political infighting is horrendous. When it gets so bad that it interferes with the productivity or reproduction of the local wererats, the highest ranking Knife-Skulker is called in to "resolve" the dispute. The threat of one of the local politicians getting killed is usually enough to dissuade them from disagreeing any further. To attain this position of authority, a Skulker values his reputation very highly.



Strengths and Weaknesses

• **Contracts and Contacts:** Other supernatural creatures know how efficacious it can be to have a Knife-Skulker solve a dispute... his way. Skulker characters start out with three points of Contacts in addition to their other starting Backgrounds. These creatures are usually extralegal informers that trade information for favors. Rat packs have plenty of leads on corrupt activities, and are often asked to intervene in the affairs of other societies. Once a pact is made, Knife-Skulkers also take a Contract Rite very seriously. If, Goddess forbid, a Skulker breaks a contract, he is fair game for assassination by other Knife-Skulkers.

• **Sense of Justice:** A Skulker can regain a point of Rage when he witnesses an event that is obviously unjust. This sparks racial memories of the wererats' betrayal during the Impergium and the War of Rage.

• **Assassin's Code:** When contracted to assassinate, a Skulker can never allow himself to be seen killing his enemy. He cannot confront his target face to face, nor can he strike while obscured by a Cloak of Shadows. Failure means that the Skulker loses Cunning Renown, even if his contract is fulfilled. Never turn your back on a Knife Skulker you do not know.

Appearance: Knife Skulkers never carry their weapons openly unless they are in battle. They do not disguise themselves when pursuing an assassination, as they will not apologize for what they do best. In addition, in Rodens form, their eyes are always red.

Rites and Rage: Knife Skulkers begin play with the Contract Rite. They can also learn the Rite of the Questing Stone or any Garou Punishment Rite; much of this knowledge has been secretly passed to the Skulkers by treacherous werewolves. However, Skulkers can only practice Punishment Rites on fellow Ratkin. Followers of this aspect begin the game with Rage 3.

Beginning Gifts: Death Mark, Sticky Paws, Truth of Gaia

Concepts: mercenary, vigilante, freelance assassin, supernatural investigator, spirit hunter, diplomat, "free-thinking" cop

Quote: "We had a contract. You broke it. Now I'm going to make your life a living hell...."

Warriors

"Good? Bad? I'm the guy with the gun."

— Ashe, *Army of Darkness*

Background: Ratkin Warriors come from a vast array of training grounds. Whether they study their marital arts in a dojo, militia, urban gang or rustic retreat, they all have one thing in common: the urge to fight. From the first moment of Infection, Warriors feel a surge of rage, an overwhelming anger resulting from the legacies of their race. The betrayal of the Garou Concord, the festering corruption of the Wyrms' minions, and the overpopulation of the human race drive Infected rats to heights of fury. When rage flows freely, violence reigns.

Wererat Warriors consider preemptive strikes against the Wyrms unnecessary; after all, the werewolves should clean up their own mistakes. Many prefer to unleash their unbridled fury

in places where humans have become far too dangerous. Severing the Weaver's webs — by striking the human civilization that has driven the Wyrms insane — is a sacred trust. Some have the wisdom to choose their battles carefully; others don't care who dies when battle lust seizes them. Granted, all Warriors know to preserve the secrecy of their own existence, since killing humans openly on the streets invites retribution. Preserving the Veil is the first stricture of the Litany of Survival. Nonetheless, winning a war can depend on many small skirmishes, and if a human has to die, the rats don't hesitate to kill. Other Ratkin sometimes refer to Warriors as "Blade Slaves," in reference to the sacred Pain Daggers they wield. The most devout wererats treasure these weapons with religious fetishism, sometimes whispering to the spirits trapped inside them.

As the population of the Ratkin race steadily increases, more of them seek work as mercenaries, contracting their skills to help refine their prowess. If the end of the world is approaching, Warriors know that they will serve as shock troops for the Wyld in the Final Battle. Admittedly, there are peaceful times in a Warrior's life — moments when meditation and reflection can silence the torrent of rage that surges through them — but peace is nothing more than a temporary cessation of the ways of war.

Wise Warriors don't feel the need to fight to the death at the slightest provocation. Developing martial skill involves far more than just killing things — sometimes it involves crippling them, weakening them, or demoralizing them. These soldiers don't just slay; they also use their knowledge of chaos to confuse their enemies, striking in the night when madness reigns. As the Ratkin race continues to hone its martial skills, armies of darkness are ready for battle, commanded by the leadership of the wererat Warriors.

Territories: Warriors nest in areas they find defensible and "tactically sound"; abandoned bomb shelters are near the top of their list. Rural Warriors sometimes establish small compounds, cabins or ranches with extensive basements, preferably with enough food and ammo stashed away to help a small band of preferred Kin survive the Apocalypse. Urban Warriors love to hang out in the worst sections of town, the places where the cops don't go — all the better to hone their skills. Army surplus stores and dojos are also favored nesting spaces for the urban Warrior.

Culture and Kinfolk: Any two Warriors in the same pack need to find out who's the more skilled soldier. Most Ratkin killers are insecure about this crucial issue. At the end of each week (of game time, not real time), if a pack has two or more Warriors, they must resolve this issue through a non-lethal duel. The Blade Slaves first find another member of the pack to judge the contest. Then, once the fight begins, the soldiers assault each other with non-aggravated damage; this continues until one of the Ratkin reaches the Wounded Health Level. The winner acts as the "alpha" for all fights during that week; the loser has to follow all of the winner's orders until the next contest. If a Knife Skulker judges this duel, he may allow further modifications to dueling etiquette. What's your preference? Battle-axes in a dark basement? Tail knives on a tightrope? As long as both Ratkin agree to these new rules, it's a fair duel.

Warriors' Kinfolk are a little bit twitchy,



and usually have a militant attitude, even if they're never Infected. Their rat Kin love to get into scraps with just about anything; they've just got a mean streak. Their human relatives have a fascination for martial life, whether that involves martial arts, gun collecting, survivalist training, or associating with quasi-military organizations. All of them pride themselves on discipline and composure... until rage overwhelms reason.

Organization: Any large breeding ground must have a Warlord to coordinate its defenses. This elder must be informed of potential conscripts at all times, and expects reports from any Warrior Ratkin passing through his territory. If a colony is large enough to have a Warlord, then that creature also has the honor of calling up the Rite of the Swarm when necessary.

Strengths and Weaknesses

• **Blade Slaves:** Only Warriors may perform the Rite of the Pain Dagger, since only they can create their sacred blades. The "blade slave" ritually summons and binds a spirit within his ceremonial weapon so that it will inflict aggravated damage. At the Storyteller's option, he might also be able to access one of the Charms used by that spirit; this costs a number of background points equal to the power level of the Charm. Each time the Charm is used, the Ratkin must spend a point of Gnosis.

Other Ratkin — that is, wererats who aren't Warriors — can also wield Pain Daggers. They can declare one as a two-point fetish during character creation; after all, a wererat can find, steal or inherit one of these sacred blades. Although these weapons still inflict aggravated damage, only a Warrior can use the Charm bound inside a ceremonial blade.

• **Buff and Tough:** All Ratkin Warriors get an extra Health Level for muscle mass. (Draw in a square above the Bruised Level, and write the word "Tough" next to it.) Some Rat Mothers prefer to breed and raise their children specifically for war, taking pride in the prowess of their offspring.

• **Blood Lust:** Warriors frenzy more easily than most Ratkin (or even many other shapechangers). The difficulty for their Rage rolls is always 5, regardless of the phase of the moon, direction of the wind, day of the week, or any other factor. In addition, resisting frenzy requires the expenditure of two Will-power points, not one.

Appearance: Warriors of both sexes are mildly insecure, and feel the need to show off their martial prowess. Whether training as a martial artist, militia man, or militarist, any Ratkin Warrior has a preferred style of fighting; he always carries something that serves as an indicator of that style. In North America, for instance, this could include a need for bodybuilding, a fixation for large weapons, or a fetish for military clothing. Among the Japanese Nezumi, *tabi* shoes, *wakazashi* blades and *shuriken* are more common. Warriors don't need to dress in camo gear 24-7, but any good Warrior feels naked without at least one mark of his style.

As part of their mania for martial prowess, any Ratkin naturally thinks his "style" is the best, and will prove it in non-lethal combat with any other wererat who challenges him. Martial artists talk of their styles as *fists*, and will gladly debate issues like whether the Flying Crane fist is hard enough to overwhelm the Imperious Tiger Fist. Less philosophical War-



rriors often make their packs dive for cover whenever they begin to debate the advantages of the 9 mm over the .357....

Rites and Rage: All Warriors start out with the Rite of the Pain-Dagger. A wererat will not be conscripted for battle until she has dedicated her sacred blade. Warrior characters begin the game with Rage 4.

Beginning Gifts: Resist Pain, Slicing Teeth, Sticky Paws

Concepts: ex-military, military brat, bully, cowboy, knight-in-training, tyrant, martial artist, ninjitsu freak, wargame enthusiast

Quote: "What? Just because you've got an army surplus jacket and a pipe bomb, that makes you a man? Any fool can pull a trigger. Leading a pack and fighting the Weaver takes a lot more. Saving the world requires true warriors."

Freaks

Just as the world continues to evolve, so does the Ratkin race. Every wererat lives on the edge of society, but a few brave souls go over it. Not every wererat chooses one of the four traditional aspects after the Birthing Plague. A "blessed" few receive more esoteric visions during their Infection. As the Final Days approach, this deviance has started to appear more frequently. In wererat society, Ratkin who delight in their genetic flaws abandon the four traditional aspects; these madmen are typically regarded as Freaks.

Lost Children and Freak Aspects

As more of Rat's children return from hiding places in the spirit world, wererats have been joined by practitioners of the more esoteric aspects of Ratkin society. In some cases, wererats who undergo the Plague remember knowledge that was thought forgotten, drawing upon thin strains of memory in their blood. In rarer cases, materialized Rat-spirits breed with Ratkin, creating obscure crossbreeds the world has never seen before. Wererat repopulation is at an all-time high, resulting in new evolutionary pathways. Thus, the average rat pack now consists of at least five members: a Tunnel Runner, a Shadow Seer, a Skulker, a Warrior and at least one Freak. The four new "freak aspects" are detailed briefly below.

Ratkin Engineers

"They used to carry food, like the rest of us. But now we see them with other things — pieces of metal, and bits of machinery, and things I can't even recognize. They take them into that rosebush, and what happens next, I don't know."

— Jeremy the Crow, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

Background: Engineers master knowledge of the Weaver's ways, scrounging amidst the wreckage of human society for the tools and weapons they need. During the Impergium, their ancestors sabotaged many early human attempts at tool-making, acting as gremlins for the force of the Wyld. Now they infest places overrun with high-technology, from genetic engineering laboratories to cutting-edge computer companies. As highly intelligent "rats in the walls," they've learned from humans trapped in corporate cages.

Ratkin Engineers are a relatively recent phenomenon, the result of mankind's leaps of technological acumen over the last

The Lost Aspect

The bards are a lost aspect of wererat society, a legend from the days of the Impergium. Colloquially known as "Speakers" (or an unpronounceable rodent whuffling sound), they acted as intermediaries between the Ratkin and other races, gathering legends to add to their collective Blood Memory. Obsequious to a fault, they were the peacemakers of the race. As emissaries to Garou septs during the early days of the world, they were the first to die when their race was betrayed. The last remaining bards gathered together at the legendary Field of Nettles to intone an epic curse against the Garou, and finished it before the last practitioner of their craft was slain.

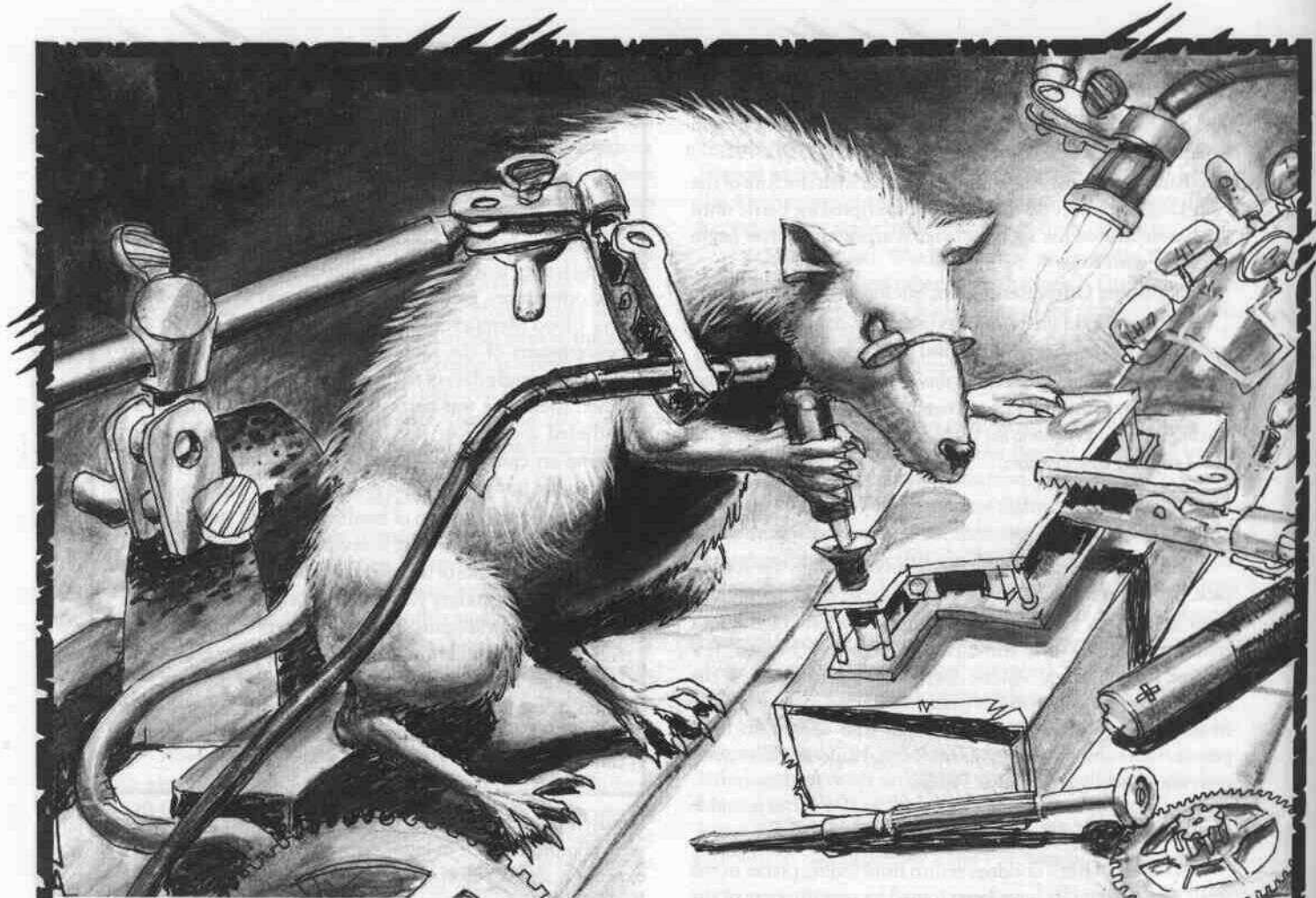
Once the last drop of bardic blood was spilled, their ancient wisdom was lost forever. Although there is a legend of the spirits of three Ratkin bards stalking a remote area of the Legendary Realm, the Speakers will never be seen in this world again. Tunnel Runners try to maintain the oldest Ratkin cultural traditions, but each year, more knowledge is lost... replaced by some new deviant creation. Some Ratkin manage to recall a few fragments from Blood Memory, but this information is always distorted by the madness of the Wyld.

hundred years. Starting in the late 19th century, ordinary rats were commonly used in laboratory experiments. As one could expect, a small percentage of these rodents were Kinfolk, Ratkin offspring who managed to pass on their blessed blood from one generation to the next. Years of living in the midst of the Weaver, countless genetic and chemical experiments, and years of training in mazes and shock chambers had a subtle effect on their intelligence over decades.

Now their descendants have finally learned enough to start monkeywrenching 21st-century tech. Many Engineers are highly conversant in the languages used by Weaver-spirits, and may even enlist them to their causes. Though more vengeful rats may insist on tearing down all of human society, Ratkin Engineers are more interested in a purposeful revolution, so that they can acquire all technology for their own mysterious goals. Technology isn't evil, after all. It's just in the wrong paws.

Unfortunately, despite their ingenious insights, years of inbreeding has hardwired other psychological traits into the Engineer's massive intellects. All followers of this aspect are paranoid about humans finding out about them. Ratkin Engineers interact more with human technology than other Ratkin do, but they are fanatic about preserving the Veil. Many are convinced that if they don't watch their actions carefully, someone from a local laboratory will capture them and experiment on them to find out why they're so smart. Rodens Ratkin everywhere share a common myth about the place Engineers go when they get caught: a horrifying laboratory known as the "Big Shiny Place."

Territories: Wherever technology thrives, these rats will move in to scavenge it. A few Engineers infiltrate corporations and laboratories to find their latest fix; most have to sort through scrap heaps and garbage dumps to find the materials they need. Humans have a fetish about continually acquiring more stuff, newer stuff



and cutting-edge state-of-the-art tech. Engineers thus have a continual supply of discarded widgets to adapt and improve. While Garou prepare for battle by holding regal moots in the isolation of the wilderness, Ratkin Engineers prefer to hold secretive revels in hardware stores, toy stores and computer shops.

Culture and Kinfolk: Though Ratkin Engineers are rare, they are manic about keeping up long-distance associations. There's a reason for this: the average Engineer is so egotistical that she immediately becomes highly competitive with any fellow techie who moves into her neighborhood. The struggle begins with fierce discussions about technological innovations, and rapidly breaks down into name calling and slander. The result is a Tech Duel, a showdown between two Engineers at a local revel. The techies face off in a crude arena. Two machines enter; one machine leaves.

Engineer Kinfolk are just as uncivilized. Rat Kinfolk are pack rats of the worst variety, and pride themselves on ruling over vast junkyards, thrift stores, and the like. Unproven rumors whisper that an entire race of their relatives, the Caged Folk, are involved in a massive conspiracy against the human race. Human Kinfolk surround themselves with gadgets and widgets that look like junk to anyone else. Whether they tinker with ancient computers or rusting cars, they have an insatiable need to fix anything that's considered unsalvageable.

Organization: The greatest and most esteemed Engineers seek out huge infestations of Ratkin they can help protect. Because of this, the Ratkin's most extensive breeding grounds like to show off their latest technological acquisitions, from simple lighting

networks of Christmas tree bulbs to elaborate elevator systems, slidewalks and traps. Lesser Engineers don't like to stay around these places for long; if you lose a Tech Duel with an elder Engineer, you'll probably get recruited for maintenance work.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Jury-Rig:** Once per day, the Engineer can build an "Ingenious Device™" out of the materials she has at hand. Sometimes, she'll spend the whole day collecting knickknacks just to see what she can build out of them that evening. The final creation requires at least of point of Gnosis (or more, depending on the size of the creation) and an Intelligence + Repair roll. The device cannot exceed the parameters of existing technology (no death-rays or teleport chambers, please) and will function for at least a full scene. After that, the device breaks down and cannot be fixed.

There's also a limit to the size of a Jury-Rigged device: anything larger than a big dog (or a massively bloated housecat) won't work. Larger items, up to the size of a human, are made possible through the Gift: Mousetrap. If an Engineer wants to construct anything bigger, like a vehicle, he'll have to go through the same Intelligence + Repair rolls anyone else would — he's better off stealing a car with the Hotwire Gift. As one would expect, eighteen-wheeled vehicles and giant war machines are far beyond the capabilities of a typical scrounging Ratkin Engineer.

- **Idle Hands:** Any Ratkin in Rodens form can shift her paws to create opposable thumbs and manipulate small objects.

Ratkin Engineers are even more adept at this; subtract 2 from the difficulty for any Dexterity roll that involves fine manipulation.

• **They Call You Mad:** Genius has its price. Every Engineer has a psychological trait that distracts him from real-world concerns. Other Ratkin can buy these as Flaws; you must automatically take one of these for free. Your choices include:

— Curiosity (roll Willpower when presented with a technological phenomenon, or you simply *must* investigate)

— Absent-Mindedness (roll Intelligence at difficulty 9 to remember crucial facts when you're in the middle of a technological investigation)

— Delusions of Grandeur (shouting things like "Rats will one day rule this city, *thanks to the power of steam!*")

— or Kleptomania (roll versus Willpower to avoid taking that little widget that would be just perfect for your next creation)

Rodens and metis Engineers can never learn the human names for complicated technological devices (like toasters, televisions, or digital watches). They must always describe them "in rat terms" instead ("shiny bread-chucker," "people-image projector box"). They cannot give technological devices new proper names as descriptors, although they do understand abstract concepts like doohickeys and thingamabobs. Homid Engineers grok perfectly what the human words mean, but prefer not to use them unless they absolutely must.

Appearance: Years of genetic manipulation have altered the appearance of Ratkin Engineers. Each one has a physiological trait that identifies him as the gene freak he is. Albinism, wrinkled skin (or "rhino hide"), unusually colored or patterned fur (and hair) and poor vision (requiring glasses in all forms, including Rodens) are all common examples.

Rites and Rage: Ratkin Engineers start the game with Rage 2. To collect the materials they need, techies also learn the Rite of the Shopping Cart at an early age. They go into the world at Freak Factor 4; this grants them an extra Gift during character creation: Sense Weaver.

Beginning Gifts: Control Simple Machine, Open Seal, Scrounge

Concepts: electrician, plumber, low-tech artist, hacker, monkeywrencher, gadgeteer, defense specialist

Quote: "Men will be destroyed by their own machines... and the Ratkin race will push the buttons!"

Plague Lords

Man and the rat will always be pitted against each other as implacable enemies... the rat's most potent weapons against mankind have been its perpetual maintenance of the infectious agents of plague and typhus fever.

— Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice and History*

Background: Plague Lords cultivate the Ratkin's most formidable weapon: disease. All Plague Lords are metis. Only an act that others consider "incestuous" — the breeding of one shapechanger with another — can create one of these troubled, tormented creatures. They oversee procreative rites that are nothing less than High Rituals extolling depravity and foulness. All of them are recognizable by the ravages of the diseases they consort with: the pustulent buboes of medieval plague,

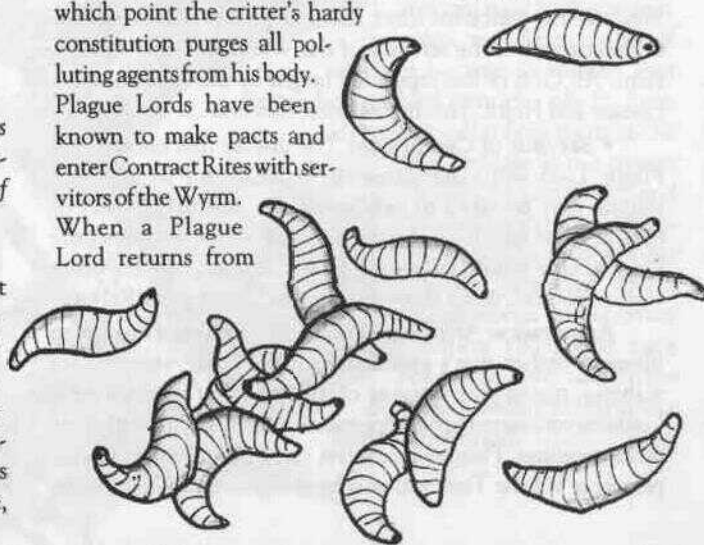
milky eyes festering with illness, unidentifiable tumors, horrific scars and warped limbs are all common deformities. Garou metis have it easy; Plague Lords revel in their ugliness.

All Plague Lords are descended from the species *Rattus rattus*, the variety of black rat that first appeared in Europe during the 6th century. Their race was later responsible for the first epidemic of the Black Plague in the 12th century. Centuries ago, many loremasters interpreted their return to the world as a fulfillment of the ancient bardic prophecy from the Field of Nettles. Unfortunately, the Plague Lords failed; humanity survived. Their ancestors were driven out of the continent centuries later by the hardier brown rat, or *Rattus norvegicus*. Since then, the Lords have remained in exile for centuries. Even the Ratkin don't trust them.

Now a dark new age has brought new diseases into the world. Plague Lords have returned from their hiding places in the spirit world. As the infection of the Birthing Plague continues to mutate, acts of Ratkin incest have produced more of these foul creatures. Racial hatred between black rats and brown rats is magnified in the conflict between Plague Lords and other types of Ratkin. Their reputation has steadily increased over the years — the number of deaths cause by rat-borne disease is believed to exceed those of all wars throughout human history.

In recent years, they have rejoiced at the proliferation of new diseases. Dark powers tutor them in forgotten arts of destruction. Though they cannot step sideways into the Low Umbra, Plaguers consort with many creatures who do. Spirits of Pain and Disease act as their eyes and ears in the Shadowlands. As a result, Plague Lords understand the ways of the Wyrms far better than their brothers and sisters. They're tolerated because some Ratkin believe they must understand the ways of the Wyrms before they can destroy it. Unfortunately, this affinity also means that Plague Lords are tempted by corruption more thoroughly than other wererats. Most walk a narrow road between the madness of the Wyld and the horrors of the Wyrms.

It is even possible for a Plague Lord to become a servant of the Wyrms, but corruption is seemingly never permanent for these cunning beasties. As far as most loremasters know, they are unique in this regard. A Plague Lord's fall from grace never lasts more than one complete cycle of the moon, at which point the critter's hardy constitution purges all polluting agents from his body. Plague Lords have been known to make pacts and enter Contract Rites with servitors of the Wyrms. When a Plague Lord returns from



their walk on the dark side, he then uses the knowledge he's gained against his former allies. Unfortunately, this also exaggerates his love of suffering and disease afterward. Perhaps their "falls" are only temporary, but it seems that every Plague Lord is destined for an eventual and inexorable turn to corruption.

Territories: Wherever diseases thrive, Plague Lords gather to exploit the victims. Personal tastes dictate favorite haunts. If rats infest a hospital, sanitarium or nursing home, a Plague Lord may rule the local breeding grounds, or at least have a position of great authority. A few prefer the epicurean delights of restaurants, condemning them to disease once they lose interest. When traveling with a rat pack, Plague Lords insist on seeing the most squalid areas of any city they frequent. They usually pursue these scouting trips alone.

Culture and Kinfolk: Plague Lord Kinfolk are always sickly and diseased, often after a prolonged history of illness. A few Human Kinfolk have careers in the medical field; the most prosperous ones manage to avoid Infection for years and years. Rat Kinfolk are stupid enough to live near medical waste, and lucky enough to survive it. After their Rite of Passage, many Plague Lords will take the name of their favorite disease as a sobriquet in their own names. Johann von Typhus and Lord Ebola of Zaire are two historical examples.

Organization: The most powerful Plague Lord in any area will establish his own high court, proclaiming himself as a Rat King in the process. The title always involves the name of the sovereign's favorite disease. If his reign is a good one, an epidemic may result; if it isn't, he'll be deposed by forces he's summoned up, but can't put down. Plague Kings in exile who can find a rat pack to take them always start out as the straggler, but with their ingenious instincts, they rarely remain that way for long.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Medical Genius:** All Plague Lords start with three dots in Medicine; this does not count against their starting allotment of Abilities (although going higher than Medicine 3 at character creation still requires freebie points).

- **Personal Plague:** Plague Lords are always chosen by either a Pain-spirit or a specific Disease-spirit during the first year of servitude. Some incorporate the name of their chosen disease at the end of this apprenticeship. The spirit can travel into the Shadowlands with some effort, and even possesses an expanding knowledge about the servitors of the Wyrn and their motivations. All Gifts of this aspect are taught by the spirits of Pain, Disease and Night. This has its price, however....

- **Servitor of Corruption:** The disease that chooses the Plague Lord will make demands in return for its aid. The wererat may be asked to help spread an infection further or exploit those who have already received it. Success grants the Plagued One power; failure results in the disease taking other victims instead, often those close to the disobedient Ratkin.

Appearance: Any Plague Lord bears the signs of his chosen illness, whether that's pustulent buboes, sickly wheezing, or scabrous, rugose skin. Because of the ravages of illness, Plague Lords are considered to be Appearance 1 when dealing with most other creatures. Plagued characters can still put points in Appearance, but the Trait will only be recognized and admired by



supernatural beasts who ignore appearances — Nosferatu vampires, Redcap fae, Wyrm-spirits and like. Other Plague Lords may be attracted to their scarred friend's abominable visage.

Rites and Rage: All Plague Lords begin the game with the Rite of the Birthing Plague. Plagued Ratkin have enough angst to begin the game with Rage 3. They begin the game at Freak Factor 4; this grants them an extra Gift during character creation: Sense Wyrm.

Beginning Gifts: Poison Food, Sniffle, Virulent Curse of Hatred

Concepts: healer, doctor, occultist, supernatural diplomat, medium, ghosthunter, assassin, child care specialist, epicurean, vivisectionist, ecoterrorist, bacteriologist, epidemiologist, antagonist

Quote: "Turn your head and cough. Oooh! I've never seen it that color before..."

Munchmausen

De Guiche: *Why... where did this man fall from?*

Cyrano: *The moon!*

De Guiche: *You —*

Cyrano: *From the moon! The moon! I fell out of the moon!*

—Cyrano de Bergerac, Edmond Rostand

Background: Munchmausen believe they are exiles from the most exotic realms of the spirit world. All of them have succumbed to the mad lure of the Wyld. A few insist that they are exiles from Arcadia itself, demanding that they are descended from the lost brethren of the fae. Though they've never actually seen that mythical realm, they still have extensive stories about it. For these reasons, they are also known as "Arcadian Ratkin" or "Moon Mice."

All of them entertain fanciful stories of spirit realms that don't exist... and maybe never did. Munchmausen are among the greatest storytellers in the world, even if they're inveterate liars. Not all of them are swashbuckling heroes, but all of them are delusional about their origins and their heroic prowess.

A Moon Mouse always carries accouterments that relate to his fantastic stories, like a replica of Excalibur, firecrackers to aid lunar travel, a pirate's eye patch, or a tiny

rodent-sized car for quick getaways. No matter what reality may prove otherwise, a Munchmausen always considers himself to be the greatest adventurer in the world.

Such fascination with the Umbra has its risks, of course; any Ratkin who spends too much time in the spirit world becomes entirely spirit, like any other shapechanger. Living perpetually on the furthest fringes of sanity, they rely on their prolonged exposure to the Wyld to forestall the dissolution of their flesh. This leads to spirit quests even more elaborate than their adventures in the physical world, both for themselves, and for the rats foolish enough to follow them. For these reason, rat packs with Munchmausen usually allow their Arcadian friends to lead them on regular spirit quests.

Territories: Most Munchmausen are, theoretically at least, living in worlds far removed from our own. The few encountered by rat racks are typically lost or exiled from realms of the Deep Umbra. Arcadian Ratkin seek out anyone who will listen to their fanciful claims. The few who are adopted by packs are usually a great benefit... if the rest of the deceit can tolerate them.

Culture and Kinfolk: Munchmausen Kinfolk are either rats, humans or spirits. Rat Kinfolk are always a little twitchy, making their homes in the most unlikely places. Human Kinfolk have trouble dealing with reality, and perpetually succumb to escapism. The most common kin to the Moon Mice, spirit Kinfolk, dwell in the furthest reaches of the Umbra, infesting the spaces between esoteric realms.

Organization: If two Munchmausen should ever encounter each other in your presence, run. The conflict of egos can become so intense that bystanders get hurt from the fallout. Each adventurer will try to convince the other that he is the greater hero in the world, and will begin telling elaborate tales to prove his point. If anyone doubts the stories an Arcadian Ratkin tells, that rat's honor has been called into question. Dueling etiquette demands satisfaction.



Strengths and Weaknesses

• **The Beautiful Lie:** Once each day, a Munchmausen can tell one beautiful, elaborate lie and get away with it. Anyone who hears this tale will swear that it is true. The effects last for at least an hour, plus an additional hour for every success on a Manipulation + Expression roll. The rest of the day, Munchmausen love to lie just as much, but these lesser confabulations are just warm-ups for this daily masterpiece.

• **Poetic License:** Munchmausen start the game with three dots in Expression; this does not count against their 27 points of starting Abilities (although starting with more than 3 dots in Expression still requires the expenditure of freebie points).

• **Self-Deception:** Every Munchmausen has at least one outrageous delusion, which cannot be dispelled by any means. If the Storyteller feels that this self-deception is not elaborate enough, he will orchestrate events to make it appear more extensive than the player chose. The Moon Mouse may even begin to notice people and objects that aren't really there for anyone else.

Appearance: In Homid form, Munchmausen abhor ostentatious dress. They insist that they have many enemies, and if they are not careful, everyone present could be punished for associating with such a dangerous character. In Rodens and Crinos form, however, the Ratkin's true affiliations are shown. Swashbuckling regalia is often the most common affectation, as it presumably is in the fae realms, but many Munchmausen prefer a vast array of adventuring gear, acquiring pith helmets, cowboy hats and other accouterments with amazing facility. The Rite of Artifice Dedication helps support these affectations.

Rites and Rage: Since Munchmausen are quite prone to outbreaks of madness, it makes sense for them to begin the game with Rage 4. It's also fitting for them to start out at Freak Factor 5. Their love of fine garments entitles them to the Rite of Artifice Dedication.

Beginning Gifts: Persuasion, Spirit Speech, Tale Spinning

Concepts: swashbuckler, lunar traveler, astronaut, pirate, archaeologist, master storyteller, pathological liar, scam artist, cartoonist, Casanova, Umbral tour guide

Quote: "My good sir, adventure is my middle name! Why, stealing those books from the local Chantry of vampires should be child's play, no harder than that time I rescued the Queen of Russia from the Metal Munching Moon Mice. What? You don't believe me? It was a cold November in Vladivostok...."

Twitchers

An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen.

— G.K. Chesterson, *The Man Who Was Thursday*

Background: As the most dangerous members of Ratkin society, the Twitchers succumb to anger and violence more readily than any of their brothers or sisters. Even other Ratkin treat them with disdain, though they must still recognize them as family. Reveling in demented destruction, these servitors of

chaos act as anarchists, instigators and architects of destruction. Rat is a Totem of War, and the Twitchers have chosen to wage an unending war against the Weaver in all her forms.

Not all Ratkin are liars and thieves, but all Twitchers are criminals of one kind or another. Wererats ignore the laws and mores of human society, but Twitchers openly flaunt them. They can be killed for rending the Veil, but are very careful about not getting caught doing it. They represent the worst traits associated with rats, magnified to extremes. Collectively, Twitchers don't even consider themselves an aspect, *per se*. Thus, they do not recognize the social distinctions that aspects create. They will never attend high court, nor will they ever bow to a Rat King.



Why, then, would a deceit of Ratkin enlist the help of such a fool? The answer is simple: As long as the anarchist is on your side, she's a potential weapon. Keep her pointed in the right direction, and she'll masterfully eliminate your enemies. She'll even take the fall after the rest of the pack has bolted. Like any high-explosive, however, a Twitcher must be handled with caution. If you're not careful, she'll blow up right in your face.

Territories: The sorts of places Twitchers frequent fall into two categories: far too opulent, or hell on Earth. Any place surrounded by people who are too comfortable, too wealthy, or too complacent is just asking for a Twitcher to rush in and raise a little hell. Any place populated by the desperate, frustrated or down-and-out is another good choice — not only does it make for a good place to hide, but it has its share of potential allies seeking vengeance... or potential victims at which to vent your anger.

Culture and Kinfolk: "Twitcher culture," if that's not an oxymoron, is frequented by the desperate and the damned. Any two Twitchers present in the same place will start out sharing conspiracy theories with each other... and then fall prey to a rapidly growing, delusional mistrust. If more than one Twitcher is in a pack, they'll need a really powerful common enemy to unite them; otherwise, each will suspect the other of conspiracy.

Ratkin Kinfolk often come from the fringes of society, but Twitcher Kinfolk are the worst in this regard. Many come from criminal backgrounds, broken homes, abject poverty or the sort of banal borderline existence that breeds cynicism and contempt for just about everyone. Rat Kinfolk don't give a damn about anyone or anything, and live up to the name "vermin" in every way imaginable. Even other Ratkin would just as soon kill them... or exploit them as expendable allies.

Organization: The phrase "organization of anarchists" is an amusing contradiction. When several Twitchers are present, the one with the highest Renown is the most infamous, and becomes a token figurehead for the hideous plans he conceives. He takes the rat's share of the credit for what others have done... and, if nothing goes according to plan, takes the fall for it as well. Highly paranoid Twitchers also keep in touch through conspiracy newsletters, computer bulletin boards, fringe conventions and numerous fronts when fulfilling their hidden agendas.



Strengths and Weaknesses

• **Anonymity:** Ratkin can usually remember the names of their brothers and sisters, even ones they've never met. Twitchers, however, have a natural anonymity. The Veil covers up most human memory of their activities, and for wererats outside of their packs, remembering an anarchist's identity requires a successful Gnosis roll (difficulty 8). Humans must roll Willpower (difficulty 8) to remember a Twitcher's identity. To reinforce this bewildering blessing, many rat anarchists refer to each other by very mundane names. The most common is "Johnny." Any suitably common name will preserve this anonymity: Joe, Mr. Smith, Jane Doe, and so on.

• **Impulse Control Problems:** Twitchers gain Rage more quickly than followers of other aspects, even ones who have the Unstable Background. If a Twitcher gains Rage, roll one die against a difficulty of (10 - the Twitcher's Rank). This roll cannot be botched. If it succeeds, add another point of Rage and roll again. Continue until the dice fail you, or the Ratkin reaches his maximum Rage. With the optional Instinct Rules (in Chapter Five), this means that Twitchers can frenzy from seemingly minor irritations, adding to the reasons why even their own kind don't trust them.

• **Paranoid Delusions:** All Twitchers share variations of elaborate paranoid fantasies. Each one has a surprising degree of truth to it. Here's the most common: The Weaver, as we know, is everywhere. It controls all forces of order. The balance of the world will not be restored until we destroy everything that smells of stasis, stability or the status quo. As a result of this philosophy, Twitchers see the minions of the Weaver *everywhere*, and do their best to warn all their comrades of its danger. Since few wererats will listen to their paranoid delusions, Twitchers often resort to extremes to alert them of incipient danger... like destroying minions of order wherever they find them.

Appearance: Ratkin anarchists usually look like they've gone through hell. In Homid form, they're unshaven, disheveled, and perpetually manic. In Rodens form, they are unusually ill-tempered, with the bites and scratches to prove it.

Rites and Rage: Twitchers gain Rage faster than other Ratkin and begin with game with an astounding Rage 5. They begin play with three points in Freak Factor; this pays for the first two levels of the background. Since they're exiled from Ratkin colonies, most learn to survive with the Rite of the Cardboard Palace.

Beginning Gifts: Firebug, Sense Angst, Sense Weaver

Concept: revolutionary, anarchist, terrorist, thug, gangster, political instigator, conspiracy theorist, chemist, sniper, performance artist, hard rock hero, ecoterrorist, religious fanatic, messiah, cultist, poser

Quote: "Hey, nobody saw me do anything. Besides, he had it coming... he pissed me off. What? You talking to me? You talking to me? Hey, Johnny, this guy wants to start something! You want a piece of me?"

Renown

Every Changing Breed has its own set of Creeds, a tradition that goes back to the days of the Impergium. Some shapechangers chant them with religious fervor; others have forgotten the words, but still uphold the underlying principles through impulse and instinct. Creeds, whether formal or not, serve as guidelines for proper behavior (or, in the case of the Ratkin, acceptable "improper" behavior). Wererat ethics are developed further in the Litany of Survival, the closest code wererats have to law. You want to know what a Ratkin is really supposed to do in the world? Chant the creed, kid, and learn....

Creed of Infamy

I will defend our breeding grounds against all threats, physical and spiritual.

I shall seek revenge against those who prey upon my kind.

I must shred the tentacles of the Wyrms whenever they constrict us.

I must sever the Weaver's webs wherever they calcify chaos.

Creed of Cunning

I will survive so that I may breed.

I must respect strength and exploit weakness.

I shall grow stronger through conflict.

I will learn from the mysteries of the spirit world.

I will revel in the visions the spirits grant me.

Creed of Obligation

I shall preserve the Veil, which ensures our survival.

I will build, steal and suborn to strengthen my breeding grounds.

I shall nurture, instruct and aid the young.

I will trust my own kind before I trust outsiders.

When someone is responsible for injustice, I will make sure someone pays.

Litany of Survival

Legality is a subjective concept at best. Other shapechangers keep laws, but Ratkin believe in justice, including the freedom to interpret that concept however they see fit. A few truisms of the Ratkin Creed are repeated when Skulkers enforce justice, but most wererats don't believe in rigid laws. Leave that to the humans and the creatures who compromise with them. Ratkin justice is harsh, left to the whims of a colony's ruler, a tribe's Rat King or a plague's matriarch.

Ultimately, justice is enforced by the Knife-Skulkers, who believe that it belongs to the strongest and the swiftest. The major points of the Ratkin Creeds have been condensed into a Litany taught to any Infected Ratkin who will listen. The exact wording may vary from one wererat community to the next, but the basic ideas remain the same. The Litany of Survival has evolved drastically over the years, but now that the signs of the Apocalypse are coming true, Knife-Skulkers have begun enforcing it with greater fervor. But don't let us tell you... some of the Rats would rather tell you themselves...

Preserve the Veil, which ensures your survival

Shadow Blade, a Knife-Skulker, interprets:

"The Rats only have one dictum that's enforced as law: maintaining secrecy about the existence of our kind. If you disobey, it'll do far more than endanger your pack; it threatens everyone's existence. Of course, if the humans find out the truth about what you did, the Delirium might distort all of their memories of what happened, but other supernatural creatures who prey on humans are not so easily fooled. Our race has little regard for human law, but if a wererat breaks the laws flagrantly enough that the authorities investigate, a colony has every right to contract a Knife-Skulker to silence him... permanently."

Shred the Wyrms' tentacles whenever they constrict you.

Fights-with-Flame, Warlord of the Horde, interprets:

"We fight the Wyrms, but only in the interest of our own self-defense. Unlike the Garou, we don't launch into self-serving crusades to purify the world from corruption — fighting to survive is difficult enough. The Garou whip themselves into religious fervor because they're trying to *prevent* the Apocalypse, but we *want* the End Times to come. What else could heal the world? My Warriors rejoice when the Wyrms kills off Garou or destroys a few humans. Why not? As long as the Wyrms isn't directly threatening your tribe, leave it be. Don't destroy the enemy of your enemy... until it turns on you. The Wyrms is destined to destroy itself, and if it tears down human civilization in the process, my pack's got no problem with that."

Richard Buboe, Plague Lord occultist, interprets:

"A rat's got to be watchful of the Wyrms. You cannot ignore its presence — learning from its minions is essential to survival. The servitors of the Wyrms corrupt our kind as well, more often than most would care to admit. Wererats corrupted by the Wyrms become monstrous, taking on many of the same deformities and afflictions as fomori — I've seen it first hand. Believe me, any Ratkin infected with Wyrms-taint must be found and killed before it infiltrates one of our breeding grounds. If Black Spirals or Wyrms-spirits come sniffing around our territory, we're honor-bound to protect our young. And, of course, the most valiant of Rat's aspects, the Plague Lords, feels duty-bound to infiltrate the ranks of our enemies and investigate first-hand...."

Sever the Weaver's threads wherever they calcify chaos.

Frankie Super-Size, Tunnel Runner punk, extrapolates:

"Hey, I don't think we're ever going to tear down all the cities in the world. Why bother? They're doomed to self-destruct. The day that the buildings come crashing down, I'll dance in the streets. Then again, there's nothing wrong with giving them a little *push*. One rat can't change the world, but a thousand rats can, right? If you want to know what the Weaver's spirits are really up to, take a peek into the spirit world. That'll tell you where to strike."

Survive so that you may breed.

Duke Wades-in-Blood, Ratkin Warrior, postulates:

"Survival comes first. Mankind's days are numbered. The end of the Age of Man is coming! You might believe it's going to happen during your lifetime or years from now, but if you die in some pointless fight for honor and glory, you won't be ready for the Final Battle against the Wyrn. If you waste your life, you'll end up as some dumb-ass spirit in the Umbra. If, however, you can develop your skill as a Warrior, you'll be able to pass on what you learn to the generations that follow you. Let the werewolves fight to the death. I intend to live."

Respect strength. Exploit weakness.

Duke Wades-in-Blood, Ratkin Warrior, pontificates:

"The strong breed. The weak die. Does that sound harsh? That's evolution. We must be stronger than our enemies, especially with the Final Days so close. If we let the weakest rats survive, they'll breed thousands and thousands of even weaker rats. Instinct will tell you when to kill, so follow it. You'll also feel an overriding need to breed — do it. We need an army to overwhelm our enemies. Too many of the other Changing Breeds have given up, but we must outnumber and overwhelm anything that gets in our way. Then, when the time is right, the force of the Wyld will overwhelm everything, returning us to the ideals of the Impergium."

Susan Whispers-in-Dust, a Shadow Seer scholar, interprets:

"Some Ratkin have taken their obligation to breed a bit too far, spawning with materialized spirits and the like. I still do not know if this is wise. Does it strengthen the race by bringing more lost aspects to the world, or is it a way for "weaker" Ratkin to breed more children? Other wererats use similar excuses to destroy our metis. After all, Ratkin bred from incestuous relationships are rarely 'strong'; instead, such children are usually more susceptible to disease. I firmly believe we need all the warriors we can get, but don't waste too much time on the metis. They are little more than shock troops, and that is the way it should be."

Conflict breeds strength.

Fights-with-Flame, Warlord of the Horde, lectures:

"If only the strong breed, then you must prove your strength before you can reproduce. Don't be some addle-witted wharf rat who breeds with any half-dead body in the sewers. You, soldier, are the paragon of your race. You have the option of breeding with common rats, desperately trying to diversify our gene pool, but it's fairly likely that all you'll do is create a lot of common baby rats who vaguely look like you. Such egotism! If you want the glory of breeding strong pups, remember: The strongest children come from the purest Kinfolk. Our purest Kin are kept under the watchful gaze of the Rat Mothers, so you'd best have proof of your prowess before trying to reproduce. It's that simple."

Susan Whispers-in-Dust, a Shadow Seer scholar, dictates:

"Regardless of what we do, the population of any nest eventually reaches a sort of 'critical mass,' when all of the wererats who come of age must victimize each other until the balance is restored. That is nature's way. If the population of creatures in any one area is too high, a few can be killed or a great number will starve. Now that the Age of Man is drawing to a close, of course, humans and rats are competing for the same resources in the largest cities. You can see where I'm going with this, can't you? When the Age of Man ends, the law demands the elimination of the weakest creatures... just like in the Impergium, before the Wolves intervened. Only then will the balance will be restored."

Build, steal and suborn to strengthen your breeding grounds.

Johnnie McMuffin, egotistical Twitcher, shoots his mouth off:

"Property is relative. If I can take it, it's mine. If you can't defend it, you don't deserve to have it. Humans don't seem to understand. They buy far more than they need, go to great lengths to defend what they have, and insist that they have the right to determine who owns what. Not very practical, is it? If you own more than you can carry, you're wasting what others can use. The humans are wasting what they've got, so we've got every right to take it."

Trust your own kind before you trust outsiders.

Frankie Super-Size, Tunnel Runner terrorist, extrapolates:

"Here's a word of advice before you go out into the world. Trust your Kin before you trust strangers. Betray others before you betray your own kind. If someone's going to be betrayed, choose a human as the victim before you choose a Ratkin. If that doesn't work, find some other shapechanger to frame. If that doesn't work, then remember there's a straggler in your pack. We're running into the world together, kid, so we've got to stick together. You ready to go? Um... you first...."

When someone is responsible for injustice, make sure someone pays.

Joe Lock-and-Load, Knife-Skulker militia man, explains:

"When a rat pack fails, someone's got to take the consequences. Hopefully, it will be someone weak; preferably, it'll be someone who isn't Ratkin. Some of us like to take this argument a bit further. The Twitchers, for instance, are really quick to place all blame on the humans, so punishing them at random is seen as justice. The term "race war" isn't really appropriate, since Twitchers don't discriminate based on the color of someone's skin, his religion or his ancestry. White, black, yellow or red — humans all bleed the same. I just feel this rage in my blood that's been there since the dawn of time. And I just feel like acting on it. Show me your true face, and it's my call whether I want to slash it off."



Chapter Five: Systems and Storytelling

Systems: *The Weaver's Webs*

Ratkin live violent, brutal and chaotic lives, forever trying to slip through the webs the Weaver erects around the world. The rules of a roleplaying game are like those webs: they can give your story structure, or they can stagnate your sessions into endless dice-rolling and chart-checking. This chapter contains a few of the most commonly used systems in Ratkin chronicles, redefining them to make the spirit world more demented, the physical world more violent, and stories more dramatic.

Of course, a roleplaying troupe doesn't have to throw in *all* of the rules listed in this book from day one of a chronicle. Instead, the Storyteller may feel free to introduce the details gradually, trying out a few systems at a time. Some experienced Storytellers, for instance, like to add in a few extra levels of rules each session, fine tuning the details as they go. This approach not only takes down the "learning curve" of the game, but also give players the feeling that the Weaver's webs are slowly surrounding them, reinforcing what's already happening in the world of the Ratkin.

Rage and Gnosis

Despite all my rage,

I am still just a rat in a cage.

— Smashing Pumpkins

Fury and wisdom are the two extremes of the Ratkin psyche. When a wererat is overpowered by the chaos that flows through her, she is overpowered by feral instincts, ready to shred the webs

of order wherever they gather. Through frenzy, a shapechanger is consumed by the primal call to battle. When a wererat's Rage is higher than her Gnosis, she's usually spoiling for a fight.

When a wererat's Gnosis is higher than her Rage, on the other hand, she'll favor wisdom over violence, at least until delusions set in. Sitting in quiet meditation, a wererat can have great insights into the shadowy corners of the world, deconstructing the chattering madness of her god into valuable knowledge. She can gain visions through Rapture, a complete abandonment to the ways of the spirit world. One can only hope that as more Ratkin Kinfolk rejoin their family, their anger will be tempered by their insight.

Rage and Frenzy

Like other shapechangers, wererats can be overwhelmed by anger and frustration. The same conditions that outrage Garou can force Ratkin to gain Rage: embarrassment, humiliation, strong emotions, extreme hunger, confinement, helplessness, taunting, the presence of silver or the sting of betrayal. Ratkin are also sensitive to two other conditions: if a wererat is living in squalor or trapped in a crowd, his anger may surge. Knife Skulkers may gain Rage whenever they witness injustice.

If any of these conditions persist, or if a player is roleplaying his character's anger, the Storyteller can ask for a Rage roll. For Garou, these rolls are based on the phase of the moon; a Ratkin's Rage roll

depends on his aspect. With four or more successes, the Ratkin's "fight or flight" instinct kicks in. As one would expect, if a rat is *cornered*, he will *always* choose to fight. Unlike Garou, Ratkin don't enter the Thrall of the Wyrn if they score six successes.

Aspect	difficulty for frenzy rolls
Tunnel Runner	8
Shadow Seer (or Engineer)	7
Knife-Skulker (or Plague Lord)	6
Warrior (or Munchmausen)	5
Twitcher	4

Wererats also have more of a "pack mentality" than Garou do, at least where frenzies are concerned. If one Ratkin frenzies, the chances of other Rats in the pack losing control actually increases. The first frenzy requires four successes on a Rage roll; once this occurs, the next frenzy for a member of the same pack requires three successes. The third Rat to frenzy only needs two successes, and so on. Normally, characters with low Rage scores aren't worried about going over the edge, but if most of the pack loses control, chances are the rest of them will either go berserk or flee in panic before long.

Gnosis

Ratkin gain Gnosis in one of four ways. Some of these are only available to Ratkin who are least Rank Two or Three, although deceits of wererats who frequent colonies may be able to find an elder to assist them with such methods.

- **Bargaining:** First, a wererat can bargain with spirits, offering their assistance in return for a reward of Gnosis. This is usually a simple deed, like stealing food, spying on someone or trading information.

- **The Sacred Hunt:** The second method is only available to Ratkin of Voto rank or higher — or at least, to their allies. The rat pack summons an Engling with the appropriate Gift, chases it down, kills it and devours its ephemeral energy. The pack splits up ten points of Gnosis after the hunt.

- **Spirit Draining:** The third method is used most commonly by Ratkin Shadow Seers: summon a spirit, bind it, and drain it of its Gnosis with appropriate rituals.

- **Meditation at a Sacred Site:** The final method is the easiest way to regain Gnosis, but also takes the longest. Ratkin can meditate to regain Gnosis, just like Garou do. Unlike werewolves, however, a wererat can only meditate at a sacred site. If the wererat can find a werewolf caern, mage Node, wraith Haunt or changeling freehold, staying long enough to gain Gnosis is difficult. Fortunately, every Ratkin Nest has a "spiritual center" where chaotic energies gather. Every wererat Nest has a Colony rating, reflecting the amount of Gnosis waiting to be harvested.

The mediation roll is the same for Ratkin as it is for Garou. The wererat spends one Willpower before meditating. He then meditates for half an hour for each point of Gnosis she intends to gain. At the end of that time, she rolls Intelligence + Enigmas (difficulty 6). For each success, the wererat gains one Gnosis (as long as she meditates for half an hour for each point). If he wants to build up his Gnosis further, he starts meditating again by spending another point of Willpower. This dependence on sacred sites one of the reasons wererats keep returning to Nests; for those who cannot, the Rite of Crash Space is another option. If a

Ratkin has so much Rage that he cannot control his anger, the rest of the pack may send him back to the nearest crash space to build up his Gnosis. For this reason, Knife Skulkers sometimes refer to crash space as a "penalty box," while Rat Mothers call it a "time out." Twitchers, of course, always go grudgingly.

Rapture

Enlightenment has its price. For Ratkin, finding Gnosis involves communion with the Umbra, the realm where the untamed Wyld is strongest. Spending too much time neglecting spiritual needs can fill one's soul with anger, driving one to the fury of frenzy. On the other hand, contemplating the mysteries of the universe for too long can short-circuit all sense of logic and restraint, bringing on the dementia of Rapture, a mind-shattering epiphany.

Here's how it works: Whenever a Ratkin gains Gnosis, roll a die. If you score a 10, that wererat should roll his temporary Gnosis, *rerolling any further 10s as if it were a specialty*. This last roll is called a Rapture roll. If the character scores more than four successes, he succumbs to Rapture, and overwhelming dementia endures for the rest of the scene. Alternatively, if a wererat ever gains four or more points of Gnosis in one scene, go straight to the Rapture roll; too much chaos at once can make for a really bad trip. The difficulty for the final roll is the "reverse" of a frenzy roll:

Aspect	difficulty for Rapture rolls
Tunnel Runner	4
Shadow Seer (or Engineer)	5
Knife-Skulker (or Plague Lord)	6
Warrior (or Munchmausen)	7
Twitcher	8

The Storyteller may also decide that anything *sufficiently freakish, unrealistic, overtly paranormal, supernaturally terrifying* or just rating really high on the "Weird-Shit-O-Meter" requires an automatic Rapture roll. Players may choose to volunteer for these rolls if they're freaked out by a particularly odd event. The only way to cope with these occurrences is to escape the confines of reality for a little while. A wererat can, however, avoid Rapture by spending a point of Willpower.

As a side note, how often a Storyteller calls for these rolls defines the type of game she's running. If Rapture is rare, madness is horrific. If the whole game involves avoiding Rapture, you'll either have a very mystical story or an epic freakfest. All three types of stories have their devotees.

Rapture Effects

The Storyteller always has the freedom to choose a Rapture effect that fits with the mood of her story. Most Ratkin only suffer these effects when they get a hit of too much Gnosis. A Kinfolk who's Infected and waiting for their First Change, on the other hand, is often on the verge of Rapture, since his limit for strangeness is often repeatedly tested. Here are most common effects.

- **Prophecy:** The wererat gets a symbolic glimpse of the future. This is a chance for Storytellers to use the ideas for symbolism and foreshadowing in *Werewolf's* (as well as other rulebooks') Storytelling chapter. The prophecy may or may not come true, depending on the Storyteller's application of fate in the game (we tend to encourage half-truths at best, in order to

keep the players on their toes). This vision can be petty or epic, depending on the tone of the story.

Example: Frankie and Johnny are riding in the back of a van in the middle of the night. Highway 101 snakes across the Pacific coastline, offering an occasional glimpse of the ocean by moonlight. While meditating, Frankie slips into Rapture... and has a vision of the van floating in the water. Squeaking in terror, he demands that the driver let his friends out now.

• **Delusions:** You have a slightly alternative interpretation of reality, and you *must act upon it right now*. You've got to do more than warn others about it, you've got to do something as a result of it.

Example: Johnny has tried to bargain with a Spider-spirit for some Gnosis, but gets a little too enlightened. He surges into Rapture and starts trembling. Certain that the Y2K virus could go off at any moment, he starts chewing through all the electrical cords he can find!

• **Hallucinations:** You don't see what isn't there, but what really *should* be there. You'll experience a message from the Rat God, a little piece of your worst nightmare, or just a little taste of rat heaven that no one else can understand.

Example: "Johnny! I think this is the gateway to the Carnivale Realm! Let's eat some cotton candy!"

"Um, we're in the supermarket, Frankie! Put down those cotton balls! Yecchh!"

• **Destructive Impulses:** The Weaver's webs are closing in! Quick, snap them! Break something... anything! The Storyteller might give you a choice of objects nearby.

Example: A brand new car parks right in front of Johnny's front door. It's shiny and new... mocking the poverty he's endured for so long! "I hate shiny things!" Johnny proclaims. "Let's destroy it!" He grabs up a hammer and bolts outside...

• **Fleeing in Terror:** The sight of something common around you inspires your flight reflexes. Once it was mundane; now it terrifies your altered senses.

Example: Frankie has been meditating for four hours in a flophouse, and the visions are just starting. Suddenly, the telephone rings, interrupting his reverie. [I can hear the ringing of a telephone!] he thinks. [Telephone wires are everywhere! I can't escape them, but maybe I can outrun that horrible ringing sound!] Naked and screaming, he runs through the hallways of the building with a fire axe.

• **Disconnection:** This phenomenon is very common among Shadow Seers. The mystic begins to wander around in the physical world while witnessing events in the spirit world. His understanding of these two realms become confused, turning him from an insightful sage to a demented madman. See Chapter Four, page 83 for more details.

• **Paranoia:** This is very common among Twitchers and Ratkin Engineers. This is more than just imagining that everyone is out to get you; a paranoid Ratkin goes to great lengths to act upon this delusion. You don't need a Rage roll to go postal in a public place. If you really think the humans are plotting against you, then lock and load.

Optional Rule: Ratkin Psychology

Rats are creatures of extremes. Pet rats can be sweet and affectionate; feral rodents can be vicious, destructive terrors. Extreme roleplayers may choose to adapt these optional rules to



reflect both aspects of rodent psychology. The "Instinct Rules" can help you rationalize both extremes of a character's mindset. Under this system, whether a Ratkin is calm or violent ultimately depends on his shifting (as in temporary) Rage and Gnosis totals. This idea was addressed briefly several chapters ago; for those of you who want more rules, here they are.

- **Feral Instincts:** If a Ratkin's Rage is higher than his Gnosis, he'll probably act like a vicious little monster. Feral Instincts take over when the Ratkin's anger is beyond his ability to control it. Exposure to danger, violence, stress, disease and filth all have the potential to drive up a Ratkin's Rage; the results can range from minor acts of vandalism to orgies of destruction.

If Rage is one point higher than Gnosis, the Ratkin's anger shows in little ways. He might shred a piece of paper in frustration, scratch a meaningless design in the nearest piece of wood, or just rip and tear into anything at hand.

If Rage is two or three points higher than Gnosis, the Ratkin is obviously "on the edge," and becomes violent if provoked. Sitting still is nearly impossible; the rat rushes around looking for something upon which to exact his frustration. Rats in this stage tend to make lots of unidentifiable noises that even other Ratkin can't understand, including squealing and chittering sounds. The difficulty of all Social rolls increases by 1.

If Rage is four or more points higher than Gnosis, roll for frenzy each hour of game time; the rat is so pissed off that he's spoiling for a fight. This is highly dangerous, since his anger may then infect the rest of the pack, pushing them over the edge as well. No one likes to associate with a madman.

- **Calm Instincts:** If a Ratkin's Gnosis is higher than her Rage, she will be calm and introspective. If a rat lives in a clean, safe and prosperous environment, it's only natural for her mood to reflect it. With little to do except sleep and eat, a calm rat will repeatedly clean herself, make nests, and use her time to contemplate her environment. Unfortunately, a Rat trapped in introspection may stumble upon some very unusual ideas, eventually succumbing to wild delusions.

If a Ratkin's Gnosis is one point higher than Rage, she'll favor discussion over action. Why go rushing around disturbing things when everything's all right? Occasionally whisper what you're thinking to the other rats around you.

If Gnosis is two or three points higher than Rage, the Ratkin will be more receptive to communion with the spirits. The Storyteller should roll Gnosis each hour; a successful roll means that the pack totem or one of its spirits will whisper further knowledge to her. This might be insight or nonsense, depending on the mood of the scene. Ratkin who already habitually hear voices will start to hear messages from other Incarna as well.

If Gnosis is at least four points higher than Rage, the Ratkin will become increasingly delusional. She might have visions of her Blood Memories, begin to expound on a demented theory, or come up with a truly bizarre course of action only another rat would understand. Make a Rapture roll each hour of game time; the wererat is having trouble relating to the normal world.

In an all-out Ratkin pack adventure, this set of rules will drive the players to extremes as well. One character's act of violence may drive up the Rage of other Ratkin, setting a swarm of rats in motion. If the game gets too complacent, one Ratkin's maddening insight may add a new dimension of delusion to the story. Either way,



Ratkin don't sit still for long. As creatures of pure chaos, they're certain to keep your story moving. As always, this system requires your Storyteller's approval; otherwise, her rage will slowly increase throughout the game. Proceed with caution.

Swarms

...most vivid of all, there was the dramatic epic of the rats — the scampering army of obscene vermin which had burst forth from the castle three months after the tragedy that doomed it to desertion — the lean, filthy, ravenous army which had swept all before it...

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*

Whether composed of insects, feral cats, rabid dogs or bloated rats, swarms of vermin attack their victims repeatedly until they're dispersed. For easy of play, we've simplified the stats for swarms of creatures. The original version of these rules appeared in *Destiny's Price*.

Traits	Common Rats	Large Rats	"Big-Ass" Rats
Initiative	3	4	5
Damage	3	4	5
Health Levels	7	9	10

Rat swarms attack once per turn; their initiative depends on the size of the beasties summoned. Each turn a character is overwhelmed by a swarm, roll damage versus a difficulty of 6; the victim can try to either dodge or soak the result. The damage is always non-aggravated. Depending on the size of the swarm, two or more victims might be affected, and might help each other out. More than one victim can attack the swarm, of course.

If a character dodges, he can move normally; otherwise, the swarm slows him to half his normal movement. If the swarm scores more than three health levels worth of damage in a turn (or if the victim botches his dodge roll), the victim has been knocked down and overrun. He can move a yard or two per turn, and the difficulty of the swarm's damage rolls goes down by 1. Anyone helping an overrun character get up can be attacked as well.

The health levels listed reflect the amount of damage it takes to disperse a swarm. An additional two levels will destroy the swarm completely. Pistols, rifles and small melee weapons only inflict one health level per shot. Shotguns, submachine guns and large melee weapons do two health levels per shot, as do large area attacks (molotov cocktails, explosions, and so on). Swarms don't soak damage.

Keep in mind that Materialized Rat-spirits may join a swarm of mundane rats. If this is the case, the spirits are usually too overtaken by the "swarm mentality" to use their unearthly Charms. (Roll Gnosis, difficulty 9, to override this instinct; if the number of successes exceeds the level of the Charm, it can be used.) Materialized Rat-spirits running with a swarm don't die when they're "dispersed," but instead reform in the spirit world as normal.

Renown

*One shot at glory — in the crossfire overhead,
One shot at glory — words have all been said,
One shot at glory — driving hard and seeing red,
Destiny calls me — one night of fire, one shot at glory.*
— Judas Priest, "Glory"

We've already seen the workings of Ratkin society, including the ideals to which Ratkin aspire. The three Creeds and Litany of Vengeance are especially useful for players who want to decipher what wererats praise and revile. Bestowing Renown is an easy way to reward players who roleplay typical wererat behavior. If a character does something awfully creative and incredibly appropriate for a Ratkin, feel free to give out a point of experience or temporary Renown to acknowledge this in front of the pack.

In the world of the Ratkin, there are three ways in which wererats are recognized for their deeds. The first involves attending moots. At the beginning of a Ratkin moot, the elders of the tribe offer to listen to rat packs speak of their latest accomplishments. Before the watchful eyes of the privileged, one rat in each pack steps forward to tell a brief tale of his deceit's adventure. The elders then chitter their approval, and the eldest states what the pack has obviously learned. The Storyteller then recites the amount of Renown each character gains.

Unfortunately, Ratkin who run with packs of critters from other Changing Breeds don't really have this option. They prefer the second option: direct communion with their chosen totem. Rat packs who can't find a safe haven can scamper off into the wilderness to meditate. The wererat still dedicates himself to a specific totem, and must periodically be left alone to commune with it. For each point of Renown the character hopes to gain, he should meditate for a full ten minutes. After reflecting on her deeds, the wererat then recites his story to the heavens. At the end of the story, the Storyteller awards Renown. This is also the method used when a Ratkin is ready to convert ten points of temporary Renown to a point of permanent Renown; roll Intelligence + Rituals to make sure the spirits approve.

The third method of gaining Renown, especially for Infamy, is at a revel: an anarchistic, chaotic gathering hosted by a local Twitcher or warriors on the eve of battle. As described earlier, the rodent finds an isolated place, sets off an explosion, plays raucous music, or does whatever else she prefers to focus chaos in the immediate area. As packs of rats indulge in *freeflowing rage*, a few will gather around the nearest fire to brag about the amount of chaos they've spread into the world.

Once the revel begins, each member of the pack can tell a story about furthering entropy, rebelling against authority, vandalizing order, or just generally raising hell. Some Twitchers allow hellraisers of other supernatural societies to attend a revel — Brujah vampires, Unseelie changelings and Skinriding wraiths are all obvious examples. When a Ratkin consorts with other types of critters, he is the only member who can tell their stories. There is a limit to the number of revels a wererat can attend, however: a Ratkin cannot gain Renown from more than one revel in a month.

So what sort of guidelines govern Renown awards? Well, without the space to give them their own chart, the following suggestions might help a Storyteller decide what would be appropriate. The Storyteller, as always, should use her discretion on how much Infamy, Cunning and Obligation Renown to award. As in any Werewolf game, the purpose of Renown is to reward roleplaying the ideals of a Changing Breed.

Many of the things that help Garou gain Renown work for Ratkin, too; just differently (caern defense equals Nest defense, for instance.) All Ratkin should gain Renown for proving their

strength by besting packmates (only about a point or so, though). Ratkin respect cunning combat, such as drawing first blood, surviving nasty wounds or even wounding powerful foes and prudently retreating; Warriors should receive extra Renown for this. Fighting the Weaver is also important, even if other Breeds don't realize this; Twitchers excel at this behavior. Knife Skulkers receive Renown for fulfilling contracts (and lose lots for abandoning contracts) and enforcing punishments. Rapture should be treated like visionquesting when it comes to Renown awards. Ratkin enjoy good stories and reward them, and also encourage each other to outwit and steal from humans. Killing Garou, alas, is worth a decent amount of Infamy, particularly if the victim is a Glass Walker — but killing a Bone Gnawer in Rat's good standing is very, very bad. Finally, note that becoming the pack's runt merits the loss of a point of Cunning, but serving as the pack's runt is worth three temporary Obligation per story — and finding a replacement runt is worth another point of Cunning.

Renown Rolls and Rank

Renown serves two purposes: establishing a reputation and determining Rank. For the first purpose, whether a Ratkin focuses on Infamy, Cunning or his Obligations is critical. If a wererat's reputation is at stake before the elders of a nest, the Storyteller may ask the person roleplaying him to make an Infamy, Cunning or Obligation roll. Not everyone will be impressed by a Ratkin's achievements. A wererat Warrior might be fanatic about fulfilling his obligations to the local tribe and his family, but if he isn't really infamous, he may not be chosen to lead the next attack against the Weaver.

The total number of permanent Renown points also determines a Ratkin's Rank. Which category those points are in doesn't really matter, at least for determining a wererat's social standing. Most other Changing Breeds stress different types of Renown for different auspices, but all Ratkin aspects regard Renown the same way.

Rank	Permanent Renown	Title
One	3	Rakka
Two	7	Voto
Three	15	Tava
Four	23	Teppen
Five	30	Rrrrr't

Storytelling

Ratkin society is vast and dangerous, presenting all sorts of opportunities for getting into mischief, spreading chaos, and raising hell. Ratkin have plenty of challenges to keep them busy. They can act as supernatural consorts, run with rat packs, spawn in colonies, defend tribes, and meddle in family affairs. Each of these societies offers a different set of stories to tell and requires a slightly different approach to the game.

One-Shot Pack Stories

Spending a few sessions playing a pack of Ratkin is a great way to take a break from an epic Garou chronicle. Stories that can be wrapped up in an evening or two are commonly called

"one-shots" — you fire one off and then reload for the next one. One-shot Ratkin stories usually center around a random group of Ratkin brought together to fulfill a contract. Maybe a Shadow Lord wants to burn down the property of one of his rivals, or a vampire needs something stolen from the local Garou sept. The pack is formed just long enough to carry out one task, split the reward, and leave town. Possibilities include:

- recovering a stolen fetish
- stealing files from a corporation
- monkeywrenching a corporate operation
- setting up a distraction for an attack on another supernatural group
- spying on local supernatural activity
- harassing humans who get too close to the truth
- helping out a Bone Gnawer (or Nosferatu) who can trade valuable information

Traveling Pack Stories

In an ongoing Ratkin chronicle, wererats can travel just about anywhere in the world. Ask the players what part of the world they'd like their characters to see, and you can easily find a story to tell when they get there. Some of the most common "road story" concepts include:

- **Survival:** The pack is traveling through a bad part of town, or perhaps a forbidding stretch of wilderness. Once they cross paths with a group of enemies, they've got to scam, sneak, stealth and fight their way to safety. A pack of Garou might decide to hunt, harry and destroy them, or a Pentex First Team might want to capture them for research. The objective is simple: live until the end of the story.

- **Espionage:** The rat pack is contracted to spy on another group of supernatural creatures. This could be the local Garou sept, a Hive of Black Spiral Dancers, a lone Mokolé, the Gurahl Council of Autumn, or just about anything. Depending on the information the rats gather, their success might lead them to mess with other shapechangers in all sorts of nasty ways.

- **Mystery:** Ratkin receive all sorts of revelations when they succumb to Rapture. A vision at the start of the story might prompt the pack to quest after an enigmatic and mysterious goal. This might be a Tunnel Runner's wanderlust vision of a safe breeding ground, a Shadow Seer's revelation of a prophetic event that must be stopped, a Twitcher's urge to destroy or assassinate a prominent figure, or even a Munchmausen's dream about a lost Spirit Kingdom that must be recovered. This can easily be an ongoing plot line, with minor stories along the way.

Tribal Stories

If a Ratkin chronicle is based around a tribe or colony, or even just crash space, events in the neighborhood can develop all sorts of story seeds. Any gathering of Ratkin also attracts politics and rivalries, keeping a rat pack busy for a good long time. A tribal chronicle is also well-suited to "troupe play": all of the players develop a stable of several characters, which are recruited one by one into different stories. Possibilities include:

- **Political Rivalry:** One elder is scheming against another, or against the Rat King, and contracts the rat pack to

"take care of" her rival. Alternatively, the rat pack may overhear such a scheme, and want to rat on the ambitious elder who's making a bid for power. Perhaps someone wants to kill off the local Mystic, kill off the Weaver-tainted Engineer, or replace the Rat King with a powerful Plague Lord.

- **Elder Duties:** Each of the elders of a nest has his own obligations to uphold, and may need to recruit the characters for assistance. Possibilities abound.

- A Scout may find out about some new beasties in the neighborhood, and ask the rat pack to investigate further.

- A Mystic may need the deceit to undertake a spirit quest or realize a vision she's had.

- A Knife-Skulker may have information about a criminal who's endangering the local breeding grounds, and ask for their help in destroy him.

- A Warlord may play an assault against some werewolves or Wyrms-creatures that are sniffing a little too close to the nest.

- A Ratkin Engineer may need some rare parts to build a system of defenses for the nest.

- **Severing the Weaver's Webs:** Any area where the Weaver is strong deeply unnerves the Ratkin. If a Tunnel Runner or Shadow Seer passing through the neighborhood tells a story of a place where its minion's are strong, the rat pack may feel the need to storm in to "correct the balance." This could involve monkeywrenching a corporate office nearby, destroying a computer superstore, or raising havoc in a television studio. The *Book of the Weaver* details many such menaces, and can be quite useful for spawning these sorts of stories. In really extreme chronicles, Twitchers may even enlist the pack in acts of terrorism or mass-destruction, though not everyone enjoys such stories.

- **Traveler's Tales:** Of course, strange Ratkin passing through a nest's domain always have stories to tell to the local rat pups. Sometimes these are hints of danger, swag or adventure the rat pack may want to check out. As long as the Storyteller has been detailing the area around the nest, there's an endless number of leads to check out.

Plagues and Troupes

Part of a plague's unity comes from its spirituality. By worshipping the same totems, even Ratkin who are completely isolated from their brothers and sisters may still play a part in preparing for the Apocalypse. The Rat God works in mysterious ways. Sometimes a Rat Pack or a lone Ratkin will be called upon to perform some cryptic task, often without

explanation. The reasons why may not be immediately be apparent, but a thousand rats may eventually achieve what a lone rat never could.

As an example, one wererat may be asked to chew a hole through a corporation's defenses; a separate rat pack may be required to steal a file folder from a records office; an alliance of Freaks may be asked to travel cross country with a sealed briefcase; a sentai of Nezumi may need to smuggle the contacts past some vampires in Hong Kong. Each deceit of Ratkin is unaware of the other links in the chain, and separately, they cannot piece together the overall plan. Nonetheless, each rodent plays an important role in the overall scheme. The possibilities for Storytelling this phenomenon are obvious.

Story Seeds

Still need a story? Take your pick. Add a pack of Ratkin, one Storyteller, a bag of Red-Hot Fritos, and several cans of caffeinated soda. Simmer, stir, and serve fresh. Flavor with passages from this book to taste.

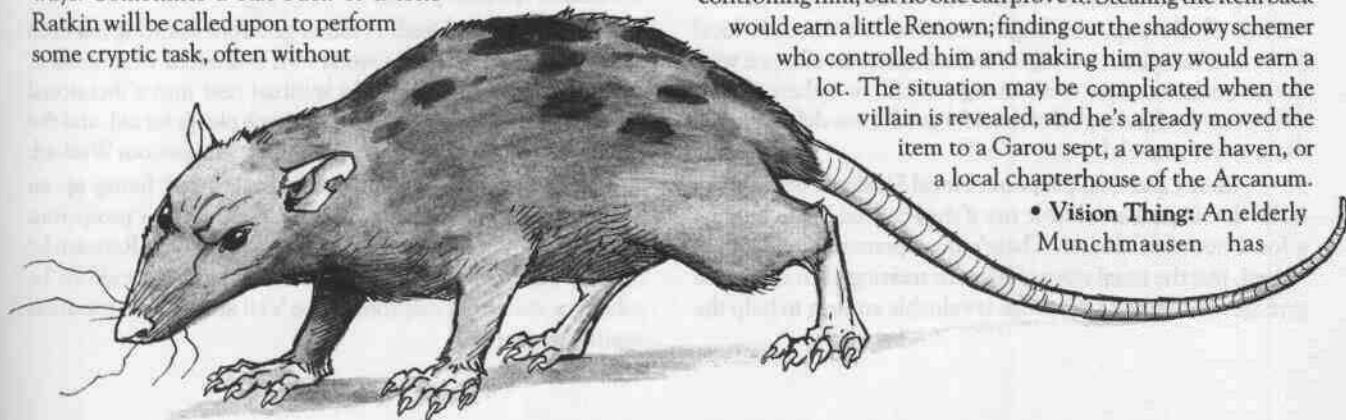
- **Special Delivery:** A mystical vision reveals that the Rat Pack must pick up a package from the dumpster in back of a large corporation. A voice in the Shadow Seer's head brings messages from a Rat Gaffling, which offers hints and clues of where the package must go. Under no circumstance should the package be opened! If the pack doesn't hurry, another interested supernatural faction harries them along the way.

- **Monkeywrenching:** It's time to raise a little hell. A Twitcher offers to make a pact with the characters, giving them something they really need if they'll help him make a quick strike on a remote branch of Pentex. Unfortunately, the crazed anarchist is really bad at coordinating his plans with the rest of the pack, leaving them outgunned and trapped in a massive business complex half-way through the deal.

- **Enforcement:** A local Garou has made a secret pact with a deceit of Ratkin... and reneged on his part of the deal. The pack's Knife-Skulker has been called by the local Rat King to mete out some justice. The Skulker must deliver at least a crippling blow to fulfill the contract and teach the Wolf a lesson; the rest of the pack will be busy enough trying to track down the wily critter and run interference with the rest of the sept.

- **Once a Thief:** An inquisitive academic has acquired a valuable Ratkin fetish, one that shouldn't fall into the wrong hands. Everyone suspects that some supernatural mastermind is controlling him, but no one can prove it. Stealing the item back would earn a little Renown; finding out the shadowy schemer who controlled him and making him pay would earn a lot. The situation may be complicated when the villain is revealed, and he's already moved the item to a Garou sept, a vampire haven, or a local chapterhouse of the Arcanum.

- **Vision Thing:** An elderly Munchmausen has





been overwhelmed by despair. He's been having horrible dreams of a "faerie queen" trapped in a remote realm of the Deep Umbra. He'll gladly offer the pack anything they want if they'll help him rescue the damsel in distress. Unfortunately, the Arcadian Ratkin has little understanding of the word "subtle," and half the Umbral quest involves cleaning up his misunderstandings with the local spirits.

- **Moving Day:** Three Rat Mothers desperately need to move away from their scrape. Human exterminators are demolishing their home, and they don't want to risk the safety of their children. One rat momma is expecting, and the other two are carrying a litter of rugrats in tow. Can you get them safely across the city while preventing the ratlings from getting into trouble?

- **There Goes the Neighborhood:** Black Spirals are moving into a local sewer system in force, and they've circumvented all the traps the Engineers have left there. A local Nosferatu vampire is outraged, and considers an alliance with the rat pack. Are they weak enough to kill, or is there a more effective way of getting rid of them for good? How defensible are those sewer tunnels?

- **Mercy and Compassion:** A local Shadow Seer offers to teach the rat pack a valuable rite if they can aid her in helping a local homeless shelter. There's no supernatural threat involved, just the usual story of humans treating each other like garbage. The sacred knowledge is valuable enough to help the

humans... at least for a little while. The suffering might be traced back to a local slumlord, a group of gangbangers victimizing the homeless, or a local police precinct that's tightening the webs of law a little too much.

- **Junkyard Rumble:** A Bone Gnawer werewolf is found heavily wounded near a Ratkin Engineer's crash space. Apparently, something has corrupted or controlled the Trash Gaffling in a nearby junkyard. The Rat is ready to stage an assault against the supernatural menace, but he can't do it on his own. First, he needs the pack to recover a few mechanical items to help him build his engine of vengeance. Then he needs a Shadow Seer who can evaluate exactly what the spiritual menace is. Once all that's done, it's time to do a little ghostbusting, spiritual warfare, or skirmishing against the Wyrms to save the site and its hidden spiritual power.

- **The King is Dead!** A rather generous Rat King has been replaced by a tyrant of the worst sort, a Warlord who wants to transform a once-peaceful and spiritual nest into a dictatorial realm. A mentor of a member of the pack pleads for aid, and the Rat Pack joins a coup against a powerful and ingenious Warlord.

- **Eviction:** A human family has started fixing up an abandoned building that's a little too close to a prosperous Ratkin colony. The rat pack decides to earn a little Renown by driving out the human infestation. Will they decide to be subtle, or will they compromise the Veil and bring retribution against their tribe?

Foreshadowing and Current Events

Since the Apocalypse overshadows everything in a Ratkin chronicle, foreshadowing the end of the world becomes vital. Here's one useful device for bringing this into all-wererat adventures: Begin each session with an excerpt from the news that shows how the world is falling apart. A news story on terrorism, militia activity, mass destruction, ecoterrorism, millennialism or just general doomsaying can really help to set the mood.

Any of these instances can be adapted to the World of Darkness, helping flesh out the background to a Ratkin chronicle. One message should be stressed over all others: *the clock is ticking*. The fact that the world is doomed plunges Garou into despair, but for Ratkin, it offers a liberating sense

of freedom... and anxiety that there may not be enough time to prepare for the end.

Readers perusing this tome after the year 2000 will probably scoff at the pre-millennial tone. After all, the big "2K" has come and gone, and the world still exists. Then again, who says the year when the world ends has to have three zeroes at the end? There is no timetable for the end of creation; one major shift in the gods and goddesses in the heavens, and all of human society could come crashing down. Ratkin have numerous delusions about the end of the world; no two need obey the same deadlines. Human civilization should be a fragile construct. The idea if thousands of spirit-traveling rats infesting the walls of reality just reaffirms that.



Appendix One: Ratkin Gifts

"See the cheating? Does Rat Flasher have a werewolf? NO! So whoo thinks it is fair for a bunch of cheeters to have a warewolf. Not, me says I."

— Scumdangle Elfbiter

Salvaged Wisdom

Ratkin characters start out with one Breed Gift, one Aspect Gift, and one Ratkin Gift. For ease of play, we've included many of the Ratkin Gifts listed in the *Werewolf Players Guide*. Several variants of Bone Gnawer Gifts are also included, along with some variations from the core Werewolf system. However, in the interest of space any Gifts that are essentially the same as those presented in the core rulebook are not reprinted here.

Unless otherwise stated, the following Gifts are taught by Rat-spirits. This doesn't mean, however, that they're freely available to Bone Gnawers! Mama Rat has given her Garou children enough advantages already without having to hand them her other kids' birthright. To learn any of these Gifts that could feasibly work for Garou, the Gnawer is probably going to have to go into a Nest and ask for instruction — which might just amount to suicide.

Ratkin Gifts

- **Cloak of Shadows (Level One)** — The Ratkin can cloak himself, and anything he is touching, in shadows. This Gift is taught by a Night-spirit, which may demand secrets in exchange for its sacred knowledge.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Manipulation + Stealth. If a witness is present, the difficulty of this roll is the Perception + Alertness of that witness; if several are present, use the one who would present the highest difficulty. The area cloaked depends on the number of successes, as listed below. If the Ratkin gets less successes than he thought he did, her reputation for treachery will increase — she might be the only one hidden!

Successes	Area Cloaked
One	the Ratkin
Two	...and one other human-sized person or object
Three	...and three other human-sized people, or an object as big as a small car
Four	...and eight or more humans, or an object as big as a small van
Five+	...and 12 or more humans, or an object as big as a tractor-trailer truck

- **Darksight (Level One)** — All wererats possess a low-level "night vision" that allows them to peer into the shadowy corners of the world. This Gift magnifies that ability. Highly perceptive Ratkin may pick up heat signatures, see sound waves, or possibly see through various methods of supernatural obfuscation. This Gift is taught by a Night-spirit.

System: Roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 7); each success adds one die to all Perception rolls for the rest of the scene, up to a maximum of three extra dice. With five successes, he can perform amazing feats like seeing sound or sensing heat signatures. As described in Chapter Two, any Ratkin can spend a point of Gnosis to gain Night Vision for one scene; Ratkin with this Gift can use Night Vision at any time without spending Gnosis.

It's also possible for a highly perceptive wererat to see through supernatural illusions, like the Uktena Gift: Shroud or the vampire Disciplines Obtenebration, Obfuscate or Chimerstry, but the Ratkin's Rank must be equal to or greater than the Rank of the supernatural creature. (Treat vampires as being Rank Two in general, modified for age and puissance; mages have a Rank roughly equivalent to their Arete -2, minimum of Rank One.) If the Ratkin's Rank is greater, success is automatic. If the wererat is the same equivalent Rank, he must make a resisted Perception + Occult roll against the subject's Stealth + Occult. If the wererat scores more successes, he sees through the supernatural obfuscation.

- **Resist Toxin (Level One)** — As the Fianna Gift.

- **Shadow Throw (Level One)** — While vocally expressing his anger, the Ratkin can form a shadowy field of power around a dagger or other sharp object balanced for throwing. Knife Skulkers, for instance, may choose to call out a victim's crime ("Murderer!") while forming this instrument of revenge. When the Ratkin hurls his dagger at a foe, the blade is propelled by the darkness around it and strikes with supernatural force. This Gift is taught by a Night-spirit, which will usually demand a tale of an unpunished criminal's dark secrets.

System: The Ratkin spends a Rage point and targets a single victim within line-of-sight; the player rolls Perception + Athletics to attack (difficulty 6, with the usual Firearms modifiers). The blade strikes with more force than the wererat can muster, inflicting Strength + 3 aggravated damage. If the blade is already magical, it inflicts only +2 damage.

- **Smell Poison (Level One)** — As a survival skill, Ratkin have learned to sniff out poisons. When a Ratkin discovers that someone is trying to poison a member of his deceit, he may decide to return the "blessing" upon the would-be poisoner. This Gift is taught by a Rat-spirit.

System: By spending a point of Gnosis, the wererat can sense any poisonous or toxic material nearby. A successful Perception + Medicine roll may give an insight into the nature of the poison involved; with five successes, it even reveals the identity of the would-be murderer. As another application, the Ratkin can seek out chemicals nearby that can be used as poisons.

- **Stash Cache (Level One)** — Ratkin aren't usually big on personal possessions. Many prefer to keep everything they need a knapsack, a briefcase, or their pockets. When they need to hide these meager items, some prefer to step sideways for just an instant, finding a little hidey-hole where they can stash their stuff. The hiding place might be a little Umbral tunnel, a hiding place guarded by a Rat-spirit, or just some space between the spirit world and physical world. Rat-spirits teach this Gift, but only if they can score a portion of the Ratkin's stash from time to time; they may well exact a slight "payment" from your first stash cache.

System: Roll permanent Gnosis; the difficulty is the local Gauntlet. If you succeed, you've found a clever little place to stash an object smaller than a backpack or knapsack. The





number of successes suggests the number of days you can probably keep it there safely. Wait too long, and your valuables will likely either be snagged by a Wyld-spirit, calcified by a Weaver-spirit, or spoiled by a Bane.

• **Crawling Chaos (Level Two)** — As the Ragabash Gift: Fly Feet. Rats are remarkable climbers; they can dexterously grasp tiny surfaces using their curled paws and claws. With this Gift, their ability takes on supernatural proportions. Performing this in rat form is unnerving, doing this in human form is similarly nasty, and the sight of a Crinos Ratkin crawling along a sheer vertical surface can be terrifying.

System: Roll Dexterity + Athletics. The user can cling to vertical surfaces or even catch on to them while falling; the difficulty of the roll depends on the surface (5 for wood or stone; 9 for glass or ice). Defying gravity increases the difficulty by 1. Ratkin have been known to scurry up the sides of stone buildings in moonlight just for the sheer joy of it.

• **Deep Pockets (Level Two)** — Can't carry enough stuff? This Gift allows you store lots of little goodies in your pockets, far more than normal. This Gift is taught by a Packrat-spirit.

System: Roll Wits + Enigmas and spend one Gnosis. Each success lets you hide an extra small item (no larger than your hand) inside a convenient pocket. If you're ever searched, none of these extra items will turn up, but if you lose the pocket (or your clothes), you can't retrieve the items inside. Each time you remove an item, you need to use the Gift to put it back again. If you need to recall an item instantly from your Deep Pockets, spend a point of Rage, and it's there.

• **Snitch (Level Two)** — You've got a talent for gathering secrets. As long as you can see someone's face, you can read his lips. As long as someone is within line-of-sight, you can hear her whispers. This Gift is taught by a Stormcrow, a Gaffling of Grandfather Thunder.

System: Just roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 4), whenever one of these situations presents itself. The amount of information gathered depends on the number of successes; with five successes, you can even gather empathic information or unspoken subtexts. If the roll fails, you can still spend a point of Gnosis to have a Rat-spirit snatch up a small fragment of the conversation for you.

• **Backbite (Level Three)** — The Ratkin can disappear into the Umbra and instantly reappear behind his opponent. The wererat then attacks his victim from behind, gleefully exploiting the benefit of surprise. Knife-Skulkers have no qualms against using this Gift to fulfill an assassination contract.

System: No roll is necessary, but the character must spend one Gnosis and one Rage. This Umbral "leap" can be up to 50 feet, as long as the victim is within line-of-sight. If the Ratkin chooses to immediately attack, the strike is rolled at a -2 difficulty; the difficulty cannot be reduced below 4. This attack cannot be dodged unless the victim is using Danger Sense, Evasion, Persecution Complex or a similar supernatural ability.

• **Bolt! (Level Three)** — A Ratkin with this Gift can bolt out of any fight. Even if the wererat is totally surrounded, he will find a way to escape from his foes. This works roughly the same way as the Backbite Gift: the wererat "leaps" a short distance through the Umbra to a safe place. A wererat who returns to

battle after bolting will lose two points of Cunning Renown; a wererat who chooses the better part of valor will no doubt escape.

System: Spend one Gnosis; the Ratkin can appear up to 50 feet away, as long as his destination is within line of sight. Then spend a point of Rage; this allows the rat to use an extra turn of movement to run away from his enemies. Halt the Coward's Flight will not prevent the Ratkin from leaping through the Umbra, but will still slow running speed afterward by half.

• **Squeeze (Level Three)** — A rat can collapse part of his skeleton to fit through narrow openings. A typical *Rattus norvegicus* can fit through an opening as small as a quarter. A Ratkin with this Gift is far more impressive, especially when he uses his spiritual talents to pass through seemingly solid objects. By briefly passing through the Umbra, the Ratkin can squeeze through solid walls, doors or other obstacles. This Gift is taught by a Rat-spirit, who often leads his protégé on a chase through an infested building while teaching it.

System: The player spends one Willpower and rolls Dexterity + Enigmas (difficulty 6); "squeezing" through a solid object increases the difficulty to 8. Three or more successes allow the wererat to pull another person through with him.

• **Attunement (Level Four)** — As the Bone Gnawer Gift.

• **Gnaw (Level Four)** — Similar to the Lupus Gift of the same name.

System: Spend one Willpower and roll Stamina + Survival. If you succeed, your Ratkin can chew through just about anything. The difficulty depends upon the material you're chewing (3 for wood; 6 for steel cables; 9 for titanium). Chewing through a live human torso is difficulty 5 and inflicts damage equal to the number of successes on the initial roll.

• **Mind of the Tunnels (Level Four)** — Blood calls to blood. Using this Gift, a Ratkin can establish a mental link with any other wererat she knows. The mindsharing is complete: emotional, intellectual and spiritual understanding can be exchanged. The Ratkin has to have actually met her subject in the flesh at least once; "remembering" him through Blood Memory isn't good enough.

System: Spend one Willpower and roll Intelligence + Empathy (difficulty 7). One success allows you to commune completely with the chosen Ratkin. For each additional success, you can bring one more wererat into this "psychic friends network." You remain the nexus of all information flowing through the network, and you can limit what sensations each Ratkin receives from the others. Wererats in the "tunnel mind" mode cannot obtain information from the other Ratkin by force.

• **Perfect Poison (Level Five)** — The wererat's spittle can be converted into an odorless, colorless, fast-acting and nearly undetectable poison. She may even decide to lick her blade to coat it with the foul compound. When exposed to air, the toxin can last for up to three hours. This Gift can be taught by a Snake-spirit, although it's easier to learn from a Spider-spirit. Snake-spirits may try to betray, exploit or eat the Ratkin who study under them.

System: The wererat must spend one Gnosis to poison her saliva. If she can introduce the poison to the victim's bloodstream or make him ingest it, the toxin instantly takes effect. A victim takes two levels of aggravated damage each turn once infected; she may soak only with Stamina, soaking a health level with each success. Although Resist Toxin works against

the saliva, Mother's Touch does not. If the victim can continue to resist damage for 10 turns and live, the poison is exuded from the body (choose the orifice or sweat gland of your choice). Any shapechanger with Rage can spend Rage to resist — gaining an automatic success for each point burned — but the 'changer must immediately check for frenzy as a result.

• **Plague Bite (Level Five)** — Long before the Plague Lords returned to Earth, Ratkin elders developed one of the most virulent diseases the world has ever seen. With one joyous bite, a wererat blessed with this disease can infect a victim's central nervous system. The symptoms of the disease are hideous. The victim cannot stop shaking, his mucous membranes ooze, and he drools continuously.

Unless the victim is immediately taken to a hospital, he will undoubtedly perish. Even with treatment, his chances of survival are slim. As part of Rat's blessing, if other wererats eat the flesh of a plague victim, they too become carriers of the disease, ready to spread it again with a successful bite attack! As one would expect, Ratkin and their Kinfolk are immune to the Plague Bite, and don't invoke it unless the punishment fits the crime.

System: Spend one Gnosis, and your high-ranking Ratkin can transmit contagion through his incisors. A successful bite spreads the disease. Once bitten, the victim will take a health level of aggravated damage each hour. Since he will not stop shaking, all difficulties for his rolls are at a +3 penalty. The plague can be cured by the Gift: Resist Toxin and similar Gifts; otherwise, the victim takes aggravated damage each hour until he is Incapacitated.

When this happens, he's allowed a final Stamina roll — difficulty 8 (the +3 modifier does not apply to this roll). If he fails, he dies. If he succeeds, he remains ill for another day or so, but the plague will not be fatal. If the victim is a shapechanger, supernatural healing will eventually break down the disease, but in the meantime, the "shakes" will still be a pain in the ass... and everywhere else.

Of course, some Garou harbor a grudge over this sort of thing. Using this sacred knowledge too frequently will remind them of how much they hate your kind, and they'll resume killing every Ratkin on sight. This leads to the use of other insidious Gifts.

• **Riot (Level Five)** — As the Bone Gnawer Gift of the same name.

• **Survivor (Level Five)** — Similar to the Bone Gnawer Gift of the same name.

System: The Ratkin spends one point of Gnosis; the effects last for one day. The wererat also gains three points of Stamina (although this cannot be used to soak damage from direct physical attacks), ignores all wound penalties, and gains one Willpower point if she is ever about to die.

Breed Gifts

Homid Gifts

Unlike many other Ratkin Gifts, homid Gifts are usually taught by Ancestor-spirits.

• **Cooking (Level One)** — As the Bone Gnawer Gift.

• **Eau de Rat (Level One)** — The intoxicating scent of rat is not fully appreciated by all mammals. In fact, most humans find it downright foul, as do the Jagglings and Gafflings of the Weaver.



System: Spend one Rage point and roll Charisma + Primal-Urge, difficulty 7. Humans and Weaver-spirits who are downwind from Eau de Rat lose one die from their dice pools when within 20 feet; lesser Weaver Gafflings are likely to flee. The effects last for a scene.

• **Persuasion (Level One)** — The other breeds have a low opinion of humanity, but that's just because they don't know how to deal with people. You've got a talent for any social situation involving human beings. Of course, Ratkin also have a reputation for deception, since they have little regard for the human race. Remember: Betray others before you betray other wererats!

System: This works a little differently than the Garou version of this Gift. Spend one Gnosis and roll Charisma + Subterfuge; each success lowers the difficulty of Social rolls by one (to a maximum modifier of -3 or a minimum difficulty of 4). The effects of this Gift last for one scene. Brooklyn accents are optional.

• **Instinct (Level Two)** — Some little rodent beasties are known for their "impulse control problems." Homid Ratkin learn to contain these instincts as best they can. With a little spiritual acumen, they can even intensify these feelings in creatures around them. A victim overwhelmed by instinct will follow his basest impulse for a brief moment. (If this is a character, the roleplayer should name the first thing that comes to mind; if it isn't, the Storyteller should immediately improvise something foul). Reactions can be petty or brutal, depending on the victim's initial frame of mind.

System: Spend one Rage and roll permanent Rage; the difficulty is the victim's Willpower. Alongside this, you've got

to do something highly annoying to spark your target's display of anger. At the Storyteller's discretion, using this ability on another player's character might increase the difficulty by 2. The effects last for one turn.

• **Sticky Fingers (Level Two)** — Humans have too much damn stuff for their own good; you only take what you need, but you don't care who it comes from. This Gift uses misdirection and distraction to boost stuff from humans with just the most casual contact. Bump in to them or talk to them, and you can take what you need. Just remember to use everything you take.

System: Any Ratkin with this Gift finds it easier to snatch little objects (items smaller than a human's hand) from the unaware. Roll Dexterity + Subterfuge and spend one Willpower to snag what you need. The difficulty depends on how well-guarded the object is. This doesn't apply to weapons wielded in combat, by the way.

Difficulty	Object's Accessibility
6	sitting in plain sight
7	clutched in someone's hand
8	in a pocket or on a wrist
9	around someone's neck or prominently worn
10	encased in something else (like a briefcase or wallet)

If the scam involves talking to someone face-to-face, the difficulty is increased by 1 (to a max of 10). Just bumping into someone or "accidentally" knocking someone over is much easier.

• **Reshape Object (Level Three)** — As the homid Garou Gift, save that it's taught by a Wyld-spirit (interestingly enough).

• **Of Rat and Man (Level Three)** — With a bit of practice, homid breed Ratkin can learn to assume a form between Homid and Crinos, rather like a Garou's Glabro form. Though the critter still appears very human, his "ratlike" features become exaggerated enough that anyone can notice them. Beady eyes, a sharp nose, gnarled hands and a stoop are the most commonly displayed traits. Humans find this unnerving; rats find it charming. While in this form, many of the aspects of misleading and betraying humans become much easier.

System: Spend one Rage and spend one turn shifting. The following Attribute modifiers apply while in "near man" form: Dexterity +2, Charisma +1 (to rats), Charisma -1 (to humans), and Perception +2. Best of all, while in this cunning form, your Subterfuge and Stealth rolls' difficulties are reduced by 2.

- **Attunement (Level Four)** — As the Bone Gnawer Gift.
- **Body Wrack (Level Four)** — As the Black Fury Gift.
- **Ugly Truth (Level Five)** — Like the homid Garou Gift:

Part the Veil. The Ratkin must bite or claw a human victim to transmit this Gift. Moreover, his experience is "embellished" by visions similar to those granted by the Birthing Plague — usually torturous reminders of the dangers of human overpopulation. If the wererat wants to finish off the experience by punishing the guilty human, he can make the disease extremely toxic. At the end of the scene, the victim will then be ravaged by the last lingering effects of the infection.

System: The roll to bite or claw is made normally; the player then rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 6) and spends one Gnosis. The wererat has the option of inflicting damage with this Gift; he does not need to declare this until the end of the scene. If the human is worthy of punishment, he takes aggravated damage; the number of health levels he loses is equal to the number of successes on the initial Charisma + Empathy roll.

Metis Gifts

• **Cloak of Shadows (Level One)** — As the Level One Ratkin Gift.

• **Rat Mother's Touch (Level One)** — Metis spend a great deal of their formative years in nests where Rat Mothers breed. Almost every day they're growing up, metis have to patch the wounds their brothers and sisters inflict on each other.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty 6). If the Gift is used to heal Garou, the difficulty is 7. Each success heals one health level. There is no limit to the number of times you can use this Gift, but each use requires a point of Gnosis. This talent works on both aggravated and non-aggravated wounds.

• **Sense Wurm (Level One)** — The Ratkin can detect the foul stench of the Wurm through any of his senses; he can also whisper to nearby Rat-spirits to find out what they know. Sense Wurm always requires active concentration.

System: This works a little differently from the Garou version. Roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 6). The number of successes required is based on the concentration and strength of the Wurm's influence. (A fomor in an empty room, for instance, would only require one success.) Vampires can be sensed with this ability, but only if their Humanity is below 7.

• **Spirit of the Spiny Rat (Level Two)** — The South American spiny rat surrounds itself with sharp quills to protect itself against predators. This talent is similar to the Gift of the Porcupine, though not as deadly.

System: Sprouting spines requires a point of Rage; the Ratkin must be in Crinos or Rat Thing form. Anyone who grapples, body slams or immobilizes the metis (or is on the receiving end of these moves) takes aggravated damage equal to the wererat's Strength + 1. The spines last for one turn for every point of the rat's permanent Rage.

• **Stink (Level Two)** — The Ratkin can emit a horrific odor dense enough to saturate a ten-by-ten-foot area. (Exactly how he does this is entirely up to you — players are *not* required to simulate this smell with bodily functions in any way during the game.)

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Occult. Anyone wanting to remain in the area must make a contested Willpower roll (difficulty 7) and exceed the metis' successes.

• **Rat Thing (Level Three)** — With a bit of practice, metis Ratkin can learn to take on a form between Crinos and Rodens, rather like the well-known Garou Hispo form. The result is a giant, lumbering Rat Thing: a long, furry quadrapedal rodent about the size of a large dog.

System: Roll Stamina + Primal-Urge, difficulty 7. Shifting from Rodens or Crinos requires one success; shifting from Homid form requires three successes. As usual, spending a point of Rage will automatically shift the character into this form. The Rat Thing's Physical Attributes are Strength +4, Dexterity +1, Stamina +1; the brute is far stronger than it is agile, but it can lumber along at three times normal running speed. If the rest of the pack is in Rodens form, they can easily ride on the back of this beast of burden. With absolute obedience, it will carry them through hell and high-water on its furry back.

Unfortunately, size is traded off for intelligence. A wererat in Rat Thing form has an effective Intelligence of 1, and can only follow the simplest orders. It cannot speak, save for vague grumbling noises. Its Manipulation score is also effectively 0. Though it is too dense to be affected by any kind of supernatural mind control, it has the attention span of a two-year-old human child. Pity the stupid, stupid Rat Thing.

• **Sliver Tooth (Level Three)** — The Ratkin's incisors splinter into nasty shards as they pierce flesh, imbedding deep and preventing healing.

System: After a successful, damaging bite attack, the Ratkin can spend a point of Rage to activate the Gift. Any damage that the target doesn't soak cannot be healed until all the splinters of tooth are removed; as usual, the bite counts as aggravated damage as well. Removing the splinters is very tricky work, as they can get pretty small.

The metis receives one automatic, unaggravated health level of damage; she cannot soak it, but can regenerate as usual. Until she does, she cannot make bite attacks.

• **Ratkin Lullaby (Level Four)** — Few Wurm creatures can be as foul or disobedient as Ratkin rugrats. Sometimes hyperactive ratlings would much rather climb the walls than submit to sleep. After years of helping little ones get ready for beddy-bye, metis learn skills useful for later in life. Through a combination of spiritual calmness, a raspy singing voice, and

weird-ass Ratkin lyrics, a metis can make his enemies drowsy, or even force them into unconsciousness.

System: Spend a point of Gnosis and roll Manipulation + Expression; the difficulty is either the victim's Rage + 3 (if he's a shapechanger) or a 6 (if not). Success brings a shapechanger or vampire out of a frenzy, or calms down a human who's reacting violently to the Delirium. The victim makes a simple Willpower roll; the difficulty is 3 plus the number of successes you scored (maximum of 9). If the roll succeeds, he feels sleepy, gaining a +1 difficulty to all die rolls for the rest of the scene. If it fails, the victim's difficulties are at +3 (to a maximum of 9). On a botch, the victim falls asleep.

• **Whelp Body (Level Four)** — As the Garou Ragabash Gift.

• **War of Vengeance (Level Five)** — Garou stalking through the deep wilderness use the Gift: Song of the Great Beast to call up the spirits of legendary creatures that stalked the Earth millennia ago. A rodens Ratkin with the Gift: War of Vengeance can do the same thing... but he can also call up the shades of ancient creatures slain long ago by werewolves and magi.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Perception + Primal-Urge (difficulty 7). The number of successes determines the spirit's anger. It will remain summoned for one scene, during which it can betray long-forgotten secrets or even attack if a werewolf or mage is present. If stats are required, take a number of points equal to the wererat's successes times ten, and divide it among the spirit's four Traits (Rage, Gnosis, Willpower and Power); no Trait save Power can be raised above 10. The spirit does not have Charms, cannot reform, and will not go into Slumber if destroyed.

Rodens Gifts

• **Absolute Balance (Level One)** — Rats have an amazing sense of balance: they can walk along clotheslines, the moorings of ships, and narrow rooftops with amazing agility. A rodens using Absolute Balance can maintain her footing on any solid surface, including ice, the slick bottom of a riverbank, a greased surface, or a snowdrift. The best part: the rat doesn't leave tracks.

System: Roll Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 6; extremely treacherous surfaces may raise the difficulty to 7 or 8. If climbing proves necessary, the rate still depends on the Dexterity + Athletics roll, but the Ratkin cannot fall for the duration of the scene. If the feat is something an ordinary rat can normally perform, no roll is necessary; this applies even if the Ratkin is in Homid or Crinos form. The Storyteller, of course, can still proclaim some feats of balance impossible.

• **Leap of the Kangaroo Rat (Level One)** — A kangaroo rat can propel itself with leaps of six to eight feet at top speed. When surprised, it can leap up to 24 feet, a rather astounding feat for a beastie about 15 inches long. With the use of its tail, it can even change its direction in mid-air. Now picture a nine-foot Crinos wererat taking advantage of the same skills. Although kangaroo rats aren't members of the family *rodentia* (they're marsupials), this supernatural Gift is still bestowed by Kangaroo Rat-spirits.

System: There are two applications of this Gift. The Ratkin can leap once up to three times its normal jumping distance. Alternatively, she can "long-run" with a series of smaller jumps (up to twice its jumping distance). Using the Gift for one massive leap has no deleterious effects; just roll Stamina

+ Athletics (difficulty 7) and gain at least one success. Long-running, however, requires a point of Rage for each hour of travel. Each hour, the Ratkin should roll her Stamina; a failed roll inflicts a health level of non-aggravated damage that can't be regenerated until the wererat rests. Long-running allows an average of ten miles an hour.

• **Survival (Level One)** — The rat does not need food or water for a full day. Just as the kangaroo rat can sustain himself with seeds he finds in the desert, the Ratkin can improvise a method of forestalling starvation. This Gift is taught by a Kangaroo Rat-spirit.

System: This requires the use of one Gnosis and a successful Wits + Survival roll. The difficulty depends on the mere proximity of food, even inaccessible food (3 for the basement of a supermarket; 6 for an urban area or forest wilderness; 9 for a vast desert).

• **Devour the Dead (Level Two)** — The user can call up a swarm of Rat-spirits to devour a dead body and remove all physical evidence in the immediate vicinity. Rodens Knife-Skulkers often use this Gift to dispose of the bodies of their victims.

System: Spend one Gnosis; a swarm of Rat-spirits appears from nowhere and consumes the dead body, bones and all, within three turns. Unfortunately, all items currently on the body will be carried off into the Umbra, where they'll be carefully hidden. Remember to loot the body first.

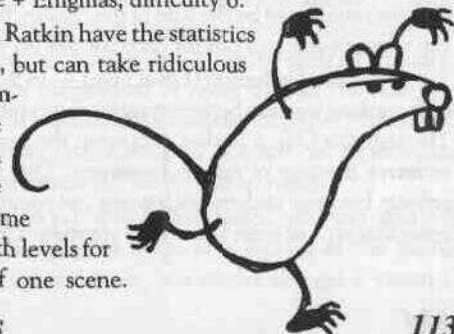
• **Scamper (Level Two)** — This ability can make a fleeing rodens Ratkin much harder to hit.

System: On the turn you decide to start Scampering, spend one Rage. To use the Gift, the rat must be using an "all-out dodge" during combat: that is, setting aside her entire dice pool for dodging. If she does, the difficulty for dodging starts out at a 4, regardless of whatever cover is available. The Gift will last as long as you keep dodging, up to the entire length of the combat. Spending extra Rage allows extra actions in a turn, but these must also be dodges. As usual, each additional attacker trying to hit the Ratkin in a turn raises the difficulty for dodging by 1 (unless you spend a point of Rage for each additional dodge). This cannot be used in conjunction with the Gift: Evasion.

• **Itchy (Level Three)** — Years ago, a small pack of Rat-spirits accessed the Television Zone in the Umbra. When they came back, the results weren't pretty. Local cartoon mice had taught them things Rats Were Not Meant to Know. The Itchy Gift allows a Ratkin in the Umbra to shapechange into a form that can employ many of the Cat-and-Mouse tactics used in classic cartoons.

System: "Taking Itchy form" is not subtle; all of the colors in the Ratkin's fur become much brighter than reality can normally manage. The wererat even begins to move like a cartoon mouse, and any creature he decides to stalk will hear an macabre parody of cartoon music. Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Enigmas, difficulty 6.

Itchy-form Ratkin have the statistics of Rodens form, but can take ridiculous amounts of damage and live; the number of extra successes on the initial roll become temporary health levels for the duration of one scene.



These extra levels only apply to non-aggravated damage; the claws and teeth of supernatural creatures remain just as deadly. By spending one Rage, you can also form a cartoon weapon for one scene; the non-aggravated damage it inflicts is equal to your permanent Rage. You can only devise one cartoon weapon or trap at a time, which fizzles out at the end of the scene.

For some reason, cartoon rats have unusually elastic bodies, which can distort into all the shapes you'd expect in animation. An Itchy form-rodens' eyes can literally bug out, a heart pounding in your chest may swell several inches outside of your body, and so on. The Storyteller has control over this; toon out at your own risk. Since this Gift can only be used in the Umbra, no one needs to worry about shredding the Veil.

- **Sliver Tooth (Level Three)** — As the Ratkin metis Gift.

- **Command Metis (Level Four)** — Ratkin metis act as lackeys to the rodens who dominate colony politics. Should one become disobedient, a high-ranking Ratkin can force him to obey his will.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Charisma + Leadership (the difficulty is the metis' Willpower); the number of words in your command must equal the number of successes. Your command must be a complete sentence (including imperatives); one success means your command is one verb. By the way, this ability cannot be used on a Ratkin metis who is of a higher rank than you are, or on a metis in frenzy! The effects last for one scene; if the action strongly goes against the metis' character, the Storyteller may allow a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) to modify the command. This cannot, however, override the metis' survival instincts.

- **Mind of the Swarm (Level Four)** — Once a swarm of rats has been summoned, or if you encounter them in the wild, you can control them through sheer force of will. You cannot motivate them to assault anything in their path (that requires the Rite of the Swarm), but you can direct their movements. This Gift can also be used to summon up a few extra rats or Rat-spirits for the duration of one scene; oddly enough, it's taught by a Rat-spirit.

System: The size of the swarm you can control depends on a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll. Spending a point of Gnosis and a point of Willpower isn't a big price to ask. The effects last for a number of hours equal to the rodens Ratkin's Willpower.

Successes	Swarm Size
1	up to 13 rats (normal rats)
2	up to 20 rats
3	up to 30 rats (large rats)
4	up to 40 rats
5	up to 50 rats (big-ass rats)

If the rodens can gather all of these rats into one place before the Rite of the Swarm is invoked, the difficulty for the ritualist's final roll is decreased by 2. You can't summon up allies in addition to those summoned by the Rite of the Swarm, but if you like, you can attract two extra rats for each success on your initial roll.

- **Furtive Gathering (Level Five)** — In Ratkin infestations, high-ranking wererats become masters of conspiracies and politics. Through this Gift, a Ratkin calls upon the spirits to surround a secretive meeting of rats and wererats. This must be done in privacy, but once undertaken, no one can communicate with the conspirators... or even know they are there. Oddly enough, this

Gift is taught by a Stormcrow-spirit, since Grandfather Thunder sympathizes with the Ratkin race's need for revenge.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Occult; the difficulty is the level of the local Gauntlet. The Ratkin are sealed off from all interruptions; anyone who wanders into the area cannot sense any aspect of the furtive gathering. The wererats, one and all, are invisible to all senses.

Aspect Gifts

Tunnel Runner Gifts

- **Danger Sense (Level One)** — No one lives with more danger than a Ratkin Tunnel Runner. When a wererat is prepared for the worst, her senses become hyperattenuated, developing a sixth sense for unseen perils. As the old wives' tales suggest, if a ship is sinking, the rats know of it first. This Gift is generously bestowed by a Rat-spirit.

If a Rat's Danger Sense is working, he receives an overwhelming sensory impulse mere moments before the disaster occurs. This impulse doesn't have to be an image; it could be the smell of a sulfurous explosion-to-be, the sound of a wall creaking before it gives way, or simply an uneasy sensation surging through twitching whiskers. The player representing the Ratkin can then declare a panicky action in anticipation of the disaster about to happen.

System: Whenever a Tunnel Runner with this Gift is near imminent danger, the Storyteller should roll the character's Wits + Alertness. (The difficulty is normally a 6, but unseen supernatural dangers may increase the difficulty of the roll to 7 or 8.) If the roll gains at least three successes, the Runner receives the sensory flash warning of the danger. The warning can be quite cryptic; it need not be crystal-clear.

- **Scent of the True Form (Level One)** — Similar to the Philodox Gift of the same name.

System: A Ratkin with this Gift can sense other wererats instantly. Detecting the true form of any other supernatural critter requires a Perception + Primal-Urge roll, difficulty 6. The number of successes required depends on the type of supernatural creature he's sniffing.

Successes	Critter
Zero	Ratkin
One	Garou or Changing Breed
Two	any kind of Kinfolk
Three	vampire or changeling
Four	mage, sorcerer or hedge-wizard
Five+	any other freakishly obscure beastie (mummy, etc.)

- **Silent Running (Level One)** — Five thousand years of practice has taught the wererats a lot about hiding from unwanted attention. This Gift obscures a Ratkin's path of travel to all methods of detection, supernatural or otherwise. Rat-spirits falsify evidence of where the Runner has been, laying false trails and obscuring existing ones. This not only makes use of the Tracking Ability difficult, but also counteracts methods like the Rite of the Questing Stone.

System: Spend one Gnosis, call out to your character's totem for aid, and roll Intelligence + Subterfuge. Each success raises the difficulty of a tracking roll by 1, to a maximum of 10;

each additional successes beyond that subtracts a success from any tracking roll used to find the character.

- **Hotwire (Level Two)** — You can circumvent the electrical system of any vehicle and jump-start the engine. With a little more work, you can even bind an Electricity-spirit to a spare key, creating a "spirit key" for the car that other Ratkin can use. Some Tunnel Runners like to travel in style, using and discarding cars along the way.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Repair; Tunnel Runners have a difficulty of 8 on this roll, while Engineers have a difficulty of 6. One success starts the engine. You may then craft a spirit key by holding up a spare key to the car's electrical system and coaxing an electricity elemental inside. Make a temporary Gnosis roll against the difficulty of the local Gauntlet; the number of successes reveals how long the key will work. Each success guarantees the key will function for one day before the spirit escapes. Only Ratkin may use this spirit key.

- **Sigil (Level Two)** — With this Gift, a Ratkin can encode a message in a bit of graffiti; only other Tunnel Runners can decipher it. These marks are often found in train yards, outside bus stations, under freeways, and anywhere else that wanderers frequent. Most include warnings about hazards to be found ahead. This Gift is taught by a Wanderlust-spirit, one of Rat's many Gafflings.

System: Inscribing the Sigil requires one Gnosis and a successful Intelligence + Primal-Urge roll. The player writes down a message up to ten words in length; the Storyteller distills this into an image other wererats will receive if they study the glyph. Any Tunnel Runner can notice and decipher one of these glyphs with a successful Perception + Survival roll; if the wererat isn't specifically looking for it, the difficulty is an 8 (and the Storyteller rolls secretly), but if a Tunnel Runner is specifically looking for Sigils, the difficulty is a 6.

- **Urban Camouflage (Level Two)** — Experienced Tunnel Runners don't look like they're wandering beggars; instead, they blend in wherever they go. A highly talented traveler can wander almost anywhere looking like he's a native. Why be invisible when you can be ignored? Runners carry this to an extreme: even whenever they're barefoot and broke, no one will question their presence if the Ratkin is using this Gift. Other supernatural creatures rely on being invisible or obfuscated; wererats with this talent just remain nondescript. Unlike other abilities, you can activate this Gift as soon as someone approaches you. Disappearing from plain view tears the Veil apart; being inconspicuous doesn't.

System: Roll Intelligence + Stealth and spend one Gnosis. If the number of successes exceeds a viewer's Perception, you're not invisible, but you will be ignored. For large groups of people, just use the highest Perception rating in the crowd. This Gift cannot be used during the stress of combat, however.

- **Evasion (Level Three)** — Trapping a rat is difficult. Hitting one can be nigh-impossible. Anyone who's chased a feral rat through an apartment late at night has experienced this first-hand. Tunnel Runners heighten this instinct to supernatural levels, especially when they travel through realms frequented by supernatural creatures.

System: During combat, spend one Rage and roll Dexterity + Dodge (difficulty 8). Add up the number of successes and

remember it; each success can be spent for an automatic success on a Dexterity + Dodge roll that turn. These points can be spent before or after the roll is made; if you miss a Dodge roll by one or two successes, it may save your tail. The Tunnel Runner cannot attack while using Evasion, but he may take other actions. This Gift can't be used at the same time as the rodens Gift: Scamper.

- **Second Sight (Level Three)** — High-ranking Tunnel Runners tend to settle down to a few select colonies, or decide to spend a lifetime acting as the Scout for one tribe. Staying in one place for too long can be intolerable — unless, of course, the maverick learns to use this Gift. By staring into the eyes of a younger Runner, the wererat can learn to use this second rat as his eyes and ears outside the Nest. This second Ratkin must voluntarily agree to this communion. This explains a commonly used tactic: a Tunnel Runner may agree to be captured by a nest's enemies to help his colony find out more information.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Perception + Empathy; the difficulty is equal to (5 + the second Ratkin's Rank). If you succeed, you can close your eyes and see through the eyes of this temporary ally. This effect lasts one day for each success. Once you advance beyond Rank Three, you can do this with more than one Tunnel Runner; for each level of Rank you have above 3, you can commune with an additional scout.

- **Speak in Tongues (Level Four)** — The Ratkin can understand any one human language for the duration of one scene. Communication is fluent; no Linguistics roll is required.

System: Spend one Willpower, and your mind will be flooded with knowledge of the new language. As for any misunderstandings or Social rolls that result, well, that's up to you.

- **Tunnel Echoes (Level Four)** — There are some tunnels that even Runners fear to tread. In these places, scouts often communicate across long distances by scraping on walls, rattling bones, chittering to set up echoes, and so on. High-ranking rats don't just spread messages this way; they also listen closely to get a rough idea of the tunnels ahead, just in case they need to bolt through them. Whisper in a ventilation shaft of a big corporate building, or rattle some bones at an open sewer lid, and there's a chance you may sense a passageway you never realized was there.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Perception + Performance. While performing this Gift, your senses will be hyperattenuated for the duration of the scene, especially to the sounds of echoes and rustling down the system of tunnels you're using. If anyone makes a loud noise while you're in this state, you'll take one health level of non-aggravated damage.

Once you take this risk, however, you can communicate to anyone in that tunnel system. Each point of Willpower you spend allows you to relay one sentence (up to ten words in length). Any Ratkin in the tunnel might receive this message. Unfortunately, the harmonics get distorted over distance; another Tunnel Runner using this Gift won't receive the words you sent, but instead, detect a sensory image that relays the same information. This image can be intercepted by other Tunnel Runners who spend a point of Gnosis and make a successful Blood Memory roll (difficulty 8); other shapechangers, humans, or supernatural creatures just hear unearthly subterranean noises.

Even if you don't spend Willpower, you can also roll temporary Gnosis to get a sense of a section of the tunnel system. With three successes, you might also get a vision of

someone stalking down there. With five successes, you may uncover a secret tunnel, an entrance to a room you need to access, or an object that has been lost or abandoned. When other shapechangers go crawling in the sewers, they learn to fear the strange echoes ricocheting around them; they foretell the approach of a skilled Tunnel Runner!

• **Cheese It! (Level Five)** — With this Gift, the Tunnel Runner can help his entire pack bolt from danger, although using it tends to be risky.

System: First, the Tunnel Runner calls out a brief phrase to signify the use of this Gift (e.g., "Everyone out!") Every wererat who wants to take advantage of this opportunity spends one point of Rage; the Tunnel Runner spends three. (The Tunnel Runner can only help a number of wererats equal to the total of her permanent Rage and permanent Gnosis.) All of the players representing the fleeing rats then play a quick hand of Rock, Paper, Scissors. (On the count of three, everyone throws down the hand signal for rock, paper or scissors.) The Storyteller plays, too.

Everyone who made the same choice as the Storyteller is lucky; their Ratkin bolt to a place of hiding within line of sight, even nearby rooftops. Any Ratkin who chose the most popular choice can bolt to the nearest hiding place, even if they didn't make the same choice as the Storyteller. Every other rat stays right where they are; the Gift does not work for them. If the Tunnel Runner doesn't make the same choice as the Storyteller, he can try this Gift again next round.

Shadow Seer Gifts

• **Rat Mother's Touch (Level One)** — As the Ratkin metis Gift.

• **Sense Weaver (Level One)** — Any good Ratkin knows how to hide in the midst of human civilization. This Gift aids a wererat in finding Weaver-spirits of all varieties. The spirit must be within sensory range, and each has its own distinctive sound or smell. This perception can vary from rat to rat, so a Shadow Seer may develop her own personal range of descriptors for spirits. Shadow Seers who sense that an area is overrun (or "calcified") by the Weaver may call on their rat pack to snap a few webs.

System: This Gift requires only a Perception + Occult roll. The difficulty varies depending on the strength and Power of the spirit. Sensing a Weaver Gaffling, for instance, is difficulty 6; a Jagging is difficulty 7. More successes on the roll bestows more information on the spirit, possibly including a measure of its Power and what Charms it might possess. Ratkin Engineers show up to this Gift with a slight degree of calcification.

• **Sense Wyrn (Level One)** — As the Ratkin metis Gift.

• **Name the Spirit (Level Two)** — As the lupus Gift of the same name.

• **Summon Engling (Level Two)** — Usually, when shapechangers need to replenish their Gnosis, they summon an Engling and stalk it. In urban areas, this hunt takes on a few unique twists; a Shadow Seer with this Gift knows them intimately. The Engling is always disguised as something mundane. Only the members of the Rat Pack can recognize that it's really a spirit. Humans react to this in unpredictable ways — watching

mad street people pursue a fleeing ice cream truck, a boy with a balloon, or a cloud of butterflies — each has different results.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll permanent Gnosis against the difficulty of the local Gauntlet. With three successes, an Engling appears, but in a disguise that only the Shadow Seer can see through. (The spirit's stats are: Willpower 5, Rage 1, Gnosis 10, Power 25; Charms: Airt Sense, Materialize.) The Ratkin must chase it down and "kill" it; if they do, they gain 10 Gnosis to divide equally between the members of the Rat Pack.

• **Touch the Spirits (Level Two)** — In animist philosophies, all objects hold some spiritual essence. Through this Gift, a Shadow Seer can speak directly to these inanimate spirits, learning where physical objects have been and what they've been used for. Psychics call this "psychometry." Knife-Skulkers don't care what it's called... they just call for the Shadow Seers to do it on command.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Perception + Empathy. Each success allows you to see back one day, sensing the gist of where the object has been and who was using it.

• **Protect the Swarm (Level Two)** — All sorts of supernatural creatures like to call up rats as allies. Ratkin from rival packs, vampires with the Animalism Discipline, mages with the Ratsstorm rote and Beast-Speaking Garou are just a few examples. If a Shadow Seer runs into a rat who's been victimized by any of these Gifts, she can determine who is controlling the poor defenseless beastie. If she's powerful enough, she may even attempt to convince the rodent to disobey its master.

System: Once you've learned this Gift, you can sense whether a rat you encounter is possibly being controlled by another supernatural creature. Roll Gnosis; you must score more successes than your rival's initial roll for his supernatural "power," whether that's a Discipline, Sphere, Gift, or what-have-you. You will even gain a brief glimpse of the rival who's been manipulating the poor critter. If you succeed, you can also overpower his ability, but only if your Rank is the same level or higher than the power that's used. Make a second roll of Manipulation + Primal-Urge (difficulty 7); you must have more successes than your rival's initial roll.

• **Command Spirit (Level Three)** — As the Theurge Gift of the same name.

• **Exorcism (Level Three)** — As the Theurge Gift.

• **Pulse of the Invisible (Level Three)** — As the Theurge Gift. The Ratkin can voluntarily enter a state of disconnection, remaining constantly aware of all the spirits around her while she wanders about in the physical world.

• **Discarded Dreams (Level Four)** — Humans throw their dreams away and never realize what they've lost. This Gift allows a Ratkin to salvage these dreams from any trash pile. By chanting an incantation and offering the refuse to someone as a gift, the recipient will be caught up in an elaborate dream; this is based on a memory someone has lost. The dreamer may even think she has the skills to carry out this aspiration. A stern old woman with a broken doll might think she's a ballerina; a lonely man with a moth-eaten coat might think he's the height of fashion, and so on. This Gift is taught by a Trash Gaffling or any servant of the Great Trash Heap, a powerful Bone Gnawer Totem.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Perception + Enigmas; the difficulty depends on the relative obscurity of the item you're looking for. You may find an item that's only vaguely what you want; if you get at least three successes, you've found exactly what you needed.

Now find a creature who's in need of a lost dream. Roll Manipulation + Expression (difficulty of the recipient's temporary Willpower) to explain what the lost object signifies. If the recipient really wants to live the dream, you only need one success; if he resists, you need at least three. For the duration of one scene, your target will live out the fantasy you give him; if you score at least five successes, he will even gain some of the skills or talents he needs to carry out this delusion. A great singing voice, mastery of the arts of dance, the stealth of a secret agent — all these treasures can be found in the trash, if only you look hard enough. As one would expect, you cannot perform this Gift during the stress of combat.

• **Feast of the Dead (Level Four)** — It's said that some primitive tribes devour parts of their enemies to gain their strength. By devouring the heart or brain of a victim, the Ratkin temporarily gains three of its Gifts randomly.

System: Kill it. Hack it open. Eat it. Randomly roll for three of the victim's Gifts, and they're yours for the rest of the day (although they must be Level Three or less). This Gift offers no protection against redundancy; you can gain a Gift you already know. In addition, this can't be used in conjunction with the *Elegy Gift* or the *Rodens Gift: Devour the Dead*; nor can the Gift be used more than once on a given corpse, even if you do eat the brain and save the heart for your girlfriend.

• **Elegy (Level Five)** — By speaking the last rites over a dying Ratkin, you can guarantee his spirit will survive to serve Rat's cause. At the moment of death, he will be reborn as a Rat-spirit. Over his dying body, you must recite the greatest accomplishments of his life. All of his Gifts will be gone, but his memories and spirit will remain. Of course, he can be bound or manipulated like any other ephemera, but some wererats are willing to make this ultimate sacrifice in service to the Rat Goddess. *

System: If a wererat's health levels go below Incapacitated, and any of his wounds are aggravated, you may immediately perform this Gift. He gets his shot at Final Rage first — rolling Stamina at difficulty 8 and healing one health level per success — so you can only proceed if he fails that roll.

Decide how much Gnosis you want to invest into the Elegy. The dying Ratkin you're trying to help then rolls Gnosis; the difficulty is equal to 10 - his Rank. Each point of Gnosis you spend before the roll adds one success; if the dying rat gets at least five successes, his flesh withers away. He's reborn as a Rat Jaggling and scampers off into the Umbra.

Knife-Skulker Gifts

• **Death Mark (Level One)** — This Gift is not invoked lightly. The Skulker invests a touch of Gnosis in a small piece of black cloth; when this is brushed across the forehead of a criminal, the victim is marked with an invisible spiritual sigil. Any Knife-Skulker can see this with some effort; various "spirit sight" disciplines can also detect it. Depending on the severity of the crime, the Skulker may give the criminal a head start, offering him a chance to atone for his crime before the other



Knife-Skulkers catch up with him. If he doesn't, the Death Mark makes the guilty bastard easier to track down... and cripple or kill, if necessary.

System: The Skulker spends one Gnosis and rolls Intelligence + Enigmas to create the death mark and store it in black cloth. A Skulker can only maintain one Death Mark at a time. If he prefers, he can hand off the ensorcelled shroud to an emissary (usually a Tunnel Runner) who will carry it to the criminal. Anyone can brush the cloth over the victim's forehead, who is usually restrained. Once this is done, the Skulker can tell the direction and distance of the guilty party (rather like the Rite of the Questing Stone). The victim may attempt to remove the mark with another Gift, Discipline, Arcanos, or the like. However, his number of successes must exceed the Skulker's initial roll, and such "cures" never last for more than a day.

- **Sticky Paws (Level One)** — The Skulker can grab a weapon out of his enemy's hands (or claws, or paws) and use it against its wielder the same turn.

System: Spend one Rage and roll Dexterity + Melee to grab the weapon; the difficulty is the equal to the victim's Dexterity + 3.

- **Truth of Gaia (Level One)** — As the Level One Philodox Gift.

- **Chitter (Level Two)** — As the Get of Fenris Gift: Snarl of the Predator. By chattering at an almost subsonic level, the Ratkin can unnerve his foes.

- **Mother's Truth (Level Two)** — The Gift: Truth of Gaia just isn't good enough for some people. A Knife-Skulker can tell who's lying with that Gift, but who's to say he isn't lying about the results? When someone's guilt needs to be proven to everyone present, Mother's Truth forces the victim to rat on his accomplices and co-conspirators. For one scene, the victim of Mother's Truth cannot tell a lie.

The victim may even be coerced into telling everything that he's trying to hide. This relies on an elaborate use of interrogation and threats, mixed in with a little supernatural prowess. Never swear on your Mother's grave, especially when she's really an Incarna with goddess-granted powers. The Rat Incarna bestows this Gift through one of her chosen Rat-spirits.

System: If the victim does not resist this Gift, the Knife-Skulker needs only to spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Intimidation (difficulty 6). In this case, the victim will literally bite his tongue if he tries to tell a lie. If he resists, everyone present will know it.

Getting the witness to betray his darkest secrets requires an extended contested test of Willpower, along with a thrilling drama worthy of a courtroom. The inquisitor and his victim trade off questions and answers, alternating Willpower rolls as they go. The victim rolls first at difficulty 6. The inquisitor's difficulty is lower: Take the number of successes the Knife-Skulker got on his initial Manipulation + Interrogation roll and subtract it from 6. The Storyteller calls for regular Willpower rolls periodically throughout the interrogation; if the Skulker gets ten successes before his victim, he has browbeaten him into submission, and the victim spills all the details of his crime. If the victim gets ten successes first, the interrogation does not work and cannot be attempted again for a full day.

- **Stalk (Level Two)** — As the Ragabash Gift: Sense of the Prey. Knife Skulkers know lots of tracking secrets.

- **Doppelgänger (Level Three)** — As the Level Four Glass Walker Gift.

- **Paralyzing Stare (Level Three)** — As the Shadow Lord Gift.

- **Open Wounds (Level Four)** — As the Shadow Lord Gift.

- **Wither Limb (Level Four)** — As the Garou metis Gift.

- **Geas (Level Five)** — Similar to the Philodox Gift of the same name. The Knife-Skulker can punish a victim or group of criminals by forcing him to undertake a quest. The victim or victims may even be forced to act against their basic instincts. In addition, Rat-spirits will harry and harass every victim who strays from the purpose of the Geas.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Charisma + Leadership (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). With a group of criminals, the difficulty is based on the victim with the highest Willpower. Each victim then makes a final Willpower roll (difficulty 9) to determine if their guilt is powerful enough to force a personality change until the Geas is fulfilled. The Geas must be a specific task the victims can perform and survive; they have up to one month to complete it.

Warrior Gifts

- **Resist Pain (Level One)** — As the Philodox Gift.

- **Slicing Teeth (Level One)** — As the Ahroun Gift: Razor Claws, but used with the Ratkin's bite attack.

- **Sticky Paws (Level One)** — As the Knife Skulker Gift.

- **Curse of Hatred (Level Two)** — As the Garou metis Gift.

- **Rat's Teeth (Level Two)** — Tiny sharp projectiles hurled at high velocity can inflict grievous damage. With this Gift, the wererat produces a seemingly endless supply of sharp objects from hidden places scattered over her body. She then assaults a chosen victim with a continuous fusillade. Japanese Nezumi use shuriken and throwing knives; ingenious Ratkin in other parts of the world have been known to use items like needles, kitchen knives and bits of broken glass.

System: As long as you carry a miscellaneous assortment of sharp objects, you've got a never-ending supply of thrown projectiles. To invoke this Gift, spend a turn doing an elaborate martial arts pose and spend one Rage; you can do nothing else during this first turn. For the rest of the scene, you can let off one barrage of thrown objects each turn. Roll your permanent Rage as your attack roll; any successes left over after your victim dodges are added to your damage roll (just like Firearms rolls). Your damage pool is equal to your temporary Rage; don't forget to add your extra damage dice.

- **Spirit of the Fray (Level Two)** — As the Ahroun Gift. If your Storyteller is using the optional Instinct rules (see Chapter Two), this is a sure way to guarantee your Ratkin is a psychotic little monster afterwards.

- **Bolt! (Level Three)** — As the Level Three Ratkin Gift.

- **Improvisation (Level Three)** — In your hands, anything can become a lethal weapon. All Ratkin are servitors of chaos; in combat, a warrior with this Gift is a deadly, unpredictable madman.

System: Spend a point of Gnosis and name a type of object that would be near your character in combat. You may then wield

one of these objects as a weapon for the duration of one scene. Each time you use this Gift, however, you must name a different type of object. As always, your Storyteller can veto your choice if its too implausible. For instance, the first time you fight in a *café*, for instance, you may decide to fight with "plates," while the next time, you may choose "kitchen knives," "hot coffee" or "trash cans." In addition, you must graphically describe each attack you make, and describe a different attack each time. Wielding it requires a roll of Dexterity + Melee; the difficulty starts at a 6 at the beginning of combat. Each attack you make must be different than all the attacks before it. If you chose "plates," for instance, you could break a plate over someone's head the first round, roll a plate across the floor and trip someone into a plate glass window the second round, and break a plate into jagged pieces before stabbing someone on the third round. *Each attack must be different.*

The Storyteller responds to each attack with a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. Depending on how ingenious your attack is, the difficulty of your next attack is either -1 or +1. The damage roll starts out equal to your permanent Rage; this also goes up or down by 1 depending on your ingenuity. If the Storyteller is impressed and gives a thumbs-up to your attack, the damage roll of the same subsequent attack gets an extra die and the difficulty goes down by 1. If the Storyteller is not amused and gives a thumbs down, the damage roll of your next attack loses one die and the difficulty goes up by 1.

Optionally, the Storyteller may ask everyone at the table (or watching the game) to give a thumbs up or down and use the crowd's judgment. Believe me, if the player and Storyteller are ingenious, they will draw a crowd.

• **Persecution Complex (Level Four)** — As the Stargazer Gift: Preternatural Awareness.

• **Treppelgänger (Level Four)** — There's safety in numbers, or so you've been told. The Doppelgänger Gift helps a Ratkin imitate another person. The Treppelgänger Gift splits you into a gang of little Ratkin. They must all stay within the same immediate area, but they can also coordinate their actions based upon your thoughts.

System: Roll Intelligence + Performance; for each success you obtain, this Gift remains active for one turn. Each turn, you can split one little nine-inch Crinos off the side of your body. You may form up to three little "gängsters," and you must spend a point of Gnosis for each one. This continues until they are all complete or you stop forming them. When the last little one is formed, you shrink down to the same size. All members of the gäng act on the same initiative. A gängster may only make one attack each turn. They cannot use any of your Gifts, and they cannot join in the Gift: Pack Attack; they're all extensions of you.

These tiny ratlings can scurry through a number of yards equal to their Dexterity each turn. They can make amazing vertical leaps, jumping onto tables, chairs, shelves and drawers when necessary. At the end of the combat, all of the little critters reform into one big Crinos rat again. Although they look like little Crinos wererats, they're actually weaker. In Treppelgänger form, each one has Strength +1, Dexterity +2 and Stamina -1. *These little rugrats are cute, though: they get Charisma +2 and Appearance +2. When you shrink down, you have the same traits.*

• **Pack Attack (Level Five)** — *High-ranking Warriors* are the master tacticians of the Ratkin race. They don't just lead swarms of rats into battle; they can coordinate entire Rat Packs in ingenious assaults. By drawing upon the "hive mind" deep within a Ratkin's psyche, a Warlord can make it easier for his pack to overwhelm enemies with ruthless efficiency.

System: First, the Warrior lets out a keening cry and rolls Manipulation + Leadership. For each success, a random member of her pack must automatically join in the Pack Attack on the next turn; they cannot abort this action and cannot split their Dice Pools. Additional Ratkin in the pack may join in voluntarily. Then, during the next declaration phase, the Warrior declares first, stating the target of the Pack Attack. The Warrior also acts first, as if he had the Gift: Spirit of the Fray. For every two Ratkin in the Pack Attack, decrease the difficulty of all attacks against the target by 1 (to a minimum of 4). The Warrior can continue the Pack Attack by spending one Rage at the beginning of each subsequent turn.



Freak Aspect Gifts

Ratkin Engineer Gifts

• **Control Simple Machine (Level One)** — As the Glass Walker Gift. Using this Gift while in the Umbra increases the difficulty by 1.

• **Open Seal (Level One)** — Similar to the Ragabash Gift of the same name.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Gnosis against the difficulty of the local Gauntlet. In any laboratory, Engineers are at -2 to their difficulty. This Gift may also open and close doors while an Engineer is in the Umbra.

• **Scrounge (Level One)** — Ratkin Engineers have a talent for finding all sorts of usable junk. Spend a few minutes searching around, and there's no telling what you might find. This Gift can either help find some mundane item that's hidden nearby, or scrounge up something bizarre that no one would have thought to look for. This Gift is taught by a Trash Gaffling.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Perception + Alertness. You can either name a specific item that would normally be in your current location, or name a general type of item that's rather hard to find. The difficulty of the roll depends on how well the item is hidden or how rare the item is. For instance, finding where the forks are kept in a restaurant after hours is difficulty 4; finding a fork in a subway station could be difficulty 6; finding a magnetized fork with silver plating by the side of the freeway might be a difficulty 9.

The Storyteller, of course, has the right to rule out any specific item as "impossible to find." If the restaurant in question really doesn't have any radioactive plutonium forks stashed in the kitchen, the Scrounge Gift won't help you find one.

• **Hotwire (Level Two)** — As the Tunnel Runner Gift.

• **Mousetrap (Level Two)** — When cornered and outnumbered, rats have unusual bursts of cunning and ingenuity. This trait is very common among the Engineers, their mechanically-inclined supernatural cousins. With this Gift: the Ratkin can figure out a way to set a trap using almost anything at hand. First, he scrounges for something that can inflict damage. He then McGuyvers it into a deathtrap of amazing ingenuity.

System: The dice roll is easy; it's the creative part of this roll that takes some work. The Engineer must spend a point of Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Repair. You must explain how the device works; the difficulty depends on the plausibility of your explanation. Many gamers claim to have knowledge of "kitchen chemistry" and homemade traps, but this Gift depends on your ability to pitch ideas based on what's at hand.

Only materials that are present near the Ratkin can be incorporated into the Mousetrap; this Gift cannot be used in conjunction with the Scrounge Gift. The difficulty starts at 5, but it can go as high as 10 if it's obvious you're talking out of your ass. For instance, if you can come up with a decent explanation of why a light bulb should explode under certain conditions in a living room, that's a 6. If you're stuck in a bookstore and start blathering about killing someone with paper cuts, an electric fan, and lemon juice, that's pathetic enough to merit a 9 or 10.

An Engineer can build a Mousetrap during the stress of combat. This takes two turns, but the starting difficulty is then set at 8.

When completed, the trap does damage equal to the Ratkin's Wits plus an additional die for every success. The damage is non-aggravated unless you use something that obviously causes aggravated damage (fire, acid or the like). It's a one-shot item — poof! and the deed is done. The victim should either get a Perception + Alertness roll to avoid the trap, or a Dexterity + Dodge roll to dive for cover whichever is higher.

• **Summon Electricity (Level Three)** — Far more effective than a general Rite of Binding, this Gift summons an electricity elemental and binds it to an electrical device for a short period of time. Even broken devices will be able to operate with a little judicious jury-rigging.

System: Roll Gnosis versus the difficulty of the local Gauntlet. You must be near a source of electricity, which isn't very hard in any human city. With four successes, you've summoned the spirit. Binding it into a battery or an electrical device requires a Gnosis roll against the spirit's Gnosis; if you succeed, it is bound, and will continue to supply power for one week per success. Five successes binds it for a year; after that, the spiritual warranty will expire.

• **Control Complex Machine (Level Three)** — As the Glass Walker Gift. This Gift allows control of complicated objects like computers, cars and ATMs.

• **Battery (Level Four)** — A Ratkin Engineer can use this Gift to energize himself or other wererats. This can temporarily increase physical abilities, though often at the risk of inflicting temporary damage as well. Some dangerous wererats use direct electricity to affect this, while more sedate ones simply mix up noxious concoctions of battery acid and other foul fluids. Convenience stores now sell many odd "energy beverages" that are commonly adapted for this purpose.

System: Spend one or more points of Gnosis and roll Wits + Repair. Every two successes on the roll can increase a Physical Attribute by one for the duration of a scene, as long as the Engineer has spent an equal number of points of Gnosis. No Trait can be raised higher than 6 in this way (not counting non-Homid Attribute bonuses).

• **Death Ray (Level Five)** — You can discharge energy through your fingertips. Granted, you'll need to hook yourself up to a car battery or wall outlet for a few hours a day, but if you've ever had a Garou trying to choke you to death, you know it's worth it.

System: You must spend at least an hour "meditating" while attached to a supply of electricity. Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Enigmas (difficulty 6); for each success, you gain a temporary dot in a new trait called "Electricity." If you spend



another point of Gnosis, you can charge this Trait up further; the maximum rating is 10. For the rest of the day, your body will have a constant static electric charge until you discharge it.

To attack with the Death Ray Gift, roll the dice in your Electricity pool. Attacking with a touch is difficulty 6; attacking at range (up to fifty feet) is difficulty 8. If you hit, you inflict one health level of aggravated damage per success; this damage is soaked at difficulty 8. The Electricity trait goes down one dot each time you use the Death Ray. Optionally, you can burn off points of Electricity instead of Gnosis to power Gifts like Battery and Summon Electricity.

Plague Lord Gifts

• **Poison Food (Level One)** — Health Department officials would cringe at the very thought of this Gift. Common black rats and brown rats are capable of spreading food poisoning under the right circumstances. Add the ordinary rat's capacity for breeding, and that means several hundred rats can drive a restaurant out of business if unchecked. Now picture a Plague Lord calling up his own assortment of Disease-spirits after learning this Gift from his ephemeral ally.

System: Spend one Gnosis and roll Intelligence + Enigmas. Anyone who eats the poisoned food takes a number of health levels of non-aggravated damage equal to the number of successes. This damage can be soaked with a Stamina roll, but the poison remains in the food for one scene. (Incidentally, raking multiple bites in the same scene does not inflict damage multiple times.)

• **Sniffle (Level One)** — Having trouble seeing an invisible enemy? To use this Gift, the Plague Lord places a pinch of dust on his palm and blows. He may direct the germ-laden cloud around the room, seeking the invisible. The first person it makes contact with must make a nasty Willpower roll to avoid sneezing, coughing, and wheezing from a temporary bout with a nasty cold.

System: Sacrifice a point of Gnosis to your Disease-spirit and procure a handful of powder. Roll Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty 6). You have a number of turns to find your opponent equal to your number of successes on this roll. Each turn, the cloud of germs travels up to five yards. If your opponent is in the area of the cloud, he must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) to avoid giving away his position with a loud outburst.

• **Virulent Curse of Hatred (Level One)** — As the Level Two Warrior Gift: Curse of Hatred, but with a few distinct differences. The victim's Traits are reduced by a simulation of the Plague Lord's favorite disease. Players are encouraged to research their favorite afflictions; the game mechanics, however, always remain the same.

System: Spend one Rage and roll Manipulation + Expression; the difficulty is the victim's Willpower. With at least one success, the victim loses two Willpower points and two Rage points. This can only be attempted once per scene. This is an Epidemic Gift, and can be spread to more than one victim with the Plague Lord Gift: Epidemic Contagion.

• **Blur of the Weeping Eyes (Level Two)** — Got something in your eye? The Ratkin can inflict someone looking at him with a nasty infection affecting his eyesight. All he's got

Rules Lawyers Take Heed:

Some Epidemic Gifts increase the difficulty of a victim's die rolls. If one of these Gifts is used on a victim more than once, the modifiers to the victim's die rolls are not cumulative. For instance, the Gift: Fever raises the difficulty of Intelligence and Wits rolls by 2. If it's used twice on the same victim, the difficulty of those rolls are still only increased by 2; they are not increased by 4. A victim can be hit with several different Epidemic Gifts, but cannot be punished with multiples of the same Gift. The same applies to any Gift that raises or lowers a victim's Traits.

to do is spit on his victim to transmit this nasty disease. This only lasts for one scene, but the poor fool will visibly suffer. He might weep pus from his eyes, suffer from a vision defect, have his eyeballs well up with blood, or watch as his eyelids are covered in scales. The Plague Lord gets to graphically describe the illness; the game mechanics remain the same.

System: You must successfully spit at someone to transmit this Gift; this requires a successful Dexterity + Melee roll and one point of Rage. Your victim has the difficulty of all Perception rolls increased by two (and all attack difficulties increased by one) for one scene. This counts as an Epidemic, and can be spread to more than one victim with the Level Five Gift: Epidemic Contagion.

• **Dredge the Spirit World (Level Two)** — The Plague Lord can summon a few select spirits of misery: those of Pain, Disease and Night. If the Gift involves an appropriate sacrifice, it may also call up a wraith... or a Spectre.

System: Roll Gnosis against the difficulty of the local Gauntlet; the difficulty depends on the power of the dark spirit invoked.

Spirit	Difficulty
Pain-spirit	6
Disease-spirit	7
Night-spirit	8
wraith/ghost	9

On a botch, the Plague Lord has either called up a Spectre (if you've got a copy of **Wraith: The Oblivion**) or a minor Bane of the Storyteller's choosing.

Successes	The spirit...
One	...comes eventually and is initially hostile.
Two	...manifests quickly, but is still initially hostile.
Three	...comes immediately and is neutral.
Four	...comes immediately and remains passive, yet benign.
Five+	...the spirit comes immediately and is friendly.

• **Catgut (Level Three)** — This is one of the fouler secrets possessed by Plague Lords. By carefully curing the skin or internal organs of other Changing Breeds, the Lord can weave a highly durable skein. With a bit of work, this can be crafted into form-fitting armor. Catgut armor, unfortunately, really pisses off other shapechangers. Bastet have been known to frenzy at the very sight of a Plague Lord wearing a leopard-skin

coat or cat ears. (And yet, other wererats have been known to fall to the ground laughing.)

System: Preparing catgut armor requires a dead shapechanger, an hour of work, and the expenditure of a point of Gnosis. Roll Intelligence + Repair; if the roll succeeds, the pelt that's skinned bestows three extra dice for soaking damage. Shapechangers of the same Changing Breed as the victim of this Gift must make frenzy checks the first time they see it, or whenever they enter battle against a Ratkin wearing it. This Gift cannot be used on Ratkin.

• **Lesions (Level Three)** — Like the Garou Gift: Halt the Coward's Flight. If you can bite or claw your victim, lesions and sores will break out on his legs and feet, making rapid movement impossible. His running speed is effectively halved.

System: Spend one turn focusing your diseases within you, and then bite or claw your victim. You must unleash this illness before the end of the scene. If you succeed, roll Charisma + Intimidation; the difficulty is the victim's Willpower. If this roll succeeds, the victim moves at half normal speed for the remainder of the scene. This is an Epidemic, and can be spread to more than one victim with the Gift: Epidemic Contagion.

• **Inflict Pain (Level Four)** — Your ability to transmit disease has become so impressive that you can adjust the pain your victims feel. This Gift is taught by a Pain-spirit.

System: You must successfully bite or claw your victim to transmit this Gift. Spend a point of Rage and roll Intelligence + Medicine; the difficulty is your victim's permanent Gnosis (or four, for those without Gnosis). The number of successes determine the dice pool penalties your victim receives for the duration of the scene; these work just like the penalties for wound levels. One or two successes inflict a -1; three or four successes inflict a -2; five or more successes grant a -3. The effects can be completely nullified with the Gift: Resist Pain. This is an Epidemic Gift, and can be spread to more than one victim with the Gift: Epidemic Contagion.

• **Epidemic Contagion (Level Five)** — The Plague Lords' forte, Epidemic Gifts, are even nastier when in the hands of the highest-ranking Lords. By use of this Gift, a wererat can make any Epidemic Gift highly contagious.

System: If the victim of an Epidemic Gift comes within touching distance of another person (one yard or so), there's a chance that the ailment will spread to that poor soul as well. The victim needs to make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7. If the victim fails, he is also afflicted with the illness... and can in turn pass it on to someone else.

Here's the best part: The Plague Lord can decide whether Ratkin can succumb to this epidemic as well. Do you want wererats to be infected by this plague? If the answer is "yes," the difficulty of a wererat's Willpower roll to resist infection is 5. If the answer is "no," Plague Lords can unleash infectious Gifts into a herd of shapechangers with impunity. Either way, the Plague Lord is always unaffected by his own plagues.

Munchmausen Gifts

- **Persuasion (Level One)** — As the homid Ratkin Gift.
- **Spirit Speech (Level One)** — As the Theurge Gift.

• **Tale Spinning (Level One)** — Using this amazing ability, the Ratkin can tell an elaborate story defying all reason and logic, and tell it so convincingly that the listener believes it is true. Telling the story absorbs an entire scene.

System: Burn one Gnosis and roll the Munchmausen's Manipulation + Expression. The most educated or skeptical listener makes an Intelligence roll to resist; for each success, he can stop the Ratkin at any point and ask him one question that should derail the story entirely. ("But sir, there is no air on the moon!" quoth he. To which I replied, "Ah, but you are mistaken! The cheese has holes, does it not?") Regardless, if the "tale-teller" has more successes than the listener, the Gift succeeds and the Moon Mouse makes it to the end of his story. Optionally, the listener may write down his number of successes on a piece of paper and pass it to the Storyteller; the Munchmausen doesn't find out the results until his story is over.

• **Name the Spirit (Level Two)** — As the Shadow Seer Gift.

• **Rapier Wit (Level Two)** — Through a combination of fast-talk and quick reflexes, the Ratkin can parry and riposte against attacks more effectively. This does not always require a weapon, but it does require quick wits (both on the part of the player and the character). The Munchmausen must compose a song or poem while using Rapier Wit, adding a stanza at least every time he attempts to parry or riposte. If the Ratkin is unarmed, the player must also describe what items nearby he is using in combat instead. A chair, chandelier or mug of ale can be deadly if wielded by a witty Munchmausen.

System: When the Ratkin begins using Rapier Wit, the player improvises the first two lines of an original poem or song. Mark off one Gnosis. Any time the Munchmausen is assaulted with a Brawl or Melee attack, she may attempt to automatically parry and counterattack. This lasts for the rest of the scene, and works in addition to the Munchmausen's other actions. Each time the Ratkin is attacked, the player must add another two lines to the poem or song. The composition need not necessarily make sense, but it must at least rhyme.

For a successful parry and counterattack, the Munchmausen rolls Dexterity + Expression. The difficulty of the first roll starts out at a 6. Each time the Munchmausen parries and adds another two lines to her composition, the Storyteller determines whether the difficulty of the next parry should go up by 1 or down by 1, depending on the ingenuity of the poem or song. (Optionally, players can vote using the "thumbs up/thumbs down" method like the one used in the Warrior Gift: Improvisation.) The difficulty of the parry/counterattack can never go lower than 4 or higher than 10.

To parry, she must score more successes than the attacker did on his attack roll. The damage for the counterattack is equal to Strength, although the Storyteller may add a die or two if the weapon is particularly vicious. If the weapon does aggravated damage, so does the counterattack. Her opponent can attempt to soak damage, but cannot Dodge or Parry the counterattack. The Gift lasts for the rest of the scene; hopefully by then, the Munchmausen's masterpiece will be complete.

• **Adversity (Level Three)** — A Munchmausen can survive extreme temperatures for a full day with this Gift. Arcadian Ratkin often tell ridiculous stories about having lived

on the moon, the bottom of the ocean, or the caldera of an active volcano. Some of these stories are true.

System: Tava (Rank Three Ratkin) are immune to extreme heat (up to boiling lava) or extreme cold (up to Antarctic conditions). At Rank Four, they gain the ability to live underwater or in a vacuum. A Rrrrr't (Rank Five) Ratkin can reproduce the Ratkin Gift: Survivor; Moon Mice find this ability essential.

No roll is necessary; the Rat just spends Gnosis for each day he wants to survive. Extreme heat or cold requires one Gnosis. Underwater conditions or compete vacuums require two Gnosis; the Survivor Gift requires three. As a side note, this Gift will never grant immunity to silver, though it will reduce the damage from fire from aggravated to non-aggravated.

• **Taste of Madness (Level Three)** — *Share my delusion!* The Munchausen can construct a brief variant of reality for his victim to experience. This must be summarized in one sentence of no more than ten words.

System: Spend a point of Gnosis and roll Manipulation + Subterfuge (the difficulty is equal to the subject's Willpower). If the roll succeeds, the victim believes the delusion as truth. The effects last one hour per success.

• **Whispered Dreams (Level Four)** — You can speak an illusion into existence. This apparition can affect all of your victim's senses, can move anywhere within your line-of-sight, and can exist as long as you concentrate on it. The Gift begins when you whisper a few words about the dwcomer you are trying to create. The illusion lasts for one scene.

System: Spend two Willpower points and roll Manipulation + Expression (difficulty 8). Anyone witnessing the illusion can attempt to "see through it" by rolling Perception + Alertness; the difficulty is equal to (5 + the number of successes you obtained, up to a maximum of difficulty 9). Once one person points out this flaw, the illusion is ruined for everyone, and it vanishes.

• **Hyperattenuation (Level Five)** — The Arcadian Ratkin can exaggerate any one sense to ridiculous proportions. The effects last for one scene, and only work if accompanied by outrageous bragging. For instance, the Moon Mouse might hear footsteps through the ground seven leagues away; smell a single peppermint leaf resting on a cup of treacle on the lowest level of a sewer system; see well enough from the top of a building to shoot the apple off a tree outside the city; or feel a man's deepest psychological problems through the bumps on his forehead. Inconceivable! This Gift is chaotic, often throwing in sensory data you never anticipated. It's taught by a Wyldling spirit.

System: Roll Manipulation + Expression (difficulty 9), without spending any Willpower. For each success, you can increase your Perception by one point for as long as you spend an equal amount of Gnosis; this lasts for one scene. The Storyteller takes any Perception roll you make and "hyperattenuates" it to Herculean proportions. Again, your heightened senses are chaotic: You might try to identify the scent of a Glass Walker's cigars, but you may also catch a whiff of the store across town that he bought it from....

Twitcher Gifts

• **Firebug (Level One)** — By focusing anger and destructive emotions, the Twitcher can ignite flammable materials

within ten feet. You can't hurl balls of abysmal flame, but you can torch things without carrying an incriminating lighter or book of matches. This inferno can only engulf wood, paper or cloth; you'll need the Pyrotechnics Gift for anything less flammable. In addition, the Gift does not work on items that are being worn or carried. This Gift is taught by a Wyldling spirit.

System: Spend one Rage and roll temporary Rage to ignite a fire. You just need one success. This may seem trivial, but no human investigator will be able to deduce the cause of your act of arson. The Gift is also instantaneous; imagine the efficacy of setting a building on fire right in the middle of an epic fight scene.

• **Sense Angst (Level One)** — You know anger and bitterness so well that you can smell it in others. Humans become fascinating: you can sense their current greatest pet peeve or annoyance. When you're near shapechangers, you can sense the extent of their Rage; if lucky, you can determine the last event that really pissed them off. You know how close a vampire is to going berserk (and what might set him off), or the pain of a wraith hovering nearby. If you use this on someone tainted by the Wyrms, you can sense part of what drove him to his madness. In all, if anyone is pissed off, you can figure out why... and use it to your advantage.

System: Roll Perception + Occult, difficulty 6. If a human is actually calm, you can tell what would most upset him at that moment; gaining more than one success gives you more insights into what would cheese him off. Three successes on a Perception + Occult roll lets you tell the relative Rage of a werewolf (or other shapechanger), the Humanity of a vampire (or a brief impression of his Path's morality and how "far along" he is on it), the Angst level of a wraith, the Banality of a changeling, or the last thing that really pissed off a human or mage; although this description is never couched in actual game terms, it allows a Ratkin to make a rough guess whether a given target is a werebeast, undead, fae thing, human or "something else." This Gift can only be used once per subject per scene.

• **Sense Weaver (Level One)** — As the Shadow Seer Gift.

• **Holdout (Level Two)** — By creating a "pocket" in your flesh, you can smuggle a weapon or a small package. Don't be surprised if a corned Twitcher pulls something amazing out of his... well, you know....

System: Spend one Gnosis, and the spirits will aid you in secreting the device. Roll Wits + Subterfuge to make sure it's well hidden. If your holdout item is bigger than a rat, you cannot shift into rat form without immediately dropping it on the ground. The package can't be larger than your chest cavity. Inserting it can be rather embarrassing unless it's done in private. Excreting it from your newly created orifice requires a point of Rage. You may point to the spot where you'd like the new orifice when you activate this Gift, but be specific; Rat-spirits don't give a rat's ass where they shove it in.

• **Self-Destruct (Level Two)** — *Students of the Weaver* can learn to control simple machines, forcing them to stop functioning. Devotees of the Wyld can make them self-destruct in a spectacular fashion, throwing off sparks and lovely jagged pieces.

System: Spend one Rage and roll your remaining temporary Rage. Anyone hit by the fallout loses a number of non-aggravated health levels of damage equal to the number of



successes; this can be soaked. This only works on mundane technology, not fetishes, talens, talismans, Devices and the like.

• **Pyrotechnics (Level Three)** — Fire walks with you. While cowards cloak objects in darkness, you're a soldier of the Apocalypse; you'll cloak them in flames. The size of the object in question depends on your anger and your ability. Anyone using this Gift must have some sort of prop to cover up the supernatural activity. Use gasoline, mix chemicals, or just wire something to blow. Even if it shouldn't physically work, your race's undying hatred will give it the kick it needs to jump-start the Apocalypse.

System: Start off by focusing your anger. You can spend as much Rage as you like; each point gives you an automatic success on the Intelligence + Occult roll that follows. The size of the object and its composition both affect the number of successes you need to set it ablaze. Every success allows you to torch a 10-by-10 foot area. Yes, this can be used on living things.

Optionally, mechanically-inclined Storytellers may choose to split the number of successes on the initial roll between these two tables to further define the conflagration. For more details, check out the *Fire!* section of the main rulebook.

Successes	Severity of the Fire	difficulty to soak damage
One	heat of a candle (first-degree burns)	3
Two	heat of a torch (second-degree burns)	5
Three	heat of a Bunsen burner (third-degree)	7
Four	heat of a chemical fire	9
Five	molten metal	10

Successes	Size of the Fire	wounds inflicted each turn
One	size of a torch	one
Three	bonfire; half of body burned	two
Five	raging inferno; total immersion in flames	three

• **Sanctify (Level Three)** — This Gift is used in conjunction with the Rite of the Pain-Dagger; if you know this Gift, you may also learn that rite from a Warrior (without spending the experience for it). Normally, you can bind a spirit to a blade of religious significance to form a Pain-Dagger, the Ratkin's equivalent of a Garou klaive. The Sanctify Gift allows you to temporarily bind one of the spirits used in the rite to *anything* with a jagged or pointed edge: butcher knives, chain saws, broken bottles, meat hooks and bone saws are all obvious examples. This Gift is blissfully bestowed by a Pain-spirit, but only if you can give it what it wants first. This often involves sacrificing another creature's pain.

System: Find a weapon to dedicate as your new Pain Dagger. Spend one Rage and whisper the greatest crime you intend to commit with it into the blade. You can then perform the Rite of the Pain Dagger upon it to summon a Pain-spirit and bind it inside. If the weapon normally inflicts non-aggravated damage (like a broken bottle or a meat hook), the new weapon can mete out Strength + 2 aggravated damage. If the weapon normally inflicts aggravated damage (like a chainsaw), the new weapon metes out Strength + 4 damage.

In addition, the Twitcher can spend a point of Gnosis to force the spirit to use the Charm: Agony (see p. 48). When the blade is dedicated, roll Gnosis; for each success, the spirit remains bound for one week. As usual, a Twitcher cannot

create more than one Pain Dagger at a time; however, they don't worry about losing Obligation Renown for performing irreverent or obscene acts with them.

Unfortunately, the spirit inside a Sanctified Pain Dagger may whisper to the Twitcher who carries it; only the owner can hear these disturbing messages. Once a day, if the owner fails a Willpower roll (difficulty 9), a drawn spirit blade will force its owner to attack a victim of its choice. Some Ratkin believe it's a small price to pay.

• **Keening of Swarm Panic (Level Four)** — This Gift is essentially the same as the Nezumi Gift from **Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East**. It is only possible in the midst of a crowd of at least fifty or sixty humans. The Twitcher keens a high, wailing sound just beyond the fringe of human hearing. After a few minutes, the humans become uneasy and soon begin to push and shove each other. The human swarm can become extremely dangerous if it senses the need to bolt.

System: Expend one point of Gnosis and roll Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 7). If the Ratkin obtains at least three successes, the crowd will begin to force its way towards a chosen exit. With four successes, the crowd will panic, surging so

violently that any non-humans in their way are swept into the crowd. Each of these victims suffers one level of damage (difficulty 8 to soak).

With five success, the crowd bolts. Anyone caught in the way of the crowd should roll Dexterity + Athletics or Dexterity + Dodge; otherwise, that victim is trampled under a wave of human flesh. The victim takes one level of damage each turn until he gets to his feet (until then, he can attempt to soak the damage at difficulty 9). The most insidious part of this Gift is its duration: ten minutes for each success on the initial roll.

• **All Hell (Level Five)** — By summoning a swarm of Wyldling spirits and Rat-spirits, you can invoke sheer pandemonium. They'll crawl the walls, manipulating mundane objects randomly, and causing sheer chaos. Any non-Ratkin in the room is hit with the Delirium.

System: Spend one Gnosis; everyone present rolls Willpower (difficulty 8). Anyone who fails this roll gets hit by the Delirium, just as if they were human. Humans are automatically affected, but move one step up the Delirium chart for each two successes they get.

Appendix Two: Rat Bastards

It was then that the rats were driven to being scavengers and thieves, living on the fringes of a world run by men.

— Robert O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIHM*

The World of the Desperate

Life is best lived to extremes. Ratkin aren't just shapechanging rats; they're extremists, anarchists, madmen and visionaries. The curse of wererat blood shapes a Ratkin's entire existence, even before the horrors of Infection. For homids, holding down a job, maintaining a relationship or just keeping out of prison or poverty can be an exercise in failure. For rodents, just sensing you're somehow different from the animals around you can be maddening. For metis Ratkin, growing up in a colony means enduring a life of shame, dreaming of the day when you can fulfill your grandest dreams... and basest urges.

Wererats are not just giant rodents — they are as similar to rats as humans are to vampires, or wolves are to Garou. Life as a Ratkin leads to life on the edge, and any desperate creature forced to extremes learns to see the world very, very differently. Once you've been called by the Rat Incarna, others may vilify you, but the Ratkin in your pack will come to understand you. Any revolutionary has a reason why he's taken a dangerous path in life. In the world of the desperate, the madness of the Birthing Plague leads all of its victims of astray. Take a look at a few examples...

Drifter

Quote: "I'm not lost. I know exactly where I'm not going. You, on the other hand, are headed right for where you shouldn't be..."

Prelude: Two years ago, you thought you would never escape from your dreary existence. A dead-end job, a lifeless marriage, a lifetime of forgotten friends — your life was going nowhere. The drinking problem pushed you over the edge, leading straight into fights with your wife that lasted for hours. Then one day, you walked out of the house on the spur of the moment for a pack of cigarettes and never looked back. Sure, you're wife thinks you're a rat bastard, but you know you're both better off this way. You used to have nightmares about the life you left behind, but now your existence is one unending dream.

Since the day you walked out, you've traveled just about everywhere. The credit on your ATM card ran out a long time ago — which is just as well, since you don't want to be tracked down to pay old debts. You've had nightmares about people from your old life tracking you down, but there's no way you'd ever go back. Drifting from one small town to the next, you never trust anyone for long.

Staying in one place just seems too damn dangerous, so the road has become your home.

Sure, it was hard at first. The first time you got really sick, there was no one to take care of you... until the sickness got worse and



RATKIN

Name:		Breed: <i>Ratoid</i>	Nature:
Player:		Tribe/Plague:	Deemeanor:
Chronicles:		Aspect: <i>Tactical Runner</i>	Concept: <i>Drifter</i>

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●	Charisma	●●●●	Perception	●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●
Stamina	●●●●	Appearance	●●●●	Will	●●●●

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●●	Animal Ken	●●●●	Computer	●●●●
Athletics	●●●●	Drive	●●●●	Enigma	●●●●
Brawl	●●●●	Etiquette	●●●●	Investigation	●●●●
Dodge	●●●●	Firearms	●●●●	Law	●●●●
Empathy	●●●●	Leadership	●●●●	Linguistics	●●●●
Expression	●●●●	Melee	●●●●	Medicine	●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●	Performance	●●●●	Occult	●●●●
Primal Urge	●●●●	Repair	●●●●	Politics	●●●●
Streetwise	●●●●	Stealth	●●●●	Rituals	●●●●
Subterfuge	●●●●	Survival	●●●●	Science	●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts		Gifts	
Contacts	●●●●	Shank Cache			
Riles	●●●●	Reputation			
	●●●●	Trunk Sense			
	●●●●				

Kenosis

Infamy		Rage		Health	
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Bruted	<input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●		
●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●		

Strength/Weakness

Culturally Sifted, *Standard*
Quizzes/Traveling Light

Infection began. When the plague hit you for the first time and the Rat God called you, there really wasn't much of an old life to give up. Instead, you found out about your new life, one filled with constant change. Unfortunately, others like you want you to join their ranks... and that worries you. You already messed up one family, so why should you be eager to screw up another one? You'll use these Rat People around you as long as you need to, but on a moment's notice, you'll decide to strike out on your own all over again.

Concept: You don't have a home, nor do you want one. Everything you need is in carried on you back — physical baggage is as burdensome to you as emotional baggage. As far as you're concerned, change is good. Every few months, you change some aspect of your appearance — whether that means growing a beard, dying your hair, or even shaving your head. When you really need to *hide out* for a while, you just take to your rat form, dropping out of human society altogether.

Roleplaying Hints: You have no intention of ever getting close to anyone ever again. Trusting someone means setting yourself up for betrayal. The only people you trust are the members of your pack, and even they seem like the sort who will desert you if they find something better. Your identity is a facade, one which you intend to preserve. The rats you consort with only give their first names, and that's fine with you. As long as no one inquires into your past, you don't really care about theirs. Your new life is a series of adventures, and the other travelers you work with are all means to fulfilling those ends. You're a man of mystery and prefer to keep it that way.

Equipment: backpack jammed with scavenged supplies; well-worn thrift store clothes

Idealistic Street Rat

Quote: "The streets belong to everyone. Someday, we'll take back the rest of the city, too."

Prelude: You were born a metis; your guilty parents sacrificed you to the Birthing Plague at an early age. When the Infection hit you for the first time, it was beyond anything you had ever experienced. In mere moments, your mind was overwhelmed by the history of the world... and the dangers it faced. Prophetic dreams revealed an entire world just beyond this one. Other creatures have names for the spirits that live there, but you remember them by their sounds and scents. As a master of insight, you're well acquainted with the foul stench of the Wyrms's tentacles, the ozone crackling of the Weaver's webs, and the liberating effervescence of the Wyld.

These wonders were amazing, but to you, the human world was even more fascinating. As soon as you were old enough to leave your colony, you started wandering the streets and find others who were just like you... almost. The wealthy humans didn't trust you, but you found plenty of other people who had abandoned the pretense of "civilized" society. Some lived on the streets because they thought it was glamorous; a few preferred the dangers of street life to the violence at home; most of them had no choice. No matter what their reasons, they all had one thing in common: they needed help.

Before the First Change, you always knew human society didn't quite work. The victims you help out are proof of that. You now take pride in knowing that a wererat can help them when ordinary humans can't. Since you can scrounge, hide and survive with the cunning of a rat, you actually like life on the street, and genuinely care for the people who live there. You help them; in return, you know a few good-hearted people who would do anything to help you. It's a shame the rest of your rat pack doesn't feel the same way.

Concept: Like many Shadow Seers on the streets, you've started to care about the humans who live there. Unfortunately, you're a metis, and some Ratkin question your odd philosophies. Don't the wererats have a sacred duty to help keep down the human population? Isn't it dangerous to wander the streets as a human female? Won't you get ripped off, like everyone else who tries to help the homeless? Your sympathy earns some skepticism from the other members of your pack, but you know that by helping out those in need, they may someday return the favor.

Roleplaying Hints: You can't resist meddling in human affairs, especially among humans who are living on the edge. Unlike most wererats, you actually remember the names of people you meet on the street. You give them change, help them out when life is rough, get them help when they're sick, and mourn them when they die. The streets are a drama that

RATKIN

Name:	Breed: <i>Aelia</i>	Nature:
Player:	Tribe/Plague:	Demeanor:
Chronicle:	Aspect: <i>Shadow Seer</i>	Concept: <i>Idealistic Street Rat</i>

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wits: ●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness: ●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Enigma: ●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●	Leadership: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●
Primal Urge: ●●●●	Repair: ●●●●	Politics: ●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Rituals: ●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●

Advantages

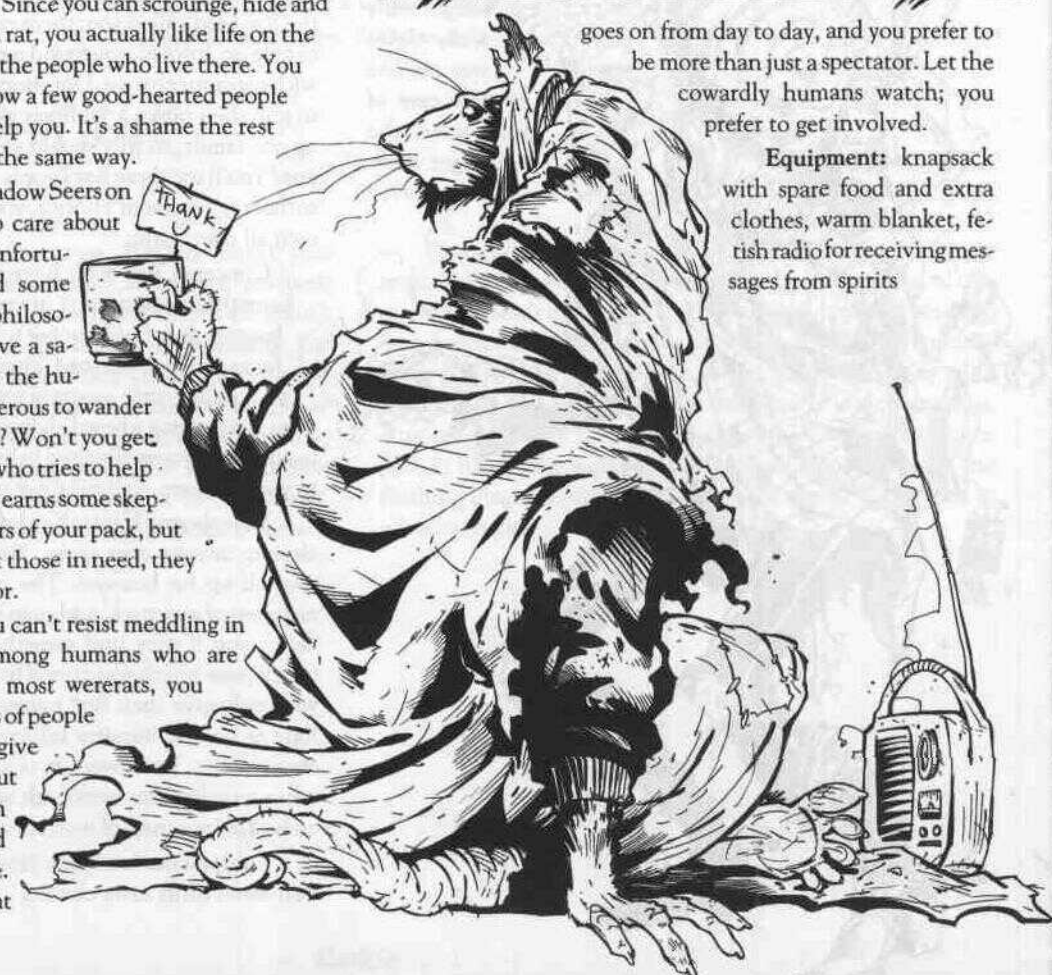
Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
<i>Setback (Rat Made)</i> : ●●●●	<i>Claw of Shadow</i> : _____	_____
<i>Rile</i> : ●●●●	<i>Rat Mother's Touch</i> : _____	_____
_____	<i>Sense of Justice</i> : _____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Renown

<i>Infamy</i> : ○○○○○○○○○○	<i>Rage</i> : ●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Health</i>
<i>Obligation</i> : □□□□□□□□□□	<i>Gnosis</i> : ●○○○○○○○○○	Bruised: -1 □
<i>Cunning</i> : ●○○○○○○○○○	<i>Willpower</i> : ●○○○○○○○○○	Hurt: -1 □
<i>Rank</i> : □□□□□□□□□□	_____	Injured: -1 □
_____	_____	Wounded: -2 □
_____	_____	Mauled: -2 □
_____	_____	Crippled: -5 □
_____	_____	Incapacitated: □

Strength/Weakness

Spirit Sight, Spirits Speak to Me, Traveling Light



goes on from day to day, and you prefer to be more than just a spectator. Let the cowardly humans watch; you prefer to get involved.

Equipment: knapsack with spare food and extra clothes, warm blanket, fetish radio for receiving messages from spirits

Ecoterrorist

Quote: "Where the law fails, I prevail. The Earth can't fight back, so I'll fight back for her."

Prelude: You started your crusade to defend the Earth because of New Age beliefs and good intentions. You've always wanted to do the right thing. Now years of involvement in environmental groups have left you bitter and disgusted. Grassroots political movements did nothing. Door-to-door fund-raisers just made other people rich. Formal protests just landed you in jail, while the corporations kept getting richer and richer. Desperate times called for desperate measures... and desperate tactics. You now pass judgment on the corporations that poison the world.

You've taken to methods and philosophies that give the environmental movement a bad name. Too damn bad. Sabotaging and stealing equipment is just the beginning. Maybe a few



RACKIN

Name: _____ Breed: *Woad* Nature: _____
 Player: _____ Tribe/Plague: _____ Demeanor: _____
 Chronicle: _____ Aspect: *Knife Stealer* Concepts: *Ecoterrorist*

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●○○○	Charisma ●●○○○	Perception ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○	Manipulation ●●○○○	Intelligence ●●○○○
Stamina ●●○○○	Appearance ●●○○○	Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●○○○	Animal Ken ●○○○○	Computer ●○○○○
Athletics ●●○○○	Drive ●○○○○	Enigmas ●○○○○
Brawl ●●○○○	Etiquette ●○○○○	Investigation ●○○○○
Dodge ●●○○○	Firearms ●○○○○	Law ●○○○○
Empathy ●○○○○	Leadership ●○○○○	Linguistics ●○○○○
Expression ●○○○○	Melee ●○○○○	Medicine ●○○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○	Performance ●○○○○	Occult ●○○○○
Primal-Urge ●○○○○	Repair ●○○○○	Politics ●○○○○
Streetwise ●○○○○	Stealth ●○○○○	Rituals ●○○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○	Survival ●○○○○	Science ●○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
Contact ●●○○○	Shadow Thrope _____	_____
Break Factor ●○○○○	Propagator _____	_____
Bite ●●○○○	Death Mark _____	_____
_____ ●○○○○	_____	_____
_____ ●○○○○	_____	_____

Reputation	Rage	Health
Infamy ●●○○○○○○○○	●●○○○○○○○○	Bruised <input type="checkbox"/>
□□□□□□□□	□□□□□□□□	Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Obligation ●●○○○○○○○○	_____	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
□□□□□□□□	Gnosis	Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Cunning ●●○○○○○○○○	●●○○○○○○○○	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
□□□□□□□□	□□□□□□□□	Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Willpower	Willpower	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
●●○○○○○○○○	●●○○○○○○○○	Strength/Weakness
□□□□□□□□	□□□□□□□□	Contact & Contacts, Sense of Justice/Ancestor's Code
Rank	_____	

pawns get injured, but that just helps scare them off their jobs. If they're wounding the Earth, then you've got every right to act in self-defense. Your favorite targets used to be large business that wanted to make a profit from logging and mining. After you were Infected, your belief became even more extreme. The humans, that race you abandoned when you first Changed, really have no right to the planet at all. Someone is responsible, and someone must pay. If necessary, they all must pay.

Concept: Maybe some of the werewolves would be proud to know you. More likely, you'd scare even them. You used to believe in the Gaia theory, but now you know the Earth Mother doesn't give a damn about you. All of her lost children have to look out for themselves. Others deal in law; you deal in justice. You're eager to investigate any large corporation that profits from the misfortune of others. Unfortunately, you can't make a long-term career out of it on your own. Instead, you've got to find a rat pack who accepts your views. As part of your Contract Rite with them, you'll aid them in their goals if they'll occasionally lend help with yours. As long as you get your revenge a few times a year, you'll stick around.

Roleplaying Hints: Mock the law; it's frustrated you for far too long. Watch patiently when you see injustice. Then start planning revenge. Become visibly upset when you see pollution, trash or urban blight. Hold your anger in check... until you need it. You've got to watch and wait, earning your deceit's respect until you can lead them on your next crusade.

Equipment: ten-year old van covered with environmentalist stickers, several cases of literature and pamphlets, safely hidden weapons of mass destruction

Militia Man

Quote: "Some say it's the government. Some say it's the CIA, or the Zionists, or the Bavarian Illuminati. I know that's all hogwash. All of the world's problems can be attributed to two groups that are forever at war: vampires and werewolves."

Prelude: All you ever wanted in life was to be left alone. A fair wage for a hard day's work shouldn't have been too much to ask. You're an American, and thought you had rights, but you took the privileges given you by the U.S. Constitution for granted. Then your world went to hell. The banks foreclosed on the family farm, you lost your job to foreign competition, and you found yourself living in the back of a camper. The rifle you stowed under the blankets became the only thing you could trust.

Fortunately, there were organizations for disgruntled Americans like you. You started going to meetings for the free food, and the politics sounded just about right. They spoke with reverence about the Right to Bear Arms, the Right to Travel Freely, and just the Right to Peaceable Assembly. Maybe they were a little too extreme, but they treated you like a friend when no one else did. You knew the words they chanted: "Whenever any form of government cannot accomplish these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it..." Inspired by that phrase, they had formed a struggling but idealistic American militia.

Unfortunately, the more you listened to them, the more elaborate their politics and conspiracies theories became. No two of them could really agree on who the real enemy was, who was to blame, who should be punished, or even what their militia should do. You showed up to their meetings regularly, but you were disappointed when they turned out to be all talk. You wanted action. You wanted justice.

Then, while starving and desperate, you were Infected for the first time. It started out as pneumonia, but ended up in the greatest gift you could ever hope for. You had dreams of new family, one that lived in secret throughout the United States. They were a lot like your old allies but they actually took action. Everyone in your squad agreed on a set of common goals and actually helped each other to achieve them. Now you've got places to hide, a steady supply of provisions, and a war you think you're actually winning. To hell with the American government. You now serve a higher authority. You're a Warrior for the Ratkin Race.

Concept: As a human, you were on the verge of welfare. As a Ratkin, you've got a place to sleep, a way to get food, and a mission in life. You consider solidarity in your pack to be very important, so you want to make sure everyone believes in the same goals. You've made a Contract with them: You'll help the pack in its short-term objectives as long as they help you in your armed resistance to the U.S. Government from time to time. You don't plan to blow up any federal buildings soon, for the time being, you'll wage your war one skirmish at a time.

Roleplaying Hints: You have your own interpretations of "traditional American values." You are a warrior in a secret militia, one far beyond anything you've seen before. Be really careful where you disclose your political affiliations; you don't want to blow your cover too easily. Evaluate other members of the Ratkin Movement cautiously — distinguishing potential allies from crackpots is critical. You've got to be stoic. If you wait long enough, you know that your chance to strike back will come.

Equipment: pick-up truck, several rifles with ammunition, small plot of land, old computer with low baud modem (for accessing local bulletin boards), well-worn bible

RATKIN

Name:	Breed: <i>Human</i>	Nature:
Player:	Tribe/Plague: <i>The Rat Race</i>	Demeanor:
Chronicle:	Aspect: <i>Warrior</i>	Concept: <i>Abilix Axi</i>

Attributes		
Physical	Social	Mental
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wisdom: ●●●●●

Abilities		
Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Computer: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●●	Leadership: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Performance: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Primal Urge: ●●●●●	Repair: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●●	Smith: ●●●●●	Rituals: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●

Advantages		
Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
Skills (the bag of tricks): ●●●●●	Shadow: Three	
Flair: ●●●●●	Law of Rat	
Resources: ●●●●●	Stick Bass	

Reputation	Rage	Health
Infamy: ●●●●●	●●●●●	Tough: <input type="checkbox"/>
Obligation: ●●●●●	●●●●●	Bruised: <input type="checkbox"/>
Cunning: ●●●●●	●●●●●	Hurt: <input type="checkbox"/> -1
Rank: ●●●●●	●●●●●	Injured: <input type="checkbox"/> -1
		Wounded: <input type="checkbox"/> -2
		Mauled: <input type="checkbox"/> -2
		Crippled: <input type="checkbox"/> -5
		Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>
		Strength/Weakness
		Made Slaves, Buff & Tough!
		Mood Cool



Bad Girl

Quote: "Take me. Now. No, not here!"

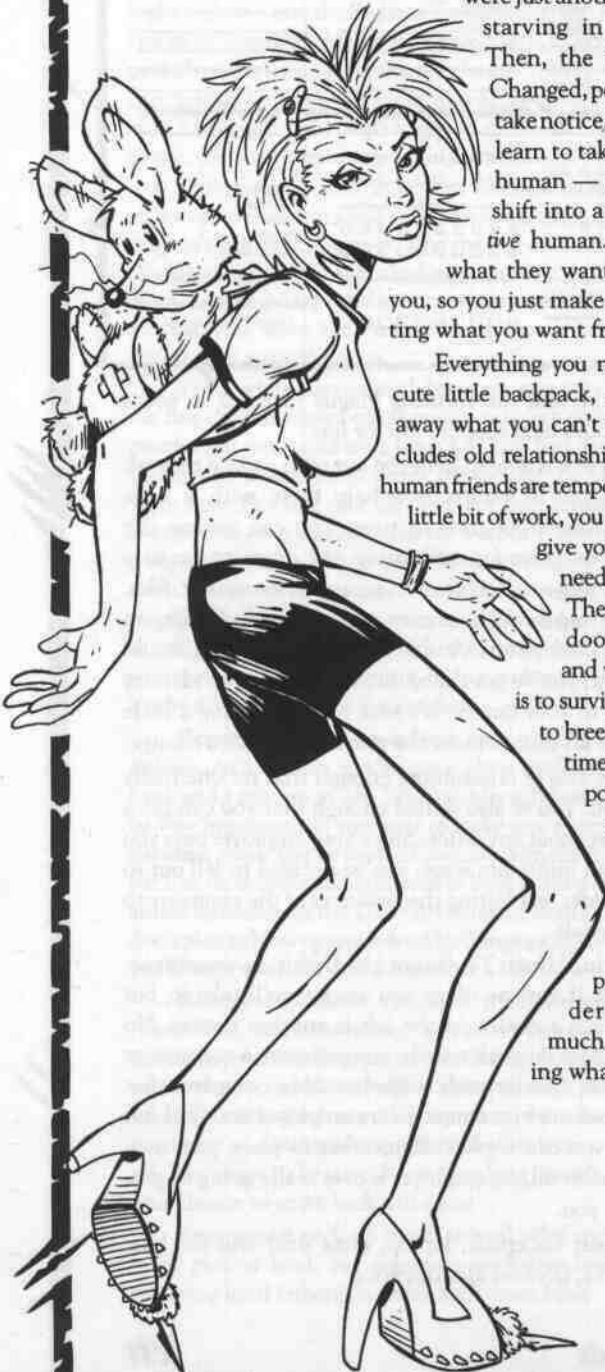
Prelude: You're a tease. No one knows where you came from, but everyone seems to have ideas about where you're going. Someone once described you as a "serial girlfriend," going from one guy to the next to get what you need. You rarely, if ever, have to pay rent... not in cash, anyway. You've never had trouble finding a couch to crash on, but you've always had trouble saying good-bye. That's why you just disappear when you feel you're not wanted anymore.

Maybe that lowers people's opinion of you, but, hey! You're new at this "human" thing! There's a reason why you never talk about your parents or family: they're rats. The first time you were Infected, no one gave a damn about you. You

were just another diseased rat starving in an alleyway. Then, the first time you Changed, people started to take notice. You didn't just learn to take the form of a human — you learned to shift into a *darned attractive* human. People know what they want to take from you, so you just make a point of getting what you want from them first.

Everything you need fits into a cute little backpack, and you throw away what you can't carry. That includes old relationships. All of your human friends are temporary, but with a little bit of work, you can get them to give you whatever you need. What the hell? The human race is doomed anyway, and your goal in life is to survive long enough to breed. In the meantime, you'll make a point of seizing everything you can along the way.

Concept: Some people don't understand how much work it is doing what you do. It's a



RATKIN

Name:	Breed: <i>Endless</i>	Nature:
Player:	Tribe/Plague:	Demeanor:
Chronicle:	Aspect: <i>Warrior</i>	Concept: <i>Bad Girl</i>

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●	Charisma	●●●●	Perception	●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●
Stamina	●●●●	Appearance	●●●●	Will	●●●●

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●●	Animal Ken	●●●●	Computer	●●●●
Athletics	●●●●	Drive	●●●●	Enigmas	●●●●
Brawl (High Kick)	●●●●	Etiquette	●●●●	Investigation	●●●●
Dodge	●●●●	Firearms	●●●●	Law	●●●●
Empathy	●●●●	Leadership	●●●●	Linguistics	●●●●
Expression	●●●●	Misdeeds	●●●●	Medicine	●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●	Performance	●●●●	Occult	●●●●
Primal-Urge	●●●●	Repair	●●●●	Politics	●●●●
Streetwise	●●●●	Stealth	●●●●	Rituals	●●●●
Subterfuge	●●●●	Survival	●●●●	Science	●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	
British (Shoes?)	●●●●	Beast Youth	_____
Resource	●●●●	Absolute Balance	_____
_____	●●●●	Slicing Teeth	_____
_____	●●●●	_____	_____
_____	●●●●	_____	_____

Renown

Infamy	●●●●●●●●
Obligation	□□□□□□□□
Cunning	●●●●●●●●
Rank	□□□□□□□□

Rage

_____	●●●●●●●●
_____	□□□□□□□□

Gnosis

_____	●●●●●●●●
_____	□□□□□□□□

Willpower

_____	●●●●●●●●
_____	□□□□□□□□

Health

Tough	□
Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

Strength/Weakness

Blade Slaves, Buff & Tough/
Blood Lust

highly refined skill; in fact, it's an art. There are people out there who are lonely, and you fulfill their needs. Of course, their weakness eventually fills you with contempt, but it's only natural for the higher life forms to prey on the weaker ones. You have no intention of living the life of the weak, enduring a minimum wage job as some counter jockey. Instead, you seek out people who are doing well, and give them exactly what they expect from you.

Roleplaying Hints: Remember who your real friends are. A Ratkin will always choose to betray a human before exploiting one of her own kind. Human lovers and boyfriends are disposable; use and discard them as necessity dictates. Ratkin treat you with more respect, and you'll stick by them if they do right by you. Unfortunately, you've also got a weakness. You'll do just about anything to help out other Ratkin, and sometimes you get burned. Ironic, isn't it?

Equipment: latest clothes (the old ones keep getting discarded), make-up case, lingerie, someone else's money and house key, really incredible fetish shoes

Fetish: Cruel Shoes. This highly fashionable footwear reduces the difficulty of all high-kicks by 2. The wearer must be in Homid form to use this ability.

Lab Rat Activist

Quote: "No animal should be caged. Humans like to build cages for themselves, but all animals should run free. I know. I hold the key."

Prelude: You were always smarter than the other rats in the lab. The day the scientists injected you with Experimental Serum X-33, it changed your life forever. A week of debilitating disease created a mind of devious capabilities. Of course, the bad men in white coats never realized how brilliant you had become. The fools! They studied you while you ran mazes and pushed levers, but at the same time, you were studying them! Not bad for a small albino rodent, eh?

Late at night, you escaped from your cage to see what they were doing to the other animals. Over several months, you learned your way around the Big Shiny Place. Such barbarity. So many horrors. Rabbits trapped on giant tables, unable to blink away the chemicals seeping into their eyes. Dogs trapped in tiny cages, whining for someone to rescue them. Chimpanzees bled and drugged and bled again. You vowed that one day you'd escape, and return to make the white coats pay.

You helped other promising rats escape, and even Infected them with the plague that courses through your veins. Not far from the Big Shiny Place, you eventually set up a small colony of rats who have now infested the walls.

You raided the labo-



RATKIN

Name:	Breed: <i>Rodent</i>	Nature:
Player:	Tribe/Plague:	Demeanor:
Chronicle:	Aspect: <i>Engineer</i>	Concept: <i>Animal Activist</i>

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength.....●●●●●	Charisma.....●●●●●	Perception.....●●●●●
Dexterity.....●●●●●	Manipulation.....●●●●●	Intelligence.....●●●●●
Stamina.....●●●●●	Appearance.....●●●●●	Wis.....●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness.....●●●●●	Animal Ken.....●●●●●	Computer.....●●●●●
Athletics.....●●●●●	Drive.....●●●●●	Enigmas.....●●●●●
Brawl.....●●●●●	Etiquette.....●●●●●	Investigation.....●●●●●
Dodge.....●●●●●	Firearms.....●●●●●	Law.....●●●●●
Empathy.....●●●●●	Leadership.....●●●●●	Linguistics.....●●●●●
Expression.....●●●●●	Meloe.....●●●●●	Medicine.....●●●●●
Intimidation.....●●●●●	Performance.....●●●●●	Occult.....●●●●●
Primal-Urge.....●●●●●	Repair.....●●●●●	Politics.....●●●●●
Streetwise.....●●●●●	Stealth.....●●●●●	Rituals.....●●●●●
Subterfuge.....●●●●●	Survival.....●●●●●	Science.....●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
Scholar (Master/Expert/Legend).....●●●●●	Small Hitman.....	
Tweak Tinker.....●●●●●	Sustained.....	
.....●●●●●	Scroungy.....	
.....●●●●●		
.....●●●●●		

Resonance

Inflamy	Rage	Health
●●●●●	●●●●●	Bruised.....□
□□□□□	□□□□□	Hurt.....-1 □
□□□□□	□□□□□	Injured.....-1 □
□□□□□	□□□□□	Wounded.....-2 □
□□□□□	□□□□□	Mauled.....-2 □
□□□□□	□□□□□	Crippled.....-5 □
□□□□□	□□□□□	Incapacitated.....□
□□□□□	□□□□□	
□□□□□	□□□□□	
□□□□□	□□□□□	

Gnosis

Obligation	Willpower	Strength/Weakness
●●●●●	●●●●●	Jury Rig, Tink, Stunts/
□□□□□	□□□□□	They Call You Road
□□□□□	□□□□□	
□□□□□	□□□□□	
□□□□□	□□□□□	

ratory for supplies, secretly building and making devices to help your colony thrive. Finally, the anger grew so great that you discovered your ultimate weapon: Crinos form. After the First Change, revenge was finally yours!

Concept: After a glorious night of animal liberation, you took to the road with your Kinfolk companions, fleeing the retribution of the white coats. Weeks of furtive travel led you to an underground of others of your kind. You now take up crash space with other Ratkin, and you've learned of humanity's other infamous crimes. Corporate exploitation. Environmental desecration. Victimization of their own kind. Together with your rodent companions, you will travel anywhere, oppose anyone, build any weapon necessary to make the humans pay!

Roleplaying Hints: Your rodent companions think you are mad. You prefer the word "visionary." As your genius grows, you're insight into human technology increases. You must use the humans' own weapons against them. First, you must punish the humans who have declared war on the animal kingdom. Next, you must raid human habitations to get the supplies you need for more weapons and devices. Finally, you must raise an army to continue this crusade, so that the rats can finally fight back! Keep hidden! The white coats are about, and there is work to do!

Weakness: Technological Fascination

Equipment: string, batteries, dedicated backpack, shiny things, transistor tubes, hidden stash of duct tape

Notable Ratkin

The Giant Rat of Sumatra

The Victorian Age created legends that will live on forever. Some are regaled in the history of mankind, but the secret history of the world celebrates more nefarious heroes. The Giant Rat of Sumatra is one such creature, a rodent genius esteemed as a mastermind of crime. Spawned of the docks of an Indonesian fishing village, his titanic intellect had humble beginnings. His tale began with a common, bloated wharf rat.

For this scarred rodent, life was simple, consisting mainly of raiding the local fish market at the end of each day. Theft came naturally to the local rats, especially with so much surplus food about. The history of crime would be changed forever, however, when a Indian ship containing medical supplies and cheap whisky entered the harbor. The manifest didn't list the stowaways on board: a pack of rats carrying an exotic plague. Disembarking in the tiny village, the foreigners raiding the local market and spread the Birthing Plague with rapturous glee. Pure chance led them to our hero. He took to the Plague immediately and, overwhelmed with ingenious ideas about his true role in the cosmos, boarded the primitive ship to learn more of worlds that he had never truly experienced.

That leaky steamer traveled throughout the British territories, and the wharf rat's body grew as quickly as his intellect. With the passing of years, the self-proclaimed "Giant Rat of Sumatra" soon learned of his brethren throughout the Empire.

Hopping from one tramp steamer to another, he soon developed a criminal empire throughout the seaports of the world. Just as the sun never set on the British Empire, this rodent mastermind gathered resources to rival nations. Night or day, his rodent minions stole anything that took his fancy. His criminal achievements eventually led him to award himself an even more presumptuous title: Sumatran Emperor.

As the Emperor grew older, he not only gained a dislike for travel with anything less than the height of opulence, but also a fascination with the hidden cults of the Far East. To fulfill his greed, he dispatched his minions to gain information he could use in his criminal enterprises. The most successful secret society that resulted was that of the Ratkin Thuggees, dreadful assassins of legendary prowess. This was, of course, the origin of the most extensive rat family in the Far East, one of the mysterious deadly plagues.

The Sumatran Emperor passed down his title to the eldest of his one hundred (mostly Kin) children shortly before his death. Heirs to the throne have preserved and expanded his criminal empire ever since. Ratkin would not dare openly profess to serve the nefarious schemes of the latest Sumatran Emperor, but any wererat who contends with one of the Thuggee learns of the deadly legacy of the Giant Rat of Sumatra.

Johnny Y2K

In the words of Oingo Boingo: Johnny was bad; even as a child, everybody could tell. His mother was Lisa Trash-80, a Ratkin Engineer who grew up in the walls of an IBM facility in Texas. She fell in love with a rather insidious Plague Lord who had been spreading diseases in the building's ventilation shafts. The result of their torrid affair was about 95 baby rats in the year that followed, including one metis child with an affinity for hard-drives, viruses and system crashes. Since he was the runt of the litter, his parents just called him Johnny.

This anonymous Ratkin watched the evolution of computer viruses from their earliest origins. Rat packs shunned him, but he found allies lurking in the wiring of his vast corporate home. By whispering to the wiring of the computer network, he learned the many names of computer spirits, along with the Chiminage they demanded. Johnny stopped at nothing to learn of the latest developments in computer viruses. Johnny soon began taking credit for the havoc wreaked by many common computer viruses. Since then, he insists that he has helped further their evolution. How much of his accomplishments are real and how much is hype remains a topic of debate.

By 1999, his greatest accomplishment involved his most epic lie: a computer virus so deadly that it could theoretically tear down every network in the world. Johnny spent months traveling to revels throughout the United States, hyping his alleged accomplishment for all it was worth. As a result, he's spawned an urban legend in the world of humans, who continue to tell the tale of the legendary "Y2K bug." As of this writing, some of the more gullible mundanes he's victimized plan to shut down bank accounts, stockpile cash and lock their doors on the eve of the millennium. Even if his story is a lie, the





amount of effort businesses have taken to counteract Johnny's plan has done far more damage than most viruses ever could.

Taking credit for the hype, Johnny has taken the name of this infection and added it to his own epithet, proclaiming himself Johnny Y2K. After nearly ten years of Internet romances, he has settled down to mentor hundreds of ratlings with hacking in their blood. Their motivation for tearing down the computer networks of the world is simple — they'll admit that they did it out of respect for their mentor. Ask any Ratkin hacker why he brought a start-up company to its knees, and he'll give you the obvious response: He did it for Johnny.

Momma Rat

"Wesley! Get momma's prying bar..."

—Lisa Simpson, in a horrible, horrible dream, *The Simpsons*

From birth, Momma lived her whole life in a Southern burrow, one where the weak died and the strong bred. After her first Infection in the early 60's, she realized her two true missions in life: to survive and to breed. After a lifetime of devoted service to the Rat God, she's the proud mother of thousands of little children, many of whom attend to her needs around the clock. This is hardly surprising, since the Birthing Plague left her with a rather amazing genetic affliction. In Homid form, Momma now weighs over half a ton. Both accomplishments have earned her a place of honor as a white trash goddess.

Since 1972, Momma has lived in an enormous white trailer. This is just as well, since Momma is now incapable of leaving the trailer in Homid form without destroying it. Even in Rodens form, she is barely able to fit through the door, and would just as soon not leave. Packs of Ratkin and their Kinfolk who revere her fecundity steal and seize the goodies needed to maintain her extravagant lifestyle. Each week, an honor guard of attendants carries out the mass of food containers, candy wrappers and supermarket tabloids that accumulate. They later bestow these treasures upon Trash Gafflings, highly-esteemed Bone Gnawers, colonies where favored offspring live, and random, bewildered mundane humans.

Metis Ratkin contest for the honor of pulling Momma's trailer behind an ever-changing cavalcade of broken-down cars and rusty pick-up trucks. Her knowledge of the many trailer parks and empty lots of North America is nothing short of incredible. Her real fantasy, however, is to travel around the world. Life abroad would no doubt puzzle her, though, since it in no way resembles what she sees of foreign countries on TV soap operas. Once every five years, Momma undergoes a dramatic Umbral quest to the fabled Television Realm, where she is able to visit her favorite soap stars in person.

She has also built a shrine in the spirit world to her greatest idol, Elvis Aron Presley. At the heart of this terrifying labyrinth is a wax effigy, allegedly the prop used to weigh down Elvis' coffin after his death was faked. Three of Momma's children are also named "Elvis" — all of them are Tunnel Runners capable of impersonating the King with an amazing degree of skill. Ratkin who seek out Momma Rat know that if there's an Elvis sighting



anywhere in the world, a sudden depletion in snack cakes in a Southern town, or a trailer park filled far beyond capacity with servitors of the Rat God, this goddess is no doubt nearby.

Danny "Diz" Walton

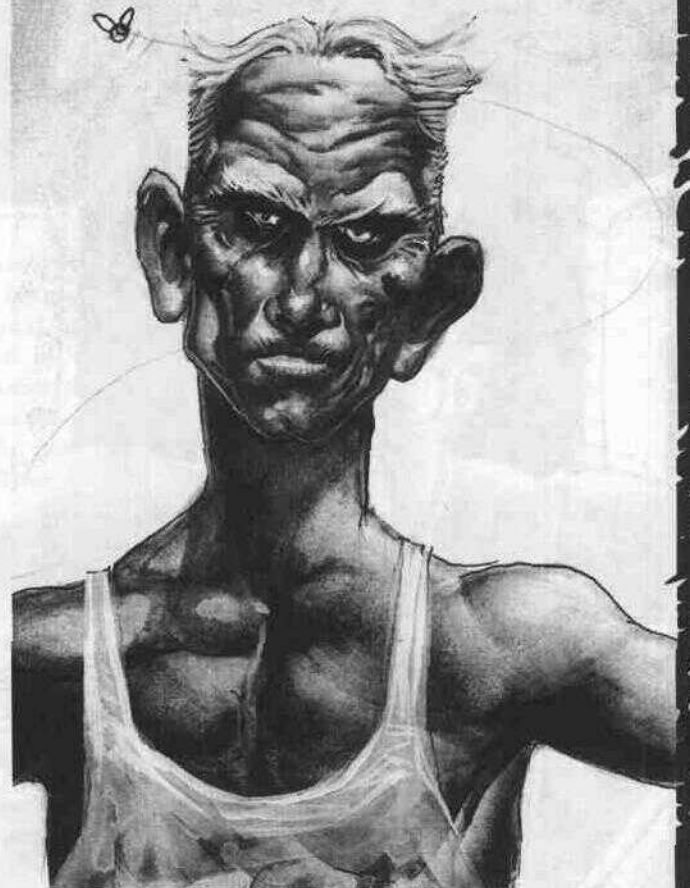
Born in rural Midwestern America in the early part of the century, Danny Walton had a dream... and someone else stole it from him. Throughout his childhood, Danny was a talented cartoonist, forever amusing the other children at his orphanage with drawings of fanciful rodents. He earned his pocket change running errands for the local newspaper, with aspirations of one day selling his etchings for the funny pages. Of all his delightful caricatures, his favorite was a charming little rat named Ricky. Young Danny had a dream. Someday, the young man thought, Ricky would live in a giant castle. Children from all over the world would come to visit him. His remarkably goofy stories earned him a nickname: "Diz."

Then one horrible day in the late 30's, Diz Walton saved up his pennies to see a moving picture at the local cinematorium. Before the film began, right after the newsreel, Diz saw an animated film that filled him with rage. Before his very eyes, a curiously familiar cartoon rodent piloted a musical steamboat. The shock was unspeakable! Someone had stolen his dream! An animated mouse with a remarkable resemblance to Ricky Rat was dancing and singing upon the silver screen!

Diz grew bitter, and descended into obscurity. He later acquired a job writing ad copy and obituaries for the local paper, but the only art he ever sold involved advertisements for nearby hardware stores. Legal complications prevented him from ever publishing the whimsical adventures of Ricky Rat, and an unfortunate and unexpected run-in with Hollywood lawyers discouraged him from ever pursuing his dream again. A lifetime of poverty, aggravated by watching his rival attain fame and fortune, made him a bitter man. Though once a patriotic good-hearted American, Diz Walton began drinking and smoking to excess. By the 1960's, his health began to fail, and the fifty year old man succumbed to his first bouts of pneumonia.

Then Infection set in. It would change his life forever.

Driven to the brink of madness, Diz Walton underwent the Change for the first time. The experience shattered what was left of his fragile sanity, as Diz realized he could *actually* become Ricky Rat. As a dirty old man in rodent form, he lived a double life. By day, poor suffering Diz was trapped in a state nursing home, but by night, Ricky Rat lived out his wildest fantasies. Each night, he would escape from the old folk's home to enjoy the best strip joints, sleazy bars, whorehouses and



gambling dens the city had to offer. As a boozing, promiscuous, foul-mouthed old man, his epic debauchery has become the stuff of Ratkin legends.

Now, thirty years later, Ricky Rat is a feisty octogenarian. He has vowed to carry out a titanic act of vengeance before he dies: He dreams of destroying the happiest place on Earth, the largest amusement park in the world. Ricky has already begun calling upon his distant relatives, assembling rat packs devoted to this one goal. From his latest nursing home in Iowa, Ricky Rat awaits the day when he can retake the magic castle, abduct a harem of nubile young tourist princesses to breed with, and finally rule over his magical kingdom, the realm that should have always been his. Every evening, he begins his nocturnal activities by gazing off into the night sky to receive visions of how he can tear down his rival's empire. No doubt it's just a matter of time. After all, when you wish upon a star...

Appendix Three: The Real World

"This weekend I saw this big fat guy and he didn't no anything about Rat, fat guy. Damn! Do yu live under a rok?"

— Scumdangle Elfbiter

Rat Facts

Rats are creatures of extremes, capable of shocking horrors... or unexpected kindness. When these cunning little rodents are in the wild, they can easily live up to some of the worst urban legends. Anyone who has raised or bred rats knows that they're quite different when they're domesticated. Pet rats can be affectionate, loyal and generally charming.

The best way to understand the psychology of a rat is to raise one as a companion. This requires patience, dedication and hours and hours of quality time. Though they require attention and affection (as all pets do!), rats don't eat much, don't bark at anything that walks past their cages, and don't shred furniture. They are generally clean, kind and devoted. Try telling the average person that, however, and you'll get hit with fierce skepticism. After all, rats are supposed to be diseased, disloyal, treacherous, self-centered and downright dangerous. Facts about feral rats can be frightening, but shouldn't dissuade you from investigating more about these remarkable creatures.

In short, rats can make for feral nuisances or devoted pets, depending on their upbringing. With this in mind, we've added some advice on researching rats first hand. The history of the Ratkin race has shown what happens to these cunning creatures when they're forced to extremes. Although we've successfully uncovered some of the seedier breeding grounds of the World of Darkness, this book wouldn't be complete if we didn't take a look at rats in the real world.

Family Muridae, Genus Rattus

The word "rat" has many different meanings, depending on the context in which its used. Generally, it refers to the over 500 species of the genus *Rattus* within the family *Muridae*. Loosely, it may also include moderately-sized rodents of other families, including the bamboo rat, cane rat, kangaroo rat, wood rat, pack rat, rice rat and spiny rat. For the purposes of this book, and when the word "rat" is usually invoked, it refers to one of two species: *Rattus norvegicus*, the "brown rat," or *Rattus rattus*, the "black rat."

The black rat is one of the most infamous rodents, both for its historical accomplishments and its urban invasions. *Rattus rattus* is the species associated with the Black Plague, the epidemic that wiped out a fourth of Europe in the 13th century and continues its tiny reign of terror today. Granted, the plague is far less prevalent in the world than it was seven centuries ago, but its reputation is still impressive. *Rattus rattus* is also known as the roof rat, Alexandrine rat or climbing rat. To add to the confusion, it's also referred to as the "gray rat," but the term "black rat" suffices for this book.

Invasions of black rats in the United States have been seriously impaired by colonies of the brown rat, or *Rattus norvegicus*. The rodents in this book are modeled primarily after this species, since most domesticated rats are descended from it. Contrary to its name, the *R. norvegicus* probably originated in East Asia around the time of the Ice Age. Its other names typically depend on the places its found: barn rat, sewer rat, wharf rat and so on. Unlike the black rat, it can dig burrows and swim quite well.

There are a few other notable differences between these two most common species. First off, feral brown rats are larger and more aggressive, and historically have been known to muscle smaller black rats out of their territory. Brown rats prefer the lower levels of buildings, including basements, sewer tunnels, and the burrows that make them so hard to eradicate. By contrast, the black rat is called the "roof rat" because especially thrives in the higher levels of buildings. It is smaller and more agile, and capable of making leaps up to 8 feet. The two types of Rat-spirits in *Axis Mundi* — Roof Rat Gafflings and Tenement Rat Gafflings — correspond to these two species.

In the wild, distinguishing the brown rat from the black rat can take a bit of work. The brown rat has a chubby body shape and short muzzle, while the black rat has a slender body shape and elongated muzzle. The average brown rat is several ounces heavier than the average black rat, but also has a shorter tail and smaller ears. The two names are admittedly confusing, because they both come in a wide variety of colors, largely because rat genes are so prone to mutation over successive generations.

Rats of Many Colors

Brown rats and black rats are actually multicolored rodents. It is not uncommon for a young rat to develop fur quite different from those of its parents. Rat coats usually come in one of two patterns: solid or spotted. Solid colors include brown, black, gray, light gray, yellow, lilac, sandy, silver and, of course, albino. Spotted patterns include hooded coats (white bodies with dark heads and a long stripe along the back), Irish rats (white with spots on the belly), and the rare color-pointed pattern (dark nose and paws).

One of the most common patterns is *agouti*, a type of banded coloring used as camouflage. By contrast, restricted spotting — white fur, except for limited color around the eyes and ears — is very rare. Mixed-bred males with this type of coat become sterile around 3 months, while purebred restricted rats die soon after birth. Regardless of coloring, all rats share the same basic traits.

Feeding and Breeding

Rats and mice are *commensal* animals; that is, they can live off the food humans gather and take shelter in their homes. Like humans, rats are omnivorous — both readily adapt to a wide variety of diets. Wild rats prefer to scavenge within a short distance of their nest. Wherever garbage is plentiful, sanitation is poor, and food is easy to find, wild rats will thrive. Of course, owners of pet rats are far more selective about what their pets eat — nutrition is important!

The gestation period of a rat is between 21 and 23 days. Up until about the 16th day, the mother doesn't mind being near other rats, but after that day, it's a good idea to isolate her. Male rats have been known to cannibalize their own young, and mothers do not nurse as well when they are living with a group of rats. The average litter typically has between 6-12 pups. A rat mother usually bears between three and seven litters in a year, although she can bear up to 12 litters (and over a hundred pups) if she really needs to. She can also bear children from several different rats. It takes an average of an hour and a half to deliver a litter of pups.

Rat pups are weaned around 21 days, begin puberty around 50 days, and are ready to breed within 65 to 100 days after being born. They are most fertile between 3 and 10 months. Menopause begins around 15 months, and old age begins at 24. The average life span of a rat is from 2 to 5 years.

A Very Brief History

Rats are also among the most precocious travelers in the world. They've spread their kind across every continent, save for Antarctica (although many are kept as research subjects there!) They can live in every climate, save for Arctic temperatures (although a close cousin of the rat, the lemming, can live in such extremes). Scientists suspect that the rat's epic, world-spanning infestation began in one part of the world: Before the Ice Age, rats originated in China, India and the Far East.

Later, as these cultures traded with other parts of the world, rats aboard their ships traveled with them. There is archaeological evidence of rats in Europe as early as the 6th century, even though the earliest written records of the black rat in Europe only date from the 13th century. The high population of black rats led to one of the most notorious events in rodent history: the Black Plague, which killed about one-fourth the population of Europe. The disease was actually spread by rat-borne fleas carrying the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, although rare strains of the plague today can be spread by rat bites. Three waves of the epidemic forever altered human history, and the threat of further epidemics still exists.

By the early part of the 19th century, commoners kept rats for sport, particularly the brutal sport of rat-baiting. A small group of rats would be placed in a pit with a vicious terrier, and spectators would place bets on how long it would take to kill all of the rats. As rat catchers began to breed more rats for this savage amusement, they would sometimes spare the ones with the most unusual coats. By the late 19th century, scientists began the practice of using rats for research. European rats were among the most common, although one of the most famous institutions for such research was the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia. Their size, prolificity, and willingness to accept human contact when raised in laboratories made them ideal subjects.

Feral Rats

Wild rats are known as highly destructive vermin and carriers of disease. Rats destroy stored food, crops and homes. They can also spread disease through urine and feces, bite wounds or as hosts to disease-carrying fleas.

Rats are notorious for chewing holes in wood, wiring and other household items. Legends and roleplaying games notwithstanding, they don't do this out of an urge towards revenge or destruction. Rats chew on things to prevent their teeth from growing too fast. A rat's teeth grow approximately five inches each year — in fact, the word "rodent" comes from the Latin word *rodere*, meaning "to gnaw." "Rat-proofing" a building is a relatively easy solution to this nuisance; this

Historical Reputations

Historically, rats have been met with both reverence and disdain. In Ancient Rome, rats were considered symbols of good luck. Rats were considered to be servants of the devil in Europe during the Middle Ages, but there is also a traditional Japanese belief that rats sometimes serve as messengers of the gods. In China, the rat is sometimes considered a symbol of prosperity. This may not be a good thing, however: the idea of a rat prospering off the hard work of men is another common theme in Chinese legends.

involves placing very hard materials along the wainscoting of walls, about the height that rats gnaw. Of course, this won't keep out all rats, but it will minimize the damage they do.

Rats also have an excellent sense of balance, and can easily walk along telephone lines or clotheslines. As a result, most ships now have "rat guards" along their mooring lines to prevent tiny stowaways from gaining easy access. Rats are highly territorial, which explains not only their habit of fighting when a breeding ground becomes overpopulated, but also their feral tendency to contest with humans for buildings. Fortunately, domesticated rats need far less space than wild rats.

Feral rats are infamous for their tendency to harbor dangerous plagues. Diseases transmitted from animals to humans are called *zoonoses*. Feral rats, both black and brown, have been accused of harboring or transmitting more than 20 diseases. For laboratory rats, these illness include salmonella, leptospira and *pneumocystis carinii*. However, these lab-bred diseases are not fatal illnesses for most people, save for those with weakened immune systems.

Pet Rats

Scientific experiments in the late 19th century led to another strain of rodent: the semi-domesticated rat. Thanks to rat fanciers of all varieties, over a century of animal husbandry has made the domestic rat better suited to a quieter, less destructive life. Companion rodents are less aggressive, free of disease, and more comfortable with confinement. With a little rodent training (and owner education), a pet rat can respond to her name, perform simple tricks, and even curl up in a pocket to sleep once she has bonded to her owner.

Rats are not inherently filthy animals; their psychological state reflects their environment. If a rat's cage is kept clean, her disposition will be calm; she'll remain inquisitive and affable. Rats actually clean themselves from head to tail up to six times per day. This is done to spread a coat of oil along the fur. Admittedly, they can't control when they'll urinate or defecate, but this is easily compensated for. Cleaning a rat's cage each week is notably simpler than contesting with a cat's litterbox or scooping up after a dog's filthy habits.



Pet rats require patience and devotion. Though initially shy, a domestic rat should be handled at a young age. Handling a rat before it's weaned is, of course, too early — as with other animals, the mother may pick up the strange scent that lingers afterward and reject her offspring. Afterwards, however, the young rodent will be naturally curious, enough so to be fed by hand.

Many rat fanciers prefer purchasing a rat that is quite young, while some specialize in breeding their own to sell to pet stores. Do not bother torturing yourself by looking at rats that are kept as food for snakes and other reptiles. Many pet shops will instead keep their "fancy rats" separate from "feeder rats." If you've found a store that handles its pet rats regularly, you're even more fortunate. If you can find a young pet rat in a kind, clean store, you're on your way to finding a suitable rodent companion.

Raising and training a pet rat takes time. As the rat grows older, he should be handled for at least 10-15 minutes a day — this is essential! Over time, a bond develops between the rat and her human, and both eventually learn to spend more time together. A trained rat is quite content to sit on her human's shoulder to watch what's going on. [Author's Note: In fact, one of my rats is sitting on my shoulder right now. (Time to go to back to your cage, Abigail!)]

As with other pets, it's vital that you only get a pet rat if you're willing to invest the time to care for another creature in your life. Think before you pick up a pet — too many animals have to be destroyed because foolish owners didn't realize that *responsibility* actually comes with pet ownership. Don't be one of these worthless jerks!

Bibliography

Here's the standard disclaimer: This book is intended as a game supplement, not a reference manual. The information in

this appendix is included as an aid to further research — after reading through it, you should find consulting expert sources much easier. As always, if you need more detail, go right to the sources: the reference materials listed in the bibliography. Some of the works in the bibliography may not seem obvious choices at first, but each of them has at least a few nifty ideas for a Ratkin chronicle. Like any good rodent, if you scrounge long enough, hopefully you'll find what you're looking for. Enjoy.

Non-Fiction

Rats: A Complete Pet Owner's Manual by Himsel

Rats by Susan Fox

Rats, Lice and History by Zinsser

Fiction

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH by O'Brien

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White

The Swords of Lankmar by Fritz Leiber

"The Rats in the Walls" and "Dreams in the Witch House," by H.P. Lovecraft

Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rostand

Inspirational Films and Television Programs

Charlotte's Web

Ben and Willard

The Abyss

Serendipitous Inspiration

Gremlins

The People Under the Stairs

The Baron Munchausen

Roleplaying Game

Feng Shui and Pendragon

Bunnies and Burrows

Watership Down

"So everyone still keeps on loving us because weer the best. Hooray Rat!"

— Scumdangle Elfbiter



RACKIN

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed:
Tribe/Plague:
Aspect:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Concept:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Repair	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Rituals	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

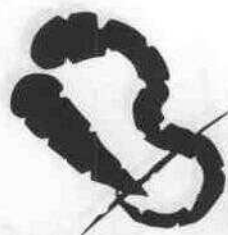
Advantages

Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
○○○○○	_____	_____
○○○○○	_____	_____
○○○○○	_____	_____
○○○○○	_____	_____
○○○○○	_____	_____

<p>Renown</p> <p>○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>	<p>Rage</p> <p>○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>	<p>Health</p> <p>Bruised <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Obligation</p> <p>○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>	<p>Gnosis</p> <p>○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>	
<p>Cunning</p> <p>○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>	<p>Willpower</p> <p>○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>	<p>Strength/Weakness</p>
<p>Rank</p> <p>□□□□□□□□□□□□□□</p>		



RATKINTM



Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Expanded Background

Colony	Mentor

Contacts

Plague

Freak Factor

Resources

Possessions

Gear (Carried): _____

Equipment (Owned): _____

Crash Space

Size: _____

Location: _____

Experience

TOTAL: _____

Gained From: _____

TOTAL SPENT: _____

Spent On: _____

