

# ***ATTACK OF THE GIANT RATS***



by Manu Saxena

### **How it Went this Time**

I'd figured I'd learned everything I wanted to from doing my first 24 hour game (The Hidden World), which was an interesting and informative experience but somewhat unpleasant when the physiological consequences of sleep deprivation caught up with me :-). Then Ron Edwards goes and makes up this crazy contest, full of fabulous prizes to be won! Well, it's labor day weekend and I had some extra time... so why not?

This time, though, I was kind to myself – I slept a full 6+ hours. As a result the game is shorter and not as fancy with not quite as many images, etc. but my perceptual and cognitive systems are still functioning normally :-). I will say that there's a lot to be said for writing quickly; it seems to me when done fast enough your creativity gets ahead of your “inner critic” and the ideas just flow. Whether they're any good or not is another matter...

The two words I chose for this game (from Ron Edwards's contest) were “rat” and “hatred”. Inspiration for elements of the rules came from a variety of sources: *Risus*, *The Riddle of Steel*, *Ars Magica*, *Sorcerer*, and *Savage Worlds* being the most obvious. But the basic thing I did was keep the adventure ideas I had in mind and try to write rules that would produce the kind of action I wanted in those adventures.

I hope you enjoy this attempt at a game!

*Attack of the Giant Rats* is copyright © 2005 by Manu Saxena. Permission granted to distribute in any form as long as no fee is charged for this. The images are from the NIH website and require no special permission to use.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>HISTORY: RISE OF THE RATS</b>	<b>P. 4</b>
<b>CHARACTER CREATION</b>	<b>P. 7</b>
<b>SYSTEM RULES</b>	<b>P. 9</b>
<b>CHECKS</b>	<b>P. 9</b>
<b>CONFLICTS</b>	<b>P. 11</b>
<b>DAMAGE</b>	<b>P. 13</b>
<b>WEAPONS &amp; ARMOR</b>	<b>P. 15</b>
<b>MUTANT POWERS</b>	<b>P. 15</b>
<b>ADVANCEMENT</b>	<b>P. 16</b>
<b>RATS AND THEIR KIND</b>	<b>P. 16</b>
<b>RAT HATRED FACTORS</b>	<b>P. 17</b>
<b>GIANT SNAKES</b>	<b>P. 18</b>
<b>ADVENTURE IDEAS</b>	<b>P. 19</b>

## ***RISE OF THE RATS: A HISTORY LESSON***

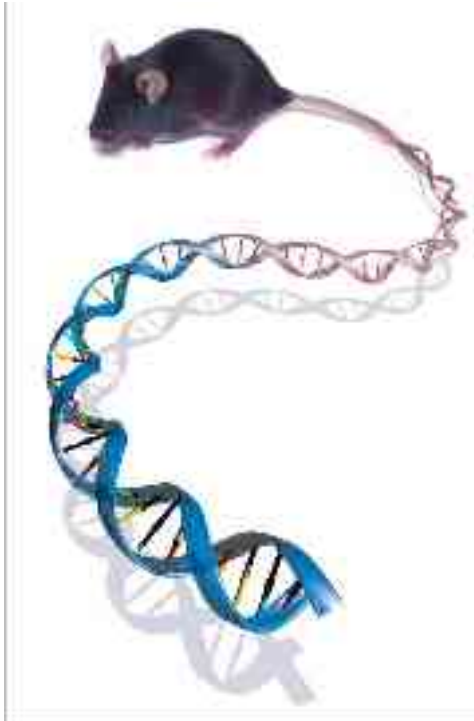
What? You want me to tell you about history? How the conflict between the great rats and the humans started? I suppose I can do that for you, as knowledge is a precious thing and I do wish to gift you with it.

Some say it started with the Great Swarm. The Great Swarm started shortly after the second decade of the 21st century began, but rats had been the most heavily used laboratory animal since the middle of the twentieth century, and this was no less true in the beginning of the twenty-first. Genetic experiments on rats met with little protest from most people, as rats were not seen as especially sympathetic creatures. Some argue today that this lack of sympathy led the humans to their undoing and the fall of

mankind from their special place on earth.

Certainly some rats argue this today: humans had made quite a mess of things, and it was simply time for mother nature to choose another species as earth's steward.

But that's jumping ahead a bit! From what we can reconstruct now, several genetic experiments were conducted to turn rats into a kind of growth medium for human tissues, so that if for example one lost an ear - or had kidney failure - they could get a transplant from a rat. This project had some initial success, but then things began to happen that no one anticipated. As a side effect of the genetic engineering, some of the rats began to increase in both size and intelligence.



At first this was ignored as irrelevant, but then a certain pharmaceutical company (which was owned by a giant agribusiness firm, which was owned in its turn by an oil company) began to see the business potential behind this development. Rats were bred and engineered

for greater and greater size and intelligence. Large dog-sized rats were taught to recognize verbal commands, and were used to perform difficult and dangerous tasks like clearing minefields, disposing of hazardous wastes, etc. Still larger rats were engineered and used to perform various kinds of menial labor.

What happened next shocked the world: some rats began to speak. It's still not clear exactly how this happened – perhaps by scientists conducting clandestine experiments - but happen it did. While many were awed by this and wanted to learn from it, more were horrified, calling it an abomination. In response to public pressure, the agribusiness company moved to exterminate the speaking rats, but to their shock found that a male-female pair had escaped.

The giant rats retained their ability to breed rapidly and frequently, and the escaped pair did so while remaining on the run from human authorities. It is rumored that some sympathetic humans helped to shelter them from harm, but this has yet to be confirmed. Regardless, not only did the rats escape the authorities, but they bred an army of rats in the countryside and secretly organized most of the service rats.

Then one day they struck, and the Great Swarm began. The humans were taken completely by surprise, and were unable to use their worst weapons because it would have meant devastating their own populations. Cities were overrun by rats, and relatively few humans escaped them alive. The slaughter was terrible. The countryside fared a little better, and humans working together were able to beat off

the worst of the attacks and find a way to survive. Some researchers attempted to fight back with a kind of "biological control", and engineered giant snakes to eat the giant rats. Unfortunately, the snakes were just as likely to eat humans as rats, so this didn't do the humans much good overall. Fortunately there aren't that many of the giant snakes still around these days.

Today we're at something of a standoff. The rats have most humans isolated or on the run, but attitudes differ among rats about what to do next. The level of hatred for humans varies widely among rodent kind, with some being quite willing to get along - even learn from - the strange two-legs, while others are so filled with hatred they will not stop until every last two-leg is dead.

So what will happen next, my human friend? Will there be a chance for reconciliation between two-legs like you and four-legs like me? Can we help each other learn to find our proper place in nature, or are we doomed to fight each other until one or the other of us is extinct? I suppose it is up to us to choose...

## ***CHARACTER CREATION***

First, choose a Profession, which can be pretty much anything anyone used to do before the Great Swarm, or learned to do since.

Then divide 10 points among the attributes Physique, Psyche, and your Profession (and a mutant power, if you want one - see below). No attribute should be higher than 6 or lower than 1.

*Physique:* this covers pretty much anything having to do with the body.

*Psyche:* this covers everything mental or spiritual.

*Option: Specialties.* With this option, you can have one specialty in each of your attributes, which entitles you to add an extra die to the roll when the specialty is relevant. Suggested specialties for Physique include strong, agile, fast reflexes, tough constitution, keen vision, etc. For Psyche: intelligent, strong willed, intuitive, etc. For a Profession use something analogous (for example a physician may have a specialty of emergency medicine).

Next choose a Goal, which is what your character cares most passionately about, and a

Weakness of similar potency. Examples of goals: "protecting my community", "keeping my daughter safe", "try to understand the rats", "find my lost brother", "killing rats", etc. You can assign 1 to 3 points to your Goal. A goal adds dice (equal to the number of points of the Goal) to checks when relevant, but must be balanced by a Weakness of an equal # of points and similar generality.

A Weakness can be anything from alcoholism, a gambling addiction, coward in combat, terrified of rats, etc. When your Weakness is relevant, you'll need to make a check against the weakness number in order to proceed normally, or else become incapacitated in some appropriate fashion (start drinking/gambling, running in fear, etc.).

### ***EQUIPMENT:***

You are assumed to be equipped with whatever is standard for your chosen profession.

### ***HERO POINTS:***

New characters start with 2.

### ***HERO DICE:***

At the start of a session, the GM gives everyone a number of Hero Dice equal to their Hero Points. This is the number of Hero Dice that can be spent in one game session. Hero Dice may be rolled during a check or just after the check's been rolled. You can also use Hero Dice to reduce damage: each Hero Die spent reduces the number of wounds taken by 1 (to



do this you must spend the HD right after being hit).

**RAT CHARACTERS:** you may play a Giant Rat, with GM permission. Design your character with the above rules, but choose "Giant Rat" as the profession and add a suitable Weakness, such as "distrustful of most humans (3)", or the like.

***SAMPLE CHARACTER:***

*Malcolm RatHunter*, Profession: Detective (3), Physique (4), Psyche (3). Goal: find sister, who he hasn't seen since the Great Swarm (3). Weakness: Gambling, has trouble turning down a bet (3).

**SYSTEM RULES**

***CHECKS***

When you want your character to perform a task, but the GM doesn't think success would be automatic, you need to make a check. Roll a number of dice equal to the characteristic most relevant to the check, either Physique, Psyche, Profession or Mutant Power. Add some Hero Dice if you wish, and dice from your Goal, if it's applicable. If you do an especially entertaining job describing your action or use especially clever tactics, the GM may give you some extra bonus dice.

Each die getting a 4 or above is a success (I'm assuming you're using d6s here, but you can use any kind of dice - just adjust the success number accordingly: 5 for d8s, 6

for d10s, etc.). If the number of successes equals or exceeds the difficulty level set by the GM (or the number of successes rolled by the opponent, when there is one), the task is a success. If not, it's a failure.

**EXPLOSIONS:** if the dice all show the same number, you can roll again and add in any new successes, and continue as long as you keep getting multiples. If you're rolling only one die it'll explode on a 6 (or whatever the max value of the die you're using is).

**FUMBLES:** if the check is a failure and the highest value shown on a die is a 2 or less, you may have fumbled. Roll three dice: if a 1 comes up, you've fumbled, and the more ones, the worse the fumble. The GM will decide what happens based on these guidelines:

*1 die fumble (i.e., only 1 die shows a one):* embarrassing, and some time may be lost

(example: fumbling with a gun or dropping it so you have to spend an extra turn getting a hold of it).

*2 die fumble:* not only embarrassing but downright dangerous, dropping or breaking an item, possibly hurting oneself (example: dropping a weapon off a bridge, badly jamming a gun, falling so badly one takes damage, etc.)

*3 die fumble:* a major disaster that causes harm to oneself and others (example: pulling the pin on a grenade and dropping it nearby amongst one's companions).

**PUSHING:** You can add extra dice to a check by pushing an attribute. To push, take one or more wounds to some attribute other than the one being used for the current check, and get one bonus die for each wound. The push dice are good only for the one check.

**HELPING OUT:** a player can add a bonus die to another character's check, if they're in a position to help and give up making a similar check of their own that turn.

### **DIFFICULTY LEVELS**

- 1: *Easy*: challenging for someone untrained
- 2: *Moderate*: challenging for a beginner, easy for a pro.
- 3: *Difficult*: challenging for a pro.
- 4: *Very Difficult*: challenging for a master.
- 5: *Unheard of*: a once-in-a-lifetime feat
- 6+: *Superhuman*: task thought to be nearly impossible

### **STORY BARGAIN OPTION:**

Instead of using your successes on the check you may choose to bargain with the GM to trade them in (and fail the check) for something particular happening in the story. For example, suppose you're trying to scale a difficult to climb fence and need to make a Physique check, and suppose you succeed. You can volunteer to fail instead and take the consequences, but in return ask for your group to find a weapons cache nearby, or for something else you want to happen. You can sweeten the pot by offering to give up some Hero Dice also, or by volunteering some other sacrifice (taking an extra wound, having an important piece of equipment break, etc.). It is up to the GM to accept or reject the offer. The more positive or helpful the event you desire,

the greater the sacrifice she will expect from you.

## ***CONFLICTS***

The GM will go around the table in any convenient order, asking everyone involved in the conflict what their player is doing (what task they're trying to accomplish) in the current "turn". A "turn" is a unit of an arbitrary length of time (basically, whatever is convenient in the context), usually equal to the amount of time it takes an average participant to complete an average task in the relevant context - as short as 1 second for combat, as long as minutes, hours or days for other things.

If order (i.e. initiative) matters, the one who gets the higher number of successes on their conflict check (see below) goes first.

*Social Conflict:* a situation may arise where you're trying to convince someone of some important point, and the outcome is of some special dramatic importance. For example, you're trying to convince a town to launch a preemptive attack against a nearby rat warren, but the majority of the town council is against it.

Use checks as usual, using an appropriate Profession or Psyche. If you do a good job detailing or describing what your character is doing and saying, the GM will give you some extra Hero Dice (usually 1 or 2). The GM will also give bonus dice to the side with a tactical edge, whatever that means in the context.

If the conflict is relatively minor, the issue can be decided with just one check: whoever wins the check wins the argument or convinces

the other one to do what they ask. If it's to be more of a dramatic conflict, then use the damage rules (see below).

If there are several people on each side, choose a representative character from each side (this should usually be the person with the highest relevant attribute). The GM will give bonus dice to one side or the other to represent tactical advantage (such as outnumbering the opponents). When the representative takes damage interpret this as the entire side being proportionately affected, in whatever way makes sense in the context.

To include more personal drama, each PC (or especially significant NPC) can perform (and make a check for) their own action done for the common goal, and if successful can add a bonus die or two to their representative's

check (but if failing, the bonus dice go to the other side).

Example: John and one faction of the town is trying to convince the village to attack the nearby rat warren; John is the most capable orator for his side with a Psyche of 4. On the opposing side, Sue of the Town Council is the most capable with a Psyche of 5. Jane, a friend of Sue, wants to help by unraveling a peace banner as Sue gives her speech. Suppose she has to dodge past a security guard to do this, and makes her check successfully. The GM can give a bonus die to Sue's check because of Jane's successful maneuver.

*Ranged Combat* (shooting or throwing things): each individual makes a check against a difficulty level the GM assigns for how tough the shot is (he can take into account everything from the range, the weapon used, size of the

target, its speed, lighting conditions, etc. - but an average difficulty of 2 is suggested for most shots). If the target is actively trying to avoid being hit (giving up any attack that turn), add 1 to the difficulty. For large numbers of participants, use representatives as described above under social conflicts.

*Hand-to-hand Combat:* each fighter makes a check against their opponent's relevant attribute (either Physique or a relevant Profession). For large numbers of participants, use the analogous rules described under social conflicts.

### **DAMAGE**

If using the damage rules, each time a participant loses a check they take a number of wounds - to Psyche for social conflicts, to Physique for physical combat (unless they're

using an appropriate Profession, in which case it goes to the Profession) equal to how much they lost by.

Once a character has taken a number of wounds equal to their attribute or greater they must make a Trauma Check each time they take an additional wound to that attribute. Failing the Trauma Check has the effects detailed below.

### **TRAUMA CHECK**

For wounds to Physique, make a Trauma Check using your Psyche, and vice versa (for Profession choose the higher of Physique or Psyche). The difficulty level to beat is equal to the current excess damage (the total number of wounds minus the attribute value). If you make the Trauma Check, you can act normally.

If you fail, you are *stunned*. You can take no action other than try to make a Trauma Check each turn to try to recover (actions like slow crawling or the like might be allowed in combat). If while stunned you take another wound and fail the TC, you are *Out of It*. Your character can no longer participate in the conflict, and if it's in physical combat he has been critically wounded and is dying (the GM determines how quickly).

### **HEALING**

Happens at a rate determined by the GM. A suggestion is 1 wound per week for physical wounds (halved with good medical care), 8 hours sleep for Psyche.

### **WEAPONS**

Weapons have two ratings, an Attack Bonus and a Damage Bonus. The AB gives you a number of extra dice to roll on the combat check. The DB is the number of extra wounds the weapon causes if hitting.

Examples: handgun (AB:0, DB:+1), big handgun (AB:0, DB:+2), shotgun (AB:+1, DB:+3), machete (AB:+1, DB:+2), Crowbar (AB:+1, DB+1), etc.

### **ARMOR**

Armor blocks a number of wounds equal to its protection rating from each attack. If armor has an encumbrance rating, this is the number of dice you must subtract from your combat check.

## **MUTANT POWERS**

Occasionally, those bitten by a giant rat will develop mutant powers. These can be bought at character creation (or with advancement, if your character has been bitten in game and you have enough Hero Points) just like Physique and Psyche, and function in the same way. You the player says what you want to do, the GM decides if a check is needed and what the difficulty level should be (*GM Note:* for powers that cause damage, a suggestion is to make the difficulty equal to the number of wounds desired, plus one-half the opponent's size or Physique, if relevant). The only difference is that each use of a power causes one wound to it (or you can spend a Hero Die to negate this), with the normal consequences of failing a Trauma Check.

## **Available Powers**

*Telepathy* - see what another person (including a rat-type person) is thinking, or if they're telling the truth.

*Telekinesis* - moving things around with mental power alone

*Pyrokinesis* - burning things mentally

*Boost* - adds bonus dice to another attribute (one's own or another's) for one turn.

*Ones you make up:* 'nuff said!

## **ADVANCEMENT**

The GM will give out Hero Points at the end of each session, usually between 0 (for not contributing anything) and 2 (for doing a lot and being fun). 6 Hero Points can be exchanged for raising 1 attribute 1 point. The player should get an extra point for advancing and acting on



their character Goal, and similarly for playing their Weakness well.

The basic theme of the game asks the question, *Can humans find their proper place in nature?* So extra points should be given anytime the PCs do something that helps to answer this question in the style of your campaign. For example, your group may collectively decide that the answer you want to explore is, “Yes, our proper place is in partnership with nature, including rats”; in that case if a player acts to lessen the level of hatred among rats they should get an extra point. Or, you may choose an “exterminator” answer: “Our proper place is to be on top, and eliminate threats to our supremacy”. In that case players can rack up points for rat scalps. Either way, actions towards the common goal should be rewarded.

## ***RATS AND THEIR KIND***

Giant rats are defined by two things: (1) their size (rated from 1 to 6 or more, 1 being the size of a small dog and 6 being the size of a small bus), and (2) their degree of hatred for humans (rated from 0 to 4).

For most checks, the GM should use the rat's size (and damage is done vs. the size attribute; Trauma Checks should use size also). Hatred functions like the *Goal: destroy humans* would, or in other situations like a *Weakness: distrustful of humans*. If a rat is fighting a human, it gets to add a number of dice equal to its Hatred to its attack checks. If, on the other hand, a rat wanted to converse or join forces with a human, it would have to roll against its Hatred in order to do so.

### **RAT HATRED FACTORS**

(0) *No hatred* - these rats see humans as just another species trying to make it on the earth, as flawed as anyone else

(1) *Antipathy* - these rats see humans as annoying creatures who've caused more than their share of damage to the world and to rodent-kind. They don't aggressively hunt humans, but if a low risk opportunity presents itself they will hunt and eat them.

(2) *Anger* - these unforgiving rats still blame humans for their past treatment of them, and will preferentially hunt and eat them, even at some risk. They usually won't hunt unless they're hungry, though. Groups of angry rats will sometimes force some humans into slavery.

(3) *Active Hatred* - like anger, but a greater intensity. They will hunt humans at every opportunity, even at substantial risk to themselves. They will kill humans just for the sake of killing them. Their reasoning powers are still intact, however.

(4) *Insane Rage* - their hatred of humans is so intense that if they smell even a whiff of humanity they'll charge heedlessly towards the offender and attack, not stopping until they or the human is dead.

A rat's hatred level can be lowered by kind and benevolent behavior (or raised by the reverse). For every few hours a rat is in the company of humans and treated well, the rat must make a check against its hatred factor (with bonuses for especially good or clever treatment by humans); if it succeeds, the hatred

factor goes down by one. Do the reverse for increasing hatred with bad or cruel treatment.

### ***GIANT SNAKES***

As far as anyone knows, these relatively rare creatures aren't as intelligent as either giant rats or humans. If hungry, they'll eat whoever they come across. They're rated by their size alone, which is typically between 6 and 12, and used for all checks. So far there are no reports of poisonous ones...

### ***ADVENTURE IDEAS***

*The Magnificent Seven* - You and your fellow players portray a group of characters living in a sustainable human community in relative peace a few years after the Great Swarm. All appears well when they learn the unwelcome news that a huge hate-filled rat has stirred up some of the nearby warrens to a killing rage. A swarm is heading to your community that outnumbers you two or three to one, and you have only two days to prepare. Can you stop the huge rat and convince the rat swarm to stand aside? Can you lure the giant snake down from the hills to surprise the rat swarm? Will you flee in time, or will you stand and fight? You have two days...

*Rat World* - It is shortly after the Great Swarm. You and a bunch of rag tag survivors are searching for some kind of safe haven. Can you escape the rats, snakes, and rogue humans long enough to find or establish a new sanctuary?

*Rats and Peace* - The time has come for a reconciliation between human and rat. You are part of a delegation on its way to Great Rat City to negotiate a peace agreement. However, there are a few malcontents on both sides who don't want to see peace, and are willing to kill to stop it...

*Planet of the Rats* - It is some decades after the Great Swarm. Humans have lived confined to reservations and in relative peace for quite awhile. However, increasingly they are being

forced into slave labor, and rumors abound that some humans are being stolen away to be used in medical experiments or even as food in upscale rat restaurants. Most people prefer not to know the awful truth, but you and a small group of dissidents decide to strike back and fight for human freedom...