

Rats *in the* *Walls*



A
Game of
Timeless Hatred

WOLVES DEN
PRODUCTIONS

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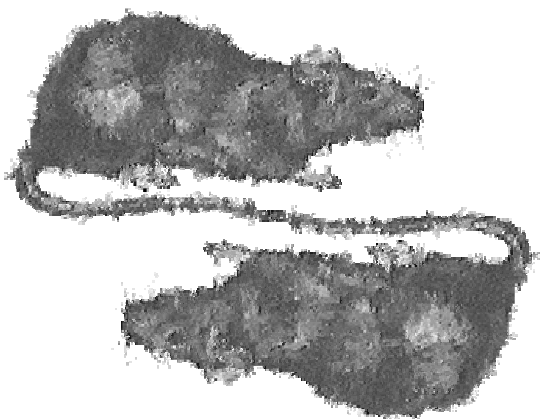
Inspirations:

Ron Edwards (Adept Press) for inviting me personally to the Ronnies, and coming up with the terms.

Alexander Cherry (Twisted Confessions) whose Fastlane mechanics inspired some found herein.

Paul Czege (Half Meme Press) whose My Life With Master game I've regrettably not yet played, but which influences this game anyhow.

The Butterfly Effect (New Line Cinema) for the idea that came right after: "Hm. Rats in the Walls... of Time?"



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Table of Contents



Introduction	2
• Rats in the Walls of Time	2
• About this Game	2
Character Creation	4
• Character Traits	4
• The Web of Hatred	5
• Assigning Traits	7
• Challenge Points	8
• New Player Characters	8
Rules	9
• Contests	9
• Scurrying Between the Walls	10
• Reshaping the Present	12
• Love, Life and Hate	13
Play of the Game	15
Designers Notes	17
Index	19



Introduction



Rats in the Walls of Time

Imagine, if you will, that time is an endless hallway, down which humanity walks. This hallway is only one way; Behind you walks everyone you have been, and ahead into who you might be is the only place you can go.

Now imagine if the walls of this endless hallway had rats. Rats in the Walls of Time itself. They scurry back where no man can go, and their chewing and tampering could change the flow of time...

About this Game

Rats in the Walls casts the players as these Rats in the Walls of Time, able to go back into the past and make changes to affect their present. Their reasons vary, but they are all driven by their hatreds, and it is their Hate which gives them the power to do so. They come from many disparate walks of life, but there are things within this world that they hate with such a passion that they are able to do the impossible. The only thing that connects them, aside from the ability itself, is the fact that they are conscious of the changes that others like them make.

Other than their extraordinary ability to change the past, each of these Rats is quite ordinary. They don't have any other special abilities, and are bound by all of the same laws of physics and society as everyone else.

Hatred is a strong word; It is not used lightly. Rats can be noble and kind or selfish and mean, but they all hold hatred within their souls. Some hate evil and oppression, others hate wealth and privilege, while still others hate kindness and generosity. Their reasons are less important than the simple fact of their hatred.

On the flipside, and equally vital, each Rat has something they love. While their hatreds drive them to act, to make changes both within the world we all know and back through time to change what has already come to pass, it is their love that keeps them grounded. The ironic part is that what they love can change as easily as events in the past, but it is really their capacity to love that is their salvation.

Everything else, their jobs, their history is entirely mutable. Given enough tampering, the Rats will even begin to forget who they once were, and who they could have been. Theirs is a dangerous path, but it is often said that madness and genius are separated by the thinnest of lines, and this holds truest of all for those who would meddle with the very experiences that have made them who they are.



Character Creation



Character Traits

Compared to some games, the characters in Rats in the Walls are statistically quite shallow. There are a total of 4 traits, plus a number of hatred descriptors. These traits are Profession, Ability, Love and Hate. Below, each will be described in more detail.

Profession: This is a pool of points representing your character's training and expertise within a specific field or job. These points can be used for bidding in any contest where your Profession would apply. The descriptor for this trait will frequently change over the course of a game.

Ability: This is a pool of points representing your character's general abilities outside of what they've learned for their specific job. There is no descriptor, and these points can be used in any contest.

Love: This is a pool of points representing the one someone or something that your character truly loves. It can refer to a person, an idea, an activity, an object or even a place. You can use points from this pool in any contest where your Love might apply. You'll need to be careful though, as your Love is the only thing that keeps you hanging on. When-

ever you make changes to the past, you can also erode your Love. When you have no Love, you have nothing left; Life is over for you.

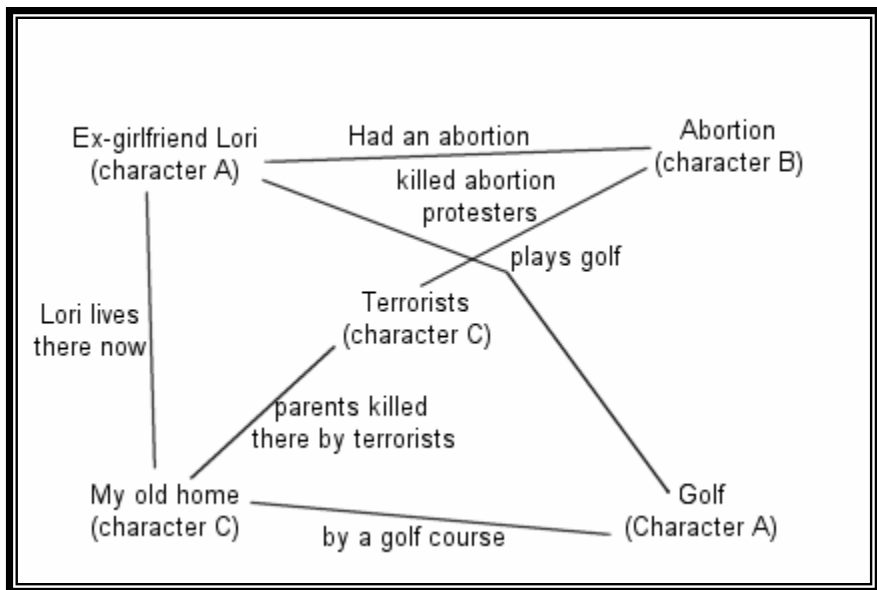
Hate: Your Hate is what you use to scurry backward in time to make changes and affect your present. The strength of your Hate affects how much of a change you can make whenever you try. Your Hate is based on your total number of hatreds, so if you eliminate a hatred over the course of play, then your Hate score is lowered.

Finally, though they're not traits in the same sense as the others, you have your hatreds. These are people, ideas, objects, activities or places that you hate deeply. We're not talking about simple dislike, no matter how strong a dislike it is. It has to be a truly mind-twisting hatred to be strong enough to allow you to circumvent the normal flow of time.

The Web of Hatred

Building your web of hatreds is the first step to building a character, except for perhaps vague initial concepts. While it is possible to have an idea in mind, it is essential to realize that your character is defined by the things they hate. So now each player needs to start choosing hatreds. The minimum and maximum number can and should be set by your individual groups. I'll toss out 5 and 10 respectively as a baseline to start from, but your minima and maxima may be lower or much higher. Once each player is satisfied by their hatreds, it's time to build the web. The best way to do this is to write all of the collective hatreds on a single piece of paper. Space them out as best

you can, because you're going to need to be able to draw a bunch of lines. These lines will connect the hatreds together; Each hatred will need two or more connections to other hatreds, at least one of which must be to a hatred belonging to another player character. Along with each line there should be a brief description describing how the two things are connected. The example chart below should give you a good idea of what a web of hatreds should look like.



This whole process should be done with lots of group cross-talk and suggestions; Everyone should be satisfied with the web before it's done. The reason for connecting all of the group's hatreds together like this is to help ensure that any changes made don't only affect that one character. The web isn't absolutely necessary to accomplish this, it does help illustrate how other hatreds can be affected when one hatred is changed.

Try to keep the number of connections pretty even. You shouldn't have one hatred with 5 to 6 connections if the rest of them have the minimum 2 or 3. On the other hand, if all of your hatreds have close to 10 connections, that's fine. Understand, also, that this is just a guideline, not a hard rule. If your group really latches on a central hatred, then have fun with it.

Assigning Traits

Once you've chosen all of your Hatreds, you're ready to move on to the rest of your traits. Take a moment to write down a brief description of why you have each hatred, then count them. This number is your Hate score, so write that down. It will be a very important number, both for the rest of the character creation process, and in play.

For the rest of your traits, you'll have to buy their ratings. For every point of Hate you have, you get 10 points to spend on your other traits. The costs for each point of an individual trait are below.

Love: 5 points per

Ability: 2 points per

Profession: 1 point per

You'll also need to choose descriptors for Love and Profession. Don't sweat too much over Profession, as it will change frequently. Love may change as well, but it is more important to make sure you have one you like to start.

Challenge Points

The last thing that needs to be taken care of before character generation is done is the GM's Challenge Points. As the GM doesn't have hatred or a character, they get to base their effectiveness on the group. Total up the collective Hate of the group, then multiply that number by 8. The result is the GM's Challenge Points, which the GM uses the same way the players use their Ability, Job and Love points when he has to represent some opposition in a contest, be it an NPC or a more impersonal force.

New Player Characters

Either due to an old NPC being "retired", or new players joining, occasionally new characters will enter an ongoing game. The process is almost entirely painless. Gather the group together and go through the normal character generation procedure. Add the new hatreds into the web, and with the group draw new connections between the new and existing hatreds. The GM gets additional Challenge points equal to 8 times the new character's Hate score.



Rules



Contests

A contest is called for whenever a PC attempts something where there's a reasonable chance of failure and a reasonable risk associated with failure. This means simple tasks like walking and even more complex tasks with no real risk attached, such as drawing a picture to hang on your wall do not require contests. Basically, unless it really *matters*, it does not need a contest.

So how does a contest work? It's a fairly simple procedure. The stakes of the contest are laid out and agreed upon up front, then each participant bids points from their applicable pools. Ability is always applicable, but the specifics of the contest will determine if Profession or Love points may be bid. If the GM is representing any opposition in the contest, then Challenge Points are used in the same fashion. There is a special rule to note when using Love points; On your Love points, reroll any die that rolls less than a 7. That means that you can never fail on a roll for a Love die, but the chances to lose or gain remain the same.

Once all participants are satisfied with their bids, a d12 is rolled for each point bid into the contest. Keep track of which trait each die roll is for, as the roll not only deter-

mines if you succeed or fail, it also determines whether or not you lose or keep the point, or even gain a new one for the same trait. The breakdown for each die roll is on the chart to the right.

1	Failure, Gain a Point
2,3,4	Failure, Keep the Point
5,6	Failure, Lose the Point
7,8	Succeed, Lose the Point
9,10,11	Succeed, Keep the Point
12	Succeed, Gain a Point

Once you've determined the result for each roll, note your gains and losses, and note each Succeed result. Then each participant with at least one Succeed result describes their actions within the contest, which uses up one Succeed result. Whoever bid the most points into the contest goes first (in case of equal bids, whichever is situated to the right of the GM goes first) Keep going around until everyone has used all of their Succeed results. If more than one person runs out on the last round, then rebid and reroll and start the contest only for those participants until finally one person prevails. It is acceptable to drop out of the contest rather than rebid and reroll, but you may not drop out until all of your existing Succeed results have been used. Whoever prevails gets to narrate the results of the conflict in terms of the stakes, and keeping in mind the events declared during the conflict.

Scurrying Between the Walls

The mechanics for changing the past are equally important... I mean, that's what this game is all about, after all. These rules are almost exactly the same. Within the fic-

1	Failure, Gain 1 Change Point
2,3,4	Failure, No other Effect
5,6	Failure, Lose 1 point of Love
7,8	Succeed, Lose 1 point of Love
9,10,11	Succeed, No other Effect
12	Succeed, Gain 1 Change Point

tion of the game, it requires a focus for the character's hate. Specifically, one of their hatreds must either be present at the moment, or in some way di-

rectly apply to the situation. Then they simply will it, and they will physically enter the past at a point of their choosing to wreak havoc or benevolence as they choose. Once that is true, the player will roll a d12 for each point of their Hate score. The results are very similar to the contest rules, but not quite the same. See the chart above for the specifics.

For each Succeed roll, you can narrate how you changed one thing in the past. It is important for the GM to think about these changes, because they will use the changes to reshape the present. For each Change Point, the player may add 1 point to Love or Ability, or 2 points to Profession. The results of Lose 1 point of Love are fairly self explanatory. This loss is immediate, before Change Points are spent. This means you can recover them by assigning Change Points to Love. No matter how many Love Points are lost, you can never go below zero, but if you are at zero with no Change Points to recover your Love, then, well...

Another limitation to keep in mind is that your character's ability to change the past is limited to their lifespan. You cannot go into the past before your birth to make changes, nor can you go into the unwritten future.

Reshaping the Present

This is another fun little exercise. The GM should consider the changes made, and look over the web of hate as they consider how the present will realign. They'll want to figure out what pieces of history never happened, or happened differently as a result of the change, and describe them. Likewise, they'll also need to make a few mechanical changes to the character who did the changing. The GM should make an effort to include other people's hatreds, Loves and even Professions in the effects of the changes, but they cannot be mechanically changed (as described below) unless those players give their permission.

Profession: By default, the Profession descriptor always changes, and the GM chooses what the new profession is. However, if the player assigned any Change Points to Profession, they have the option to choose the new Profession, even to avoid changing it.

Love: By default, Love does not change, but the GM has the option to change it if it seems reasonable that the changes to the past invalidated or destroyed the Love. The player can prevent this if they assigned any Change Points to Love. If they spent points, but want the Love to change, the GM still chooses the new Love descriptor. Also, if the Love was reduced to zero during the Hate roll, even if it is recovered by Change Points, the Love *must* change. The changes made to the past by the character somehow killed or destroyed the Love.

The only exception to the above rule about players giving permission for changes to their character is when a

change is made that will explicitly affect one of the other player characters, or whenever two or more player characters attempt to make changes to the same things at the same time. In the former case, if the player gives permission for their character to be changed, then it flies as normal. If not, then in both cases, the contest rules are used, except that instead of bidding from traits, dice are rolled only for the Hate score of all participants. When narrating the contest, try not to limit your descriptions to “I change X” “I change it back” “Well, I change it again”. Be creative. You’re hate-driven time-shifters, vicious, cornered rats fighting in the walls of time over scraps.

Love, Life and Hate

Love and Hate are the two things that drive your character and keep ‘em going. So what happens when you run out of one or the other? Game over, man. At least for that character. A lot of people won’t like that, so it’s very possible that you’ll be seeing a contradictory dance of playing against the hatreds, but trying to hang on to them at the same time. This is exactly the point. The driven often struggle to overcome something, yet cling to the very things they despise because it gives them meaning and purpose. This is one of the themes this game is meant to explore.


Eventually though, it’s going to happen. You’re going to run out of Hate, or you’ll lose your Love. Depending on which of these happens, your character will have a different fate awaiting them.

You run out of Hate: You get one final contest, against the GM. You bid all of your remaining Ability points, and the


GM bids an equal number of points, though these do not come out of his Challenge Points pool; They're free points for this conflict only; Ignore any "gain a point" results. Narration is not necessary for this conflict, but if you wish to describe your thoughts and actions, go for it. If you win this contest, then you choose a hatred that belonged to someone else that was connected to the last one you lost, or failing that, the closest hatred that seems appropriate, and take it as your own. Note that there is no other way to gain new hatreds; If you lose this one, you'll have another chance, but you'll never again have more than one hatred, and by extension you'll never again have a Hate score higher than 1.

If you lose the contest, your character is done. However, how they're done is up to you. They've just run out of driving hatreds, so they can either go on to live a normal, reasonably happy life... or give up and simply stop trying. It's up to you. Win or lose, narrate the results, either how your character came to possess the new hatred, or how they ended up once they lose the ability to scurry between the walls of time.

You lose your Love: The result here is much more tragic. You get no second chances, but that's the risk you take when you meddle with the events that made you who you are. The only fates in store for your character are suicide, insanity and/or becoming a plot device for the GM to use, because they have nothing to keep them balanced and sane any longer, but still have time within their fist. You're free to narrate their end however you like, but if you choose for them to live, they can and will be used against your fellow players and your own next character.



Play of the Game



Now you've got rules.. So what are you supposed to do in this game? To be honest, it's actually going to be pretty spelled out for you once you get character's built and ready to play. You're going to have a bunch of things on your character sheet that your character hate-hate-hates, and they're probably going to want to do something about them. They may decide to try to tackle them without meddling with the past... It's even possible, as you choose, that your character is not yet aware of their ability. But life isn't likely to let them remain ignorant. Just because they haven't yet changed time, the very fact that they're capable means that they are conscious of changes wrought by others, and all it takes to do it yourself is to will it to happen.

So here's what you do; Either you or the GM (or both) take a look at your character sheet, and grab the first hatred that pops out at you. Frame a scene that relates to that hatred, or will lead to it. Then just go from there. Once there's resolution to that scene, or a good, dramatic stopping point, the GM will jump to the next person, and do it again. I recommend saying, out loud, "shenk" to denote that you're switching players. It doesn't really have anything to do with this game, but it works well enough for my group. Besides, it's fun to say. Shenk.

Any time play seems like it's beginning to bog down, someone just take a look at their character sheet, or better yet, the web of hatred, and grab something to run with. These are hate-filled driven people with agendas all their own, and the power to either help or hinder each other. Go nuts.

As for where to set it.. Really, most anywhere will work, so long as it's understood that the ability to change the past is something extraordinary and rare. The present day is ripe with things to hate and different professions and places. A dark ages Europe setting is equally ripe, with plagues, heavy-handed nobles, politics, religion and persecution abounding. Feudal Japan, Colonial Era America, or even the first colony on the Moon all offer many opportunities for interesting play.

Both the GM and the players need to keep in mind the idea of the Butterfly Effect (in this case the Chaos theory principle, rather than the movie of the same name which is partial inspiration for this game); Even the smallest change can have huge and unforeseen consequences. This isn't something to be avoided by the players and enforced by the GM; This is grade-A conflict fodder that should be utilized by both players and GM to come up with the best gaming experience possible.

Finally, one last thing to keep in mind is that while everyone wants to have fun, it can be equally important to explore the serious themes of drive, hatred and anger, and consequences. If you can walk away from the game with good stories to tell *and* new things to think about, you're doubly a winner.



Designer's Notes



This has undoubtedly been one of the most interesting experiences I've had the pleasure of having. I've been an aspiring game designer for many, many years now, and to date I've not really finished a single game. The focus provided by the 24-hour RPG contest may very well be the thing I needed to break through. I am optimistic about this game, and I will definitely be trying out a playtest within the next several weeks, regardless of the results of the Ronnies contest.

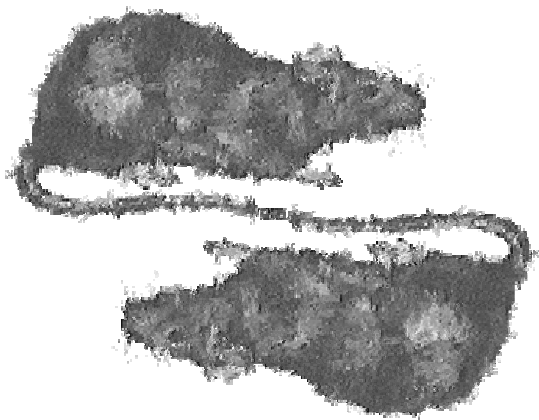
I would like to explain in brief my process for coming to this idea, as I'll admit to less than total surety as to whether or not I've sufficiently incorporated the Rats portion of the criteria. Hatred was never in doubt. It grabbed me and wouldn't let go, so the only trouble was trying to figure out which other word I would use, and how. My first inspiration was when I recalled the Phrase "Rats in the Walls" (which is, apparently, the title of a story by H. P. Lovecraft). I started brainstorming about outcasts, "Rats" living in the "Walls" of society, and their seething hatred of those that shunned them. Then came the idea that it wasn't the walls of society, but of *Time*. Immediately I recalled the movie *Butterfly Effect* and began to consider how a game based on that, and including hatred, might work.

So if it turns out that my “Rats” is too weak to qualify, then I’d like to say that I’m still content with the game as it stands, and pleased to have done it.

I hope everyone enjoys reading and playing my game as much as I enjoyed creating it.

~Lance D. Allen

WOLVES DEN PRODUCTIONS





Index



A

Ability: 4
-Cost: 7
-Use: 9, 14

B

Butterfly Effect: 16, 17

C

Change(past): 2-3, 6, 10-13
Change(stats): 10, 11
Challenge Points: 8, 10, 14
Contests: 9-10, 12-13
Characters: 4-8, 13-14

G

Gain: 10-11

H

Hate: 2-3, 5, 7, 8, 11-12, 13-14
Hatreds: 2-3, 5-7, 13-14, 15-16, 17

L

Love: 3, 4-5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13-14
Lose: 10-11, 14

P

Profession: 4, 7, 10, 12,
Players: 6, 8, 15-16

R

Rats: 2-3, 13, 17
Reshaping: 12-13
Retiring: 13-14

T

Traits: 4-5, 7, 9-12

W

Walls: 2-3, 10-11, 17
Web of Hatred: 5-7, 8, 14, 16

Rats in the Walls

Name:

Player:



HATE:

Love:

Profession:

Ability:



Hatreds: