

The World Class Rats Handbook

By Eric Bahr

*Rats have been around for a long time. In fact they've played a large part in history. Now before I begin, you have to understand the kind of rats I'm talking about here. The regular kind of rats, the little animal kind have had a large part on history too, with the black plague and everything else. But I'm talking about the **other** ones. They're everywhere in history. From the Egyptian tomb raiders, to Arabian viziers, to the western bank robbers and Thomas Edison, rats have had their impact on history. The rats are the ones who do the dirty work. Whether it's for personal enrichment or worldly good, the rats make it happen. Fiction deifies their image. Rats come quickly to mind: Carmen Sandiego, Han Solo, James Bond. All of them are big shots who've made a name for himself. I come from an older age where rats were common, where you only had to turn your head to see someone out to make it big. The way I see it, rats have done more harm than good so I've seen it to help them out. After all, in today's world they need all the help they can get.*

-The Skeleton Man

Introduction:

World Class Rats is a Role-Playing Game. In World Class Rats you take on the role of a rat or a gritty kind of person and try to accomplish pre-set objectives in a kind of imagine space. In World Class Rats there are two roles that you can take. There is the Gamemaster who explains what the setting is and generally resolves things that happen and there are players who drive the game and act as the protagonists. Each player has her/his own character that (s)he creates before the game. Generally, each player is responsible for her/his own character and the Gamemaster is responsible for everything else.

What you'll need to play:

- *The World Class Rats Handbook*
- Some pencils and paper
- Some friends who want to play with you

Getting Started:

0. (Yes it starts at zero) Print out as many copies of *The World Class Rats Handbook* as you think you'll need. (You also may want to read through the entire handbook before getting started).
1. Get together with some friends. Tell them that you've spent your time and money getting this game and beg them to play with you. This is probably the hardest part of the whole game but is an exceptional opportunity to practice the skills you'll need in game.
2. Decide who is going to be the Gamemaster and who are going to be the players.
3. Discuss, as a group, how the game should run. You should probably talk about:
 - A. The setting
 - B. The characters that the players are going to be playing.
 - C. The players' objectives throughout the game. (See *Objectives* on page X)
 - D. The characters' objectives throughout the game. (See *Objectives* on page X)
 - E. How long the game is going to run (see *The Game* on page X)
 - F. Who is going to bring the Cheetos or whatever.
4. Start the Creation process. Players should create their characters (See page X) and Gamemasters should set up a challenge (see page X.)
5. Play!

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Mechanics

Maybe the most remarkable thing about rats is that they tend to know how things work. Ask most people who's in charge and they might tell you who he is. Ask a rat who's in charge and he'll point to him. This isn't too surprising. After all, it's their business to know who can do what and how well.

-The Skeleton Man

The Purpose for a System

The best reason to have a system is so that everyone can agree on what happens. In the real world everything happens according to complex rules that are pretty much impossible to simulate on a large scale. In *role-playing* games the rules are dumbed down so that the Gamemaster doesn't have to carry around a calculator and a physics book (although some do anyways).

Resolution

Most of the time in *World Class Rats* what happens is just narrated by the players and Gamemaster. Each person takes turns narrating what they want to do either in the first or third person. Generally this works out pretty well but sometimes there's a conflict. Say a player wants her/his character to open a door only to find that it's locked. There should be a method that a player can use to get it to open. *World Class Rats* offers several methods by which players can get it open.

The Big Seven

Rats each have seven basic trades that they use to accomplish their goals. They are:
Talk Stealth Fight Info. Sleight Appearance Acrobatics
The big seven are also called *trades*. Every trade has a certain amount of points with it.

So What're Points?

A point lets a character succeed using a trade. In the above example of the locked door, if a character had a point of sleight left, he could use it to open the door. Once you use a point that point is expended and you can't use it again until the end of the adventure. Until then, for that trade you will have to rely on fool's luck. Aside from their generic uses, each trade has innumerable specializations.

A Look Into The Big Seven

Talk- Used to convince people and deceive people, this trade is exceptionally useful to get people to do things in your best interest.

Stealth- Used to avoid detection by cameras, guards, and more sinister things (your roommate when you're in the next room with is girlfriend)

Fight- Sometimes rats have to fight too. This is used to succeed at all things combat from suave duels with rapiers to stunning a man from behind with a good punch.

Info.- This trade is used to get information on anything. From the credit card number of your father to the poker hand of your opponent.

Sleight- This is used to trick others using physical means or general use of manual dexterity, from the convincing illusion to distract your assailants or to pinch their pouch.

Appearance- Even, and maybe especially, rats maintain their appearances. They can do this to look like someone's lost love, to give them an air of confidence or whatever else.

Acrobatics- What's a rat without the ability to run about dodging his opponents or to land directly on the vault without tripping the security systems?

Specializations

Each of The Big Seven has different specializations. A specialization has points just like The Big Seven do but they can only be used to accomplish things that the specialization alludes to. Talk, for example, has many specializations. Sweet talk for example would be a valid specialization. A character could use a point from her/his sweet talk specialization to get a member of the opposite sex to accompany them as a date for a local dance for instance. That character could have used a point from her/his Talk trade to accomplish this task (even if (s)he didn't have the specialization). Characters can have many specializations per skill.

Example Specializations:

Talk- Bargaining, Flattery, Sweet Talk, Fast Talk, Conning

Stealth- Hiding, Camouflage, Camera Shirking, Moving Silently, Leaving No Scent

Fight- Fist Fighting, Using Swords, Using Guns, Improvised Fighting

Info.- Personnel Information, History, Computers, Cards

Note: Info. can be easily abused. Try to abide by the rule of thumb. (See page X)

Sleight- Sleight of Hand, Magic Tricks, Escaping, Lock Picking

Appearance- Attractive, Authority Figure, Beggar, Zombie Jesus

Acrobatics- Platform Hopping, Dodging, Chandeliers, Out of Windows

A Deeper View Into the World of Points

The use of points can be very slippery. Generally, they can be used to turn the tide of any situation into the favor of the character if used appropriately. Points are always

accompanied by a narration by the player explaining what happens. This narration can include elements not included by the Gamemaster. For example: A player with Acrobatics could use a point to jump out of a nearby window even if the window wasn't provided by the Gamemaster previously.

Success when using points is generally assured. However, the Gamemaster has every right to complicate the situation. For example, the previously mentioned player has her/his character jump out of a window. There is nothing stopping the GM from saying that there are twenty armed guards at the bottom.

Occasionally a Gamemaster might want to (or have to) tell the player that what they're doing with a point isn't possible but this should happen only reluctantly. The goal of an adventure may be to get the money from a fortified safe. It may not be appropriate for a player to use his machine gun to blast it open. For a further look at this see **The Rule of Thumb**.

Points Verses Normal Narration

Normal narration is integral to *World Class Rats* as it isn't in other RPGs because there isn't any mechanic to resolve success when a character attempts something. This means that the vast majority of actions taken are just normal narration. Players have every right to sweet talk someone using normal narration and the Gamemaster should give them a fair chance. When a player tries to climb a wall or shoot a sleeping guard, provided that there aren't any special circumstances, that player should succeed. Points should guarantee automatic success and should not be used for success in general.

The Rule of Thumb

The rule of thumb for using points is, "Does it make the situation more interesting or less?" Generally, it's more interesting to let the players accomplish what they want with points and then to complicate situations further. If a player's action makes the game less interesting you might not want to limit its effect or even to not allow it to happen. If you do this, you should refund that character's point and tell her/him why it wouldn't help the game.

Fool's Luck

When a player runs out of points in a particular trade and all of its specializations, that player must use **Fool's Luck** to use that trade any longer. Using **Fool's Luck** will provide a use of that trade normally but you gain a point of **Bad Karma**.

Tools of the Trade

Tools of the Trade are uncommon items in *World Class Rats* that provide characters with points when using that item. However, instead of being Trade Points, they're Tool Points. Tool points are good for using the item with a guaranteed success. They are not limited to their tool points, however. For example: A grappling hook may have three points but once those points are used up it can still be used as a normal grappling hook. A rat cannot use **Fool's Luck** to guarantee automatic success with an item once its points have been used up.

Karma

Karma is the rat's best friend. It protects him even while everyone else it out to get him. They say that God protects fools and children but that's really just good Karma at work. Why Karma is disposed to the rats of the world nobody knows but I suspect that it has to do with all the good that the rats unknowingly do for everyone and a snide god reluctantly paying them for their efforts.

-The Skeleton Man

Kar-wha?

Karma is an additional mechanic to save poor characters from the plights that they get into and to help them out when they really need it. It can also be used to complicate their little lives. A character can have any amount of Karma but they tend to only have 0-3 points at any given time.

Good Karma

Good Karma can be used to accomplish virtually anything, be it through skill or luck or both. Think of it as a trade point but much more powerful. If a character were stuck in a small enclosed room with gradually rising water they could use a Karma point to have someone show up and rescue them. If they were searching for a spy for the government they could use a Karma point to suddenly run into him. Just like a trade point, the player must narrate what happens when (s)he uses a karma point. However, they're given a greater degree of freedom when doing this. A player is awarded Good Karma based on their cleverness in play. When a player does something very cool and in line with her/his character concept the group (the Gamemaster and the players) should tell her/him so (after they're done hooting and hollering like monkeys) and if it's basically unanimous a Karma point should be awarded.

Bad Karma

Bad Karma comes of using **Fool's Luck**. A point of bad Karma is generally a bad thing. The character must get rid of it by the end of the adventure or it will be subtracted from that character's Good Karma. To get rid of Bad Karma a player must narrate some complication that is negative towards that character's goals. This can be simple. For example: A player narrates his character hitting on a girl and her throwing her drink into his face. It can also be outlandish: The car that he's driving, while fleeing the police spins out of control into a ditch. The bad news: If your character has excessive amounts of Bad Karma, the Gamemaster is advised to penalize her/him. Maybe her share of the money was eaten away by moths. Maybe he loses one of his limbs. Maybe he falls hopelessly in love. The reverse, however, is not true. Good Karma does not give you good results unless you use it. This measure is only here to check all players who wish to abuse **Fool's Luck**.

How Can I save 15% or More On My Karma Insurance?

Sorry, you can't. Karma of the good and bad variety carries into the next adventure. At the end of the adventure each character's Bad Karma is subtracted from her/his Good

Karma. The good news is that this game's writer doesn't know enough about math to apply negative numbers. You cannot have less than zero karma.

The Adventure

Adventure is what rats thrive on. Some rats say that they're in it for the money or the chicks or the respect but they're rats. Being a rat means taking risks, doing things stupidly. It's kind of like falling in love with the devil.

-The Skeleton Man

World Class Rats is separated into adventures. An adventure is a space of time that characters have to accomplish an objective. An adventure can be one, two or even more sessions but it's recommended that you keep adventures down to one session. How long an adventure is can be important because characters don't regain their points until the beginning of an adventure. (See *Objectives* on page X)

Characters

I get asked all the time about what a rat is. I always tell them that it's not what he is but what he does. Anyone can be a rat. A Jewel thief? Sure, she can be a rat. A con artist evangelist? Sure, he can be a rat. Your land lady? If she's gritty enough she can be a rat. An even-tempered mayor? Well... all politicians are rats.

-The Skeleton Man

Creating a Character:

Part 1- Character Concept

Okay, you're creating a character. The first thing you need is a character concept. A character concept is just an idea of who your character is that you build her/him around. The actual process of creating a character is really just building stats around a particular idea. Most character concepts start with a particular genre. If your group is playing a particular band of space pirates you might want to think about old pirate adventure stories like *Treasure Island* or some genre related anime like *Outlaw Star*. The point is to come up with some type of character and to then flesh it out. For example: All pirate adventure stories have inflexible patriotic military guys (not being one of them is practically what defines a pirate) so you may want to play one of them. Once you have a solid idea move on to the next step.

Part 2- Building a Character

In building a character, you're just adding a few stats to give your character some influence over the game. The system helps organize 'what happens' into something concrete that everyone can agree with. In *World Class Rats* you play a rat. Rats have each of these things:

- The Big Seven
- A Specialty
- Tools of the Trade
- A Piece of Flair
- A Goal
- A Description
- A Name

Step 1- Get a piece of paper and a pencil

Step 2- In the top left part of your paper write down **The Big Seven** in a column. You have 17 points to assign to your trades. Each trade must have at least one point. Write the number of points for each trade to the right of it. This is to keep track of the number of points that you start with each adventure. Now write down a number of dots equal to the amount for that trade next to them. When you use points you will cross them off (or erase them).

Step 3- Assign 10 points to specializations. This can be distributed to as many specializations as you want but it's not suggested to have lots of specializations. Generally it's recommended to have 2-3.

Step 4- Rats always have a specialty. This only reflects your degree of expertise, just normal stuff under the course of normal narration. Your specialty should be something specific. Piloting Airplanes would be appropriate while solving mysteries would not. While doing things related to your specialty the Gamemaster should be averse to needlessly complicating your poor character's life but of course it doesn't provide as any kind of fail-safe. There's nothing wrong with having a specialty related to your trades or specializations.

Step 5- Have you hugged your Gamemaster lately, taken her/him to a baseball game and told her/him how much you enjoy spending time with her/him? Well let's hope so because it's time to ask for equipment. Most of the time the Gamemaster should be pretty lenient but when you start asking for hundreds of pounds worth of miniscule crap in hope of concocting something Macgyveresque in the middle of play you shouldn't hold your breath. It's also okay to ask for one or two Tools of the Trade with 2-3 tool points each.

Step 6- Now all you have to do is establish all of the other stuff about your character, their age, appearance, their name, etc. Each character should also have a piece of flair. This can be anything, from a bright red hat, to a business card that you leave after every theft that you make. It can even be your hair style.

Step 7- Every rat has a goal. A goal is different than an objective because it doesn't necessarily relate to the adventure. It's something that an individual character wants to achieve. They can be generic things like: "Get as much money as possible" or "Gain a fantastic reputation" They can also be more specific things like: "Conquer Selma's Heart" or "Get revenge on the scoundrel who cursed you."

Master of the Game

-For the Gamemasters

Rats are the players of games of all types, some more literal than others. All rats embark on the path of mastery a road laden with plagues, villains, disgust and romance. While rats are hardly perfect, they should not be tested at their own games by either the wise or the wary.

-The Skeleton Man

Setting the Setting

The setting is where the adventure takes place. Its components are things like genre and archetypes. *World Class Rats* doesn't have a default setting and instead relies on the creativity of the participants playing in it. *World Class Rats* works best in settings where rats flourish. Rats tend to be pretty gritty people that tend to use any means to accomplish their goals so it may be best to use a setting where those types flourish. Like many other things that Gamemasters decide, it should be discussed with your players.

Example Settings:

- The open seas of a piratey era
- A star trader style universe
- A 20th century crime infested city
- Late 19th century political situation
- The Casinos

What About Roles?

The most important part of a setting is its influence over the roles of the player characters. The two go hand in hand. What the player characters' roles are is one of the most important topics to hit upon before they make their characters.

Example Roles:

- Conmen for an environmental organization
- A band of petty thieves
- A band of petty actors (but I repeat myself)
- Conspiring businessmen against hippies
- Conspiring hippies against businessmen
- Space Pirates

Objectives

Objectives are conditions to jumpstart an adventure that the players have, not the characters. Objectives are agreed upon by the whole group (players and Gamemaster) and don't necessarily coincide with character goals or motivations. Objectives should be

open-ended so as to allow the adventure to end in many different ways. It would be appropriate for an objective to be: "Get into the safe" but inappropriate for an objective to be "Steal the money from the safe."

Tricks

Any REAL rat has a couple of tricks up his sleeve. Maybe it's an all purpose fake love letter or a royal flush. Who knows? If you did it wouldn't really be a trick anymore, would it?

-The Skeleton Man

The Gamemaster Needs a Helping Hand Too

This section is to highlight a few things that Gamemasters can use to get some edge in the game, to help with their personal gratification, and to help with how the game runs. Like most tricks, the one's below work best if used sparingly.

Mess With Your Players

Always keep your players on their toes. Even though they have the power of automatic success in the context of their narration, you can change things up considerably. Don't overwhelm them with your unlimited power, but try to out-clever them. They hack a computer system and work to get into the top floor of a building that it directs them to only to find that they were given the wrong address in the first place. If a player uses a point to have his character plunge a knife into one of your NPCs' back, you can let the NPC avoid death by having it wear armor. As long as it makes plausible sense, it's fair game.

NPC Rats

NPC rats are just like PC rats except that they're controlled by the Gamemaster. These people should only be used on rare occasion, generally as challenging antagonists. Using NPC rats also gives the players an opportunity to cope with your narration in interesting ways. If an NPC rat talked a PC into helping her, for example, the player would get to have his PC work against his own interest. He'd also have the opportunity to work within the rules against the NPC just as the GM often does to the PCs. After all, turn about is fair game. NPCs can have karma points, flair, and tools of the trade (which can be looted).

Endless Adventure

There are two different ways to play *World Class Rats*. One is called Solo Adventure Mode. It's a one-shot game where the consequence of the adventure isn't going to be immediately important to any other adventures you might have. If your friends are over and you have an evening to kill before you go skiing the next day, you might want to dig *World Class Rats* out and give it a run without expecting it to carry into further gaming. However, you can also link adventures together to form a campaign. Each adventure should have its own complications that lead into an ultimate objective. Perhaps your

group is playing a trust of shady businessmen who go on adventures foiling their competition only to find that their greatest opponents are members of their own business.

The Reward Cycle

Many a rat is a seeker of treasure, a questor of riches. What the valiant rat finds, though, is that the world contains such rewards as are beyond his poor imagination.

-The Skeleton Man

At the end of the adventure, the PCs are rewarded with improved abilities. In addition to anything they collected during the adventure they can gain an additional 4 trade points and 4 specialization points.

1. A player gains a trade and one specialization point for completing her/his objective.
2. A player gains an additional trade and specialization point for dealing with their goal(s) (be it through failure or success)
3. A Player gains an additional trade point if (s)he gained at least one Karma point.
4. They gain an additional trade point and specialization point for making significant progress involving a vendetta.

Vendetta

All kinds of rats got vendettas. In fact, that's how many of them got to being rats in the first place. All it takes is for one murder in your family, one financial transaction gone wrong or one outrageous cell phone bill and a guy's suddenly a rat. It can be a scary world.

-The Skeleton Man

A vendetta is almost like a goal except that you can get four points total at the end of an adventure instead of two from making progress towards a goal. Beyond that a Vendetta is optional and represents a more significant danger than a mere goal. In *World Class Rats* it's significant to have a Vendetta because of how often rats find themselves in revenge-inspiring situations.

The Wrap-up

Alright rat. You know enough to get out there and risk it all. Remember though, it's a dangerous world. There're plenty of rats just like out for gold and plenty more out for blood. Always remember who you can trust, you. If you stay a couple of steps ahead and watch your own back you'll be fine.

-The Skeleton Man