



THE LOATHSOME RATMEN
AND ALL THEIR VILE KIN

In the dark and war-torn world of Warhammer, humankind is beset by danger from all sides. From the sewers and drains crawl the Ratmen, filthy beasts of fur and claw, killers, spreaders of disease: the Skaven! Long have they desired to destroy the people of the Old World, but even as their power waxes, most men remain blind to it.

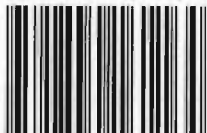
But a few have the courage and foresight to recognise our peril. One such man was the scholar Wilhelm Leiber. This is his book, covering all the aspects and habits of the revolting Skaven: their physiology, their methods of war and his projected plans on how to deal with the rising menace, with many accompanying pictures and sketches.

Many believe Leiber was a maniac, a paranoid fool, whose work has no basis on fact. We think otherwise. Read this tome and learn for yourself the secrets of the Skaven!



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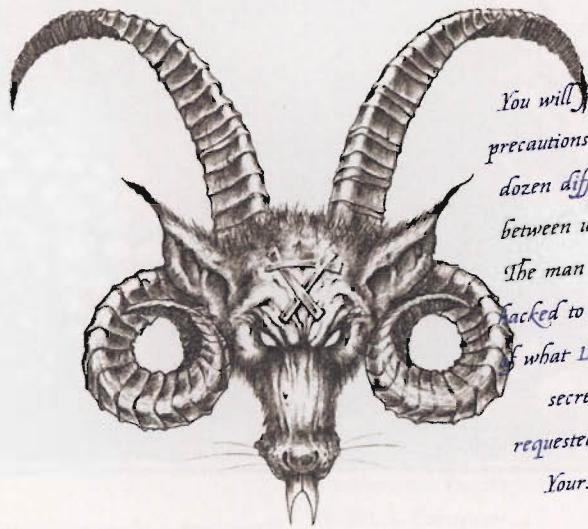
Background Book

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The Loathsome Ratmen

And All Their Vile Kin



Drexler,
You will find I have taken more than the usual precautions in sending this book to you, utilising a dozen different couriers so as to obscure the trail between us. It is with good reason that I do this. The man who obtained it for me is dead - found hacked to pieces in his room. It seems some at least of what Leiber says is true: the Ratmen guard their secrets jealously. Still, here is the book you requested. I hope it is of help to you in your work.
Yours strong in the faith of our lord Sigmar,

Von Adler

Being an examination of the forms and nature of the race of Ratmen known also as the Skaven, with emphasis given to the grave threat posed to Humanity by their secret and unholy intrigues.

With further well-considered thoughts, theories & conjectures
by the Author

Wilhelm Leiber

"Seeking by means of Reason and Learning to diminish the Darkness."

I am a scholar, not a soldier. But, despite that, at its root, the work herein was born of my experiences on the battlefield. Above all else, it was born in a single night of horror, when in the company of men more noble and courageous than myself, I was confronted by creatures which conventional scholarship would dismiss as nothing more than the fancies of a halfwit. Against all odds I survived that night. But others did not. And it is to those brave and martyred souls – men who fell in battle with horrors beyond the wit of Man – that this work is dedicated. It is my fervent hope that the wider dissemination of knowledge of the nature of those horrors might, in some small way, serve to justify the loss of so many good men's lives.

Hans, Erich, Wilmar, Otto, Ernst, Jurgen and Klaus, may Sigmar guard your souls. You were the finest comrades a man could have. This work is dedicated to your memory. A meagre recompense considering the enormity of your sacrifice, I know, but, sadly, the only one within my power to give.

Wilhelm Leiber, Altdorf, 2313 IC



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(Above) And Taking his Hammer he did Cast the Ratmen Down. Illustrative woodcut from the Gutenberg Edition of the Deus Sigmar, printed circa 1457 IC. Despite some anachronisms in the portrayal of Sigmar's dress, the illustrator is to be applauded for having so powerfully and movingly depicted the triumph of our God over the vile Ratmen. (From the copy of the Gutenberg Edition held in the Cathedral of Nuln: Woodcut on parchment)

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Introduction

At some point in his life, every man finds himself confronted by the reality of evil. The test comes in whether he is willing to face it unflinching, or turn aside and by his inaction let that evil prosper.

Witch Hunter Captain Helmut van Hal

I begin with a simple maxim. Any book, whether written in the name of scholarship or to serve the more humble purposes of entertainment, is as much shaped by the tale of how its author came to write it, as it is by the wider issues of truth and aesthetics; the act of creation does not take place in a void. Rather, it is forged in the crucible of the author's own circumstance and past experience. It is with this in mind that I must now begin, however briefly, by elucidating certain of the facts of my life that played an immeasurable part in the creation of the book you now hold.

Born into a comfortably moneyed, if otherwise undistinguished family, early in life I was set on the path of the scholar. A path that ultimately led me to the hallowed halls of some of the Empire's most respected institutions of learning, and the study of the diverse disciplines of Language and the Humanities. Had the direction of my life continued to run true I would have no doubt in time become a linguist or interpreter, I may perhaps have even sought service in the diplomatic corps. But, in common with many other individuals of my age and disposition, I instead found myself caught up in the great events of our time. For, privileged to hear the words of Magnus the Pious as he gave a stirring and impromptu speech to a gathered crowd in the city of Grünburg, I was moved to join the ranks of his citizen-army in its march north to relieve

Kislev, then under siege by the forces of darkness.

I will not dwell at length on the wider triumphs and tragedies of that campaign here, except to say it is in such times of want and calamity that a man learns the true stuff, not just of his own soul, but of the souls of all those who stand beside him. I was blessed in that regard. For although my comrades were no more warriors by trade than I — many of them came from the most ill-regarded strata of our society, from beggar to peddler to thief — still they proved brave and steadfast to the last.

Time and time again we were tested. Together we faced bloodthirsty tribes of Kurgan horsemen, savage herds of Beastmen and disgusting throngs of mutants. We saw burned villages whose every inhabitant had been slaughtered, vast battlefields littered with decaying and scavenger-stripped corpses, and even heard the chilling cries of the screaming stone mouths of Chaos-warped Praag.

And through all those days and nights of horror, we never faltered. Emboldened by our love of our nation and faith in our God, we stayed true to our duty. Until at last, with the war won and Kislev saved, we turned to begin the long march south for home, little realising that the greatest horror of all still awaited us.

It came as my comrades and I made camp for the night in the forests of northern Ostland, just inside the borders of the Empire. By then Magnus had dispersed his army into smaller units to better forage for food and fuel, and we were but one such grouping — a thousand men in all. Experienced soldiers by then, and glad as we were to be back inside the Empire, we still knew to be mindful of the dangers of the forest.

1. Quoted from *Helmut van Hal, Against the Darkness, or The Record of My Struggles Against Humanity's Enemies in the Service of Our Lord Sigmar*, page 13. See bibliography.



(Above) Detail from the surviving central panel of Heinrich Bloch's triptych *Visions of the Ratmen*, circa 1141 IC. Having lived through the years of the Great Plague, the horrors Bloch witnessed were to serve as a source of inspiration throughout his life. Sadly, many of the great truths he painted were judged too powerful by later generations and few of his works survive to the present day. Even the panel above has not survived unscathed: rather than use Bloch's original title, museum authorities have taken to displaying it under the false title *Visions of Darkness* so as to avoid any mention of the Ratmen. (The Averheim Museum of the Arts: Oil on wood panel)

Accordingly, to guard against attack by night, a line of pickets had been set and sentries deployed to watch them; precautions that for all their commendable foresight, proved to be of no avail in the unfolding of events.

My own first intimation of the horrors that confronted us came as I was awakened from sleep by the screams of dying men. Hurrying from my tent with half-pike in hand, I saw sights that I shall never forget. Ahead of me the entire camp was in confusion as, everywhere, men struggled and died in savage conflict with the creatures who had slain our sentries and crept unheard into our camp while we were sleeping. I saw men cut down by jagged blades, torn limb-from-bloody-limb by ferocious beasts and overwhelmed by rabid, swarming hordes of

hungry rats. But even these were but the smallest part of the horror I witnessed. I saw men run shrieking past me, arms flailing in helpless agony as their bodies burned with the unearthly glow of alchemical fire. I saw others die haloed in choking, green vapours, mouths foaming with bloody froth as they breathed their last. I saw strange weapons, sinister machines, monstrous beasts, a vast and terrifying tableau of unholy horrors. I saw the face of our enemy.

I saw the Ratmen.

Here was the worst horror of all. A horror greater than all the beasts and hordes of Chaos combined. I saw vile creatures armed as with the machineries of nightmare, foul hybrids of rat and man that walked on two legs, wore armour and carried weapons as though in mocking imitation of our ways. I saw wave after wave of disparate and feral bipeds, mad with bloodlust, come to overwhelm us by sheer weight of numbers. I saw things that seemed born of the nightmares of visionary madmen, as though the very shapes of the underworld itself had been given flesh and set loose upon us.

I saw a thousand different horrors, all of them wearing the face of the rat.

Perhaps I was guarded by Sigmar's guiding hand, for I alone of my comrades survived that night. I survived to spend two terrifying days and nights in the forest, fleeing without sleep or rest for fear the Ratmen would find me. But when I finally emerged at another encampment and made a breathless report to my superiors, to my shock I found my account of the Ratmen was met with derision. Unwilling or unable to accept the truth, they told me the ambush had been the work of Beastmen, and all my claims were nothing more than the ravings of a man unhinged by grief. I was even threatened with court martial for having left my post! For the first time in my life, I was given some inkling of the strange and unsettling conspiracy of silence that surrounds the existence of the Ratmen and all their works. A conspiracy that would seem to stand in the way of all official investigations and has seen many other survivors of the Ratmen's attacks dismissed as madmen.



(Above) The Face That Haunts My Nightmares, XIII, sketch/ink wash by the artist Niklaas van Meer, circa 2254 IC. In his day the most celebrated portraitist in the Empire, van Meer's life was changed forever following an encounter with the Ratmen on the Old Dwarf Road between Averheim and Wurtbad. Barely surviving with his life, van Meer became obsessed with the Ratmen from that point on, drawing endless studies from memory of the faces of the creatures he had seen. For all his efforts though, to van Meer's mind none of his works fully captured the Ratmen's savagery and menace. Eventually, destitute and shunned by his former patrons, van Meer died in the madhouse, a broken stub of charcoal in his hand and an unfinished sketch before him, struggling to the last to give testament to the horrors he had witnessed. (Private collection: Ink wash on canvas)

I could have let the matter lie there. But forever mindful of all the good men who had given their lives that mine might be spared, I could not let that be the end of it. That I lived at all could only mean that either fate or Sigmar — and which of us can know these things — had decreed my life must continue for a reason. A reason that soon became apparent in the days and weeks that followed as, having heard of my ordeal, other men approached me to tell their own tales of the Ratmen. Quickly, it became plain that mine had not been the only unit to be so ambushed, I heard tell of a dozen or more such attacks being inflicted on our forces during the long march

home. And, each time, when the terrified survivors of these atrocities made report to their commanders, they had been met with the same derisory, palpably ridiculous explanation. Beastmen! As though, having fought Beastmen so many times already, any of us could have mistaken them for anything else.

No, hearing these broken men and their tales, I found the reason why my life had been spared. Why else, of all the men who died, would the gods have saved a scholar, if not so that I might put my skills to use? I had been given a mission, a holy duty. Henceforth, my life's work would be to research and record the true extent of the evils of the Ratmen, in order that in time I



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the scholar Anders Emmerich following his murder at the hands of unidentified assailants in the year 2307 IC. (The Emmerich Papers: Charcoal on vellum)

might finally find the compelling evidence that would expose those evils to the gaze of Man.

It has been no easy task. In the ten years since I have faced and overcome many obstacles. No longer considered persona grata by any of the scholarly institutions where once I studied, I have been forced to endure the braying laughter of my peers while my work was ridiculed, my name and reputation reviled. It would be no exaggeration to say at times it has seemed as though every man's hand was set against me. Even my own family have turned on me – under the influence of sinister forces they have disinherited me and attempted to have me committed. Worse, the Ratmen's agents are everywhere and they guard their masters' secrets zealously. My life has been threatened more times than I would care count, while on numerous occasions I have escaped death by barely a whisker.

And yet, despite it all, despite every threat and privation, I have stayed true to the course I set myself. To do any less would be to dishonour the memory of all those whose sacrifice brought me to where I am today; and not just my fallen comrades, but all the brave men and women who have suffered over the centuries because of the existence of the Ratmen. Every forgotten and martyred victim, every discredited scholar, every so-called heretic burned at the stake for daring to speak the truth. As a race we have much for which to atone, but first, we must cast aside the shackles of our ignorance and face the truth of the enemy that sits watching us from the shadows.

Such is the aim of this book. Herein, the reader will find the fullest account yet written of the diverse ways and horrors of the Ratmen, or Skaven, as they are also known. An account written in the sincere and desperate hope that by furthering the span of human knowledge in this area we may begin a process that, ultimately, will see the entire race of the Ratmen and their kin eliminated from this world. Here, the reader will find the lie given to those who would claim the Ratmen are but misidentified sightings, born of hysteria, of giant rats. Despite those



(Above) Van Meer's *The Face That Haunts My Nightmares*, XXXIV, circa 2254 IC. (Private collection: Ink wash on canvas)

who would say otherwise, the reader will learn the Ratmen are not a myth, extinct, nor primitives incapable of organised action. I warn the reader, oft-times in the course of perusing this work he will find himself confronted with so many strange and loathsome examples of horror that he will be tempted to turn his eyes from them.

But I beseech you, do not look away! For as many a savant has remarked in the past, to destroy an enemy you must first know his nature. Further, I am aware that some readers among you, unused to the ways of evil, may condemn the claims made in this book as the ravings of a madman. I ask you to cast aside your prejudices and preconceptions. The Ratmen exist. And, what is more, their existence represents a grave and continued threat to the very survival of Humanity.

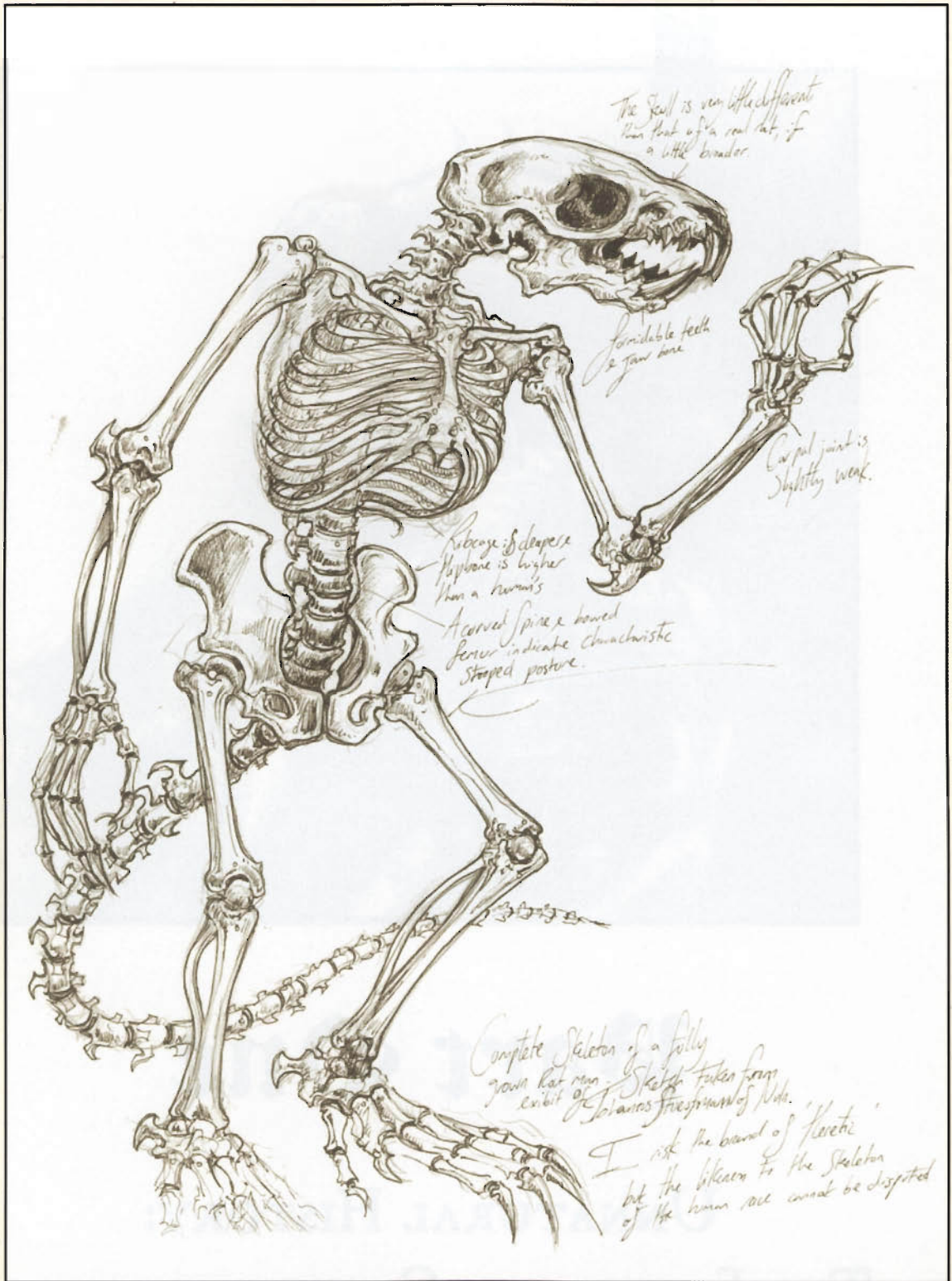
A threat made all the greater because so few are willing to admit it exists at all.






Part One

UNNATURAL HISTORY:
THE FORMS AND CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE SKAVEN RACE



(Above) Sketch of a skeleton held in the restricted access collection of the Altdorf Museum. Despite the claims of the museum's curators, it is clear from even the most cursory of examinations that the skeleton is neither a fake nor the remains of a previously unknown species of hornless Beastman. Manifestly, it is the skeleton of a Ratman – most likely that of a Clanrat warrior. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

1. Uncertain Beginnings: Questions as to the Origins of the Ratmen

f all the puzzling questions relating to the existence of the Ratmen, there can be none more vexing to the scholar than the matter of their origins. That these same origins stretch back to before the beginnings of recorded human history is beyond doubt.¹ But the specific facts of where, when, and – most importantly – how such creatures first came into being would seem as lost in the mists of Time as the equally perplexing mysteries of our own, more benign, human origins. Further, in attempting to investigate these questions at all, we find ourselves forced to navigate a vast and churning sea of ill-considered theory and groundless speculation. Nor can we turn to the leading lights of contemporary scholarship for guidance.

To a man, these so-called savants seem content to remain blinkered in the fog of their own ignorance, utterly denying the Ratmen's existence. Worse, they are close-minded on the subject to the point of obstinacy, gainsaying any evidence that does not accord with their prejudices, and damning those that bring it to them as frauds, or fools, or madmen.²

Take, by way of example, the work of Herr Professor Adolphus Dumpf, lately Master of Natural History at the University of Altdorf. In the otherwise competent pages of his *Races of the Known World*, Dumpf devotes an entire chapter to ridiculing what he refers to as “The Ratman Fallacy”.³

I will not dwell overlong on the Herr Professor's manifold errors of logic and learning

here, except to say it reflects poorly on the state of contemporary scholarship that any man – no matter how eminent – could be allowed to represent such a catalogue of mistakes, misapprehensions and inanities as fact. If I mention it at all, it is only as an example of some of the wilful obfuscations emanating from the scholarly orthodoxy of the Empire whenever the issue of the Ratmen is raised. And so, putting the works of accepted academia aside, we must turn instead to other, perhaps less well-regarded, authors in our search for truth.



RAT INTO MAN, OR MAN INTO RAT

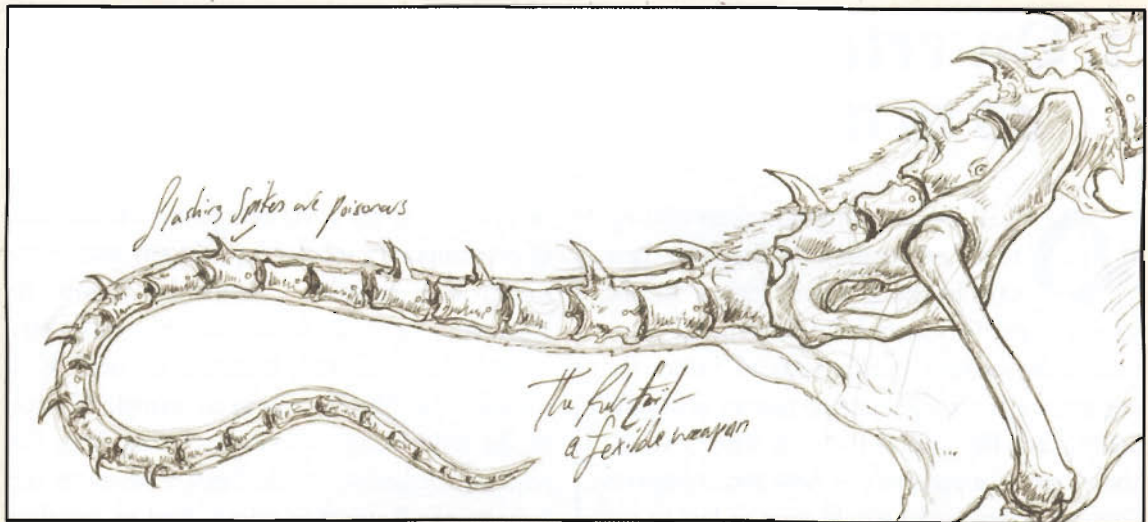
Here lies the central question: are the Skaven the descendants of rats who over time evolved into a form resembling that of Man, or were their forebears men who somehow degenerated and acquired rat-like characteristics? Among those few scholars whose meditations on the subject have any merit, opinion is mixed. In his seminal, if little-known, work on the causes of the Great Plague of the year 1111 IC, Wilfried Schtutt takes the former view, arguing the Skaven are descended from rats warped and mutated by the hand of some malign and unknown power.⁴ While freely admitting the difficulty of ascertaining the true identity of this power, Schtutt draws parallels with the well-established link between Chaos and

1. In the records of the Dwarfs for example, there are references to the existence of the Ratmen dating back nearly 1500 years before the birth of Sigmar.

2. On this last, I speak from bitter experience.

3. Adolphus Dumpf, *Races of the Known World*, Volume VI, University Press, 2308 IC, pages 625–715. If it seems overly harsh to condemn the current intellectual climate of an entire nation on the basis of the follies of a single author, I ask the reader to consider for a moment the method by which Herr Professor Dumpf's work was ratified. As a serving faculty member of the University of Altdorf his book would have undergone an extensive process of peer-review, requiring the approval of the university's entire academic board before it could be put forward for publication.

4. Wilfried Schtutt, *The Plague Years*, pages 9–22 & 113–133. See bibliography.



(Above) A sketch of a skeleton held at Altdorf Museum. I believe it to be of the hindquarters of a Skaven Clanrat. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

mutation, and muses whether the Ruinous Powers may have played some part in the Ratmen's transformation.

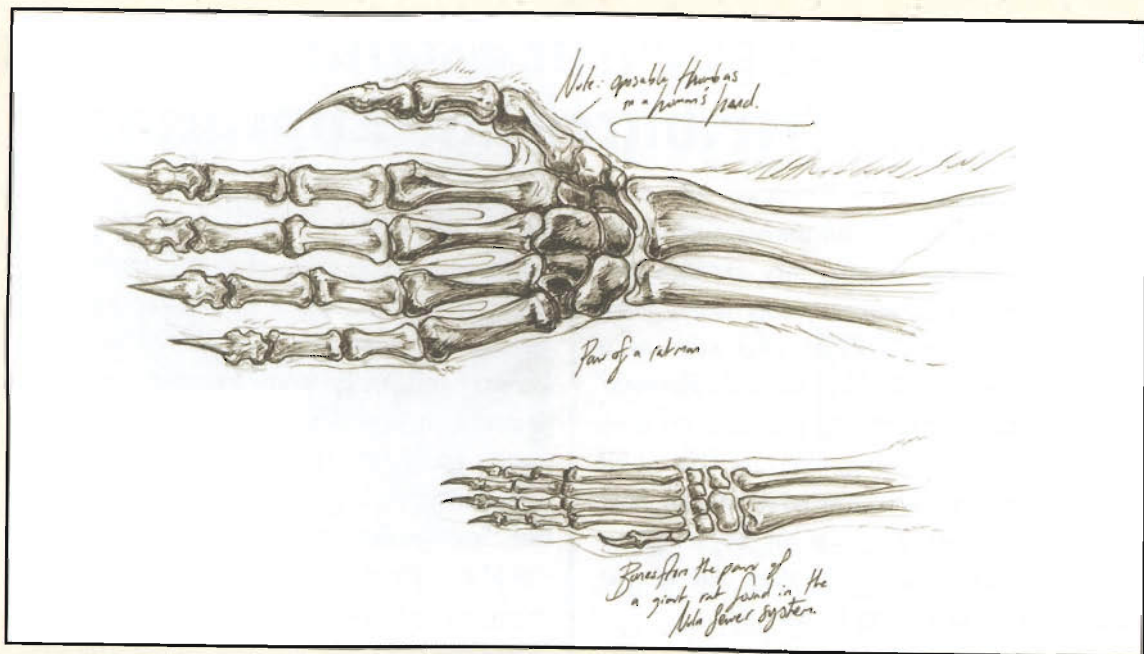
In contrast, while agreeing with Schtutt's contention that rats were the antecedents of the Skaven, the Tilean classicist, Verdallo, argues that the agent of their transformation can be found in the conceptions of the ancient philosopher-sage Proti. In brief, Proti maintained that all things in the universe — living and non-living alike — were ultimately created by the mystical interaction of vast and impersonal cosmic archetypes which exist outside Space and Time, which he called "The Forms". Hence, according to Proti, the Dwarfs were created by the union of the Forms of Man and Stone, while the Elves were created by the Forms of Man and Plant; a thesis which Verdallo extends to the Skaven, seeing in them the interaction of the Forms of Rat and Man.⁵ But for all its outwardly appealing elegance, there is a void at the heart of Verdallo's abstractions that no amount of sophistry can conceal. If by their nature these Protian Forms exist outside the scope of human experience and observation, then they also exist outside the scope of empirical

analysis. And the truth or not of any theory which cannot be submitted to such analysis for verification must remain forever suspect.

Turning to the counter-theory that the Ratmen are descended from men who by some agency were regressed to a bestial state, we find this position is supported by no less an authority than that towering polymath of the sixteenth century, Johannes Krueger. In his *Bestiarium*, Krueger relates an ancient Estalian legend of how an act of cannibalism among the survivors of a shipwreck led to them being cursed by the sea-God Manann and transformed into rats.⁶ Arguing that such myths often fulfilled a proto-historical function in ages past, Krueger brings the wisdoms of his own age to bear to see through the timeworn distortions to what he believes are the truths hidden beneath the myth. He posits that on some secluded island in the distant past, a group of marooned mariners resorted to cannibalism and were accordingly punished by their God, Manann (it has been observed that common rats will eat their kin if other food is scarce). But rather than being changed into rats per se, the curse caused them to slowly degenerate into man-rat hybrids, and it

5. Marcelli Verdallo, *Forma di Malevola*, pages 36-65. See bibliography. It perhaps speaks ill of Verdallo that, like Proti, he sees the origins of humanity in the interaction of the Forms of Ape and Man. A view which would seem to have much in common with the heterodox and frankly distasteful theories of the heretic naturalist Karls Dährin.

6. Johannes Krueger, *The Bestiarium*, pages 208-213. See bibliography. Counted an erudite giant in the history of learning in the centuries immediately after his death, the fact that so few readers today are familiar with Krueger's works speaks volumes of the ever-declining standards of modern education.



(Above) Sketch of a Skaven's claw. Of particular interest are the opposable thumbs that allow the beast to manipulate tools. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

was these hybrids who served as the progenitors of the modern Skaven race. (Or "Ratkin", as Krueger calls them.)

In theory, the island in question must lie to the east of the — at that time — newly-discovered continent of Lustria, Krueger even goes so far as to name it Rodentenland. Furthermore, he calls upon the kingdoms of the Old World to mount a united expedition to find the island and begin a campaign of extermination against the natives. But, despite much exploration of the western seas and the eastern coastline of Lustria in the centuries since, no trace of any such island has ever been found. Sadly, it would seem Krueger's Rodentenland is as much a myth as tales of lost tribes of Halfling cannibals in the New World, or vast kingdoms ruled by Ogres east of the World's Edge Mountains, as much a myth, even, as the Estalian legend that inspired it. And so, for all his erudition, we must reject Johannes Krueger's theory, just as we did that of Verdallo.

Returning then to the works of Schtutt, we can see now that his notion of the origins of the

Ratmen is not without its merits. Even granting that the theories of worthies such as Verdallo and Krueger cannot be entirely disproved, Schtutt's premise that the Ratmen are descended from rats warped by some unknown power would seem the closest to meeting the scholarly dictum of Otkar's Razor — namely, that the explanation of any unknown phenomenon should always be sought first in terms of that which is already known. As to what ancient sorcery — or ancient hand — was responsible for transforming ordinary rats into horrors like the Ratmen, we can only guess. (Though, as we shall see later, given the Skaven's close relationship with the substance known as warpstone, the possibility that it played some part in their transformation cannot be discounted.) Nor can we hazard a motive for perpetrating such a monstrous crime. In the end, we can only decry the current state of human scholarship once more, before turning towards areas where the truths about the Ratmen are more concrete, if no less terrifying.⁷

7. More learned readers may wonder by what oversight I have neglected to discuss the works of Spengler here, specifically his oft-cited theory that the Ratmen are not related to rats at all, but are simply an unusual sub-breed of human mutant. It is no oversight, I assure you. I simply find both Spengler and his theory beneath contempt.

2. The Beast at First Glance: Notes on Skaven Attributes and Appearance

All decent folk rightly hate the rat. Scavengers sick with filth and disease, they are repulsive creatures. But how immeasurably worse then, are those loathsome hybrids who exist as a grotesque parody of Rat and Man: the Ratmen? Foul and deadly creatures, possessed of dark intellect and vile cunning, that they exist at all speaks amply of the extent to which we have offended our gods. They are the worst of our nightmares given flesh. The dark side of our souls, come to destroy us for our sins.

Attributed to the flagellant prophet Tomas of
Wissenburg¹

As has been remarked by many other authors in the past, the process of writing a scholarly work is much akin to that of the construction of a building. It is a commonplace truth perhaps, though one no less enduring for all its familiarity. If he would see the walls of his edifice stand firm, the scholar, like the master mason, must pay close attention to the cut and lay of his foundations. And it is with this in mind that we now turn, not to matters of secret histories or strange conspiracies², but to the most readily verifiable observations of basic Skaven biology. For, as we shall see in time, it is in these matters of biology that many of the defining truths of the Ratmen menace have their beginnings.

They are each of them a horror, these Ratmen, creatures of grim and savage aspect, whose inhuman malignancy is made plain by even the most cursory of glances. At the same

time, they display a diversity of physical appearances far in excess of that displayed by the more benevolent races of Elf, Dwarf and Man. But for all the remarkable disparities in size, fur colour and even form between individual Ratmen, it is still possible to point to certain norms which hold true for the majority of their ill-intentioned breed. And it is these norms — the “average Ratman”, if so horrific a creature could ever be labelled with so wilfully prosaic a term — that will be the main focus of our attentions here.



PHYSICAL APPEARANCE & ATTRIBUTES

Although individuals among them have been observed standing nearly as tall as six foot at the shoulder, with correspondingly heavily muscled frames³, as a species the Ratmen are generally both smaller and more slightly built than men. Typically, the common Ratman stands in the region of four to five feet in height, with a characteristically stooped, almost hunched, posture that puts the onlooker in mind of nothing so much as a coiled spring, ready to explode into hellish action. And, well it might. For, whatever their apparent deficiencies of height and weight, the Ratmen are manifestly dangerous opponents. They are creatures built for stealth and speed, easily capable of

1. Quoted in Reinhard Ascher, *Heresies in the Age of the Three Emperors*, page 113. See bibliography. It should be noted there is dispute among scholars as to whether the quotation above should more properly be attributed to the earlier Albrecht of Nuln, a heretic and rabble-rouser burnt at the stake for pernicious declamation in the year 1301 IC.

2. Though the reader may rest assured we will be returning to these broader questions in time.

3. The reader will no doubt be relieved to learn creatures of such proportions are counted rare among the monstrous hordes of the Ratmen. Those possessed of black or similarly dark-hued fur will most often find their way into one of the groups of elite Clanrat warriors known as “Stormvermin”. The rest, unless either particularly dull-witted or timid, will usually fight their way to positions of authority in the restless hierarchy of strength that is Skaven society. It goes almost without saying that any such relative giant unable to put his strength to good use is likely to be quickly killed by his fellows, or else find himself sold as a test subject for the gruesome experiments of Clan Moulder.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony of some of the creatures that destroyed the Reikland village of Urwald in the year 2303 IC. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

outdistancing even the fastest human runner despite a curiously scurrying bipedal gait. Nor is Skaven swiftness simply a matter of being fleet of foot. Even the lowliest among them is possessed of astonishing reflexes, while their most skilled killers are capable of reacting with a physical celerity that, in any race bar Elves, would seem preternatural. A speed of reaction which, coupled with a similarly impressive agility and manual dexterity⁴, would allow the Skaven warrior to compete on equal terms with his human counterpart, even were it not for the Ratmen's natural ferocity and tendency to rely on weight-of-numbers to overwhelm their enemies.

Conditioned by both biology and an inclination to life underground, the nightvision of the Ratmen is remarkably acute, allowing them to see clearly in all but the deepest darkness. At the same time, their other senses – especially smell – are also sharp. As might be expected, they strive to take every advantage

from these gifts, restricting themselves as much as possible to moving and fighting by night when outside their natural habitat⁵. A restriction that, given the fact ambush and deceit have long been the Ratmen's most favoured forms of warfare, often suits their wider purposes admirably.



FUR COLOURATION AS A MARK OF STATUS

Steeped in the fair-minded habits of human culture, it may seem inconceivable to the reader that any race, even the loathsome Ratmen, would allow so minor a matter as colouration to dictate their behaviour to their fellows. But, as will become plain again and again in the course of this work, what is unthinkable to other races is an accepted fact among the Skaven. And, as strange as it may seem by our more civilised mores, the greater part of the destiny of any individual Ratman is determined by the colour of fur they wear when they are first delivered as squealing horrors into this world.

To the Ratmen, fur colour is a telling mark of future rank. The vast bulk of the Skaven population – the anonymous toilers and warrior hordes upon whose unheralded actions their society is based – possess fur coloured in varying, often piebald, shades of reddish-brown, in the manner of the common rat (*rattuss-rattus*). A certain proportion, however, are born with pure black fur – a condition which among the Ratmen is considered the mark of a true killer – and are usually quickly recruited for training either with the Stormvermin, or among the murderous adepts of Clan Eshin. But most favoured of all are those born with either grey or white fur – shades which are counted as signs of

4. In some Ratmen this dexterity is even more pronounced, allowing them to grasp and use weapons with their long prehensile tails – essentially, using the tail as a “third arm”. Though whether this is an innate ability in the manner of human ambidexterity, or a talent acquired by dint of advanced training, is at present unclear.

5. Certain sources, most notably my Dwarf informants, argue that this is as much because the Ratmen's vision is poor in daylight. However, the possibility cannot be discounted that this is simply an embellishment born of racial antagonism, similar to some of the more outrageous Dwarf claims made about reproductive practices among Elves.

the favour of the Skaven's infernal God, marking the individual out as destined for future greatness. A self-fulfilling prophecy that quickly sees such individuals elevated to the upper echelons of Skaven society, in time becoming the Ratmen's sorcerers, leaders, and priests⁶.



METABOLISM, LIFESPAN & BIRTH-RATE

As will be attested by any who have had the misfortune to have encountered them directly, the attacks of the Ratmen are characterised by a ferocity not unlike that of the maddened rage of rabid animals, a ferocity that is not simply a matter of cultural conditioning, but an expression of one of the central facets of Skaven biology. The metabolism of the Ratmen burns at a much faster rate than that of man, causing them to experience sudden bursts of feral strength and speed whenever they feel threatened. But the accelerated pace of their metabolism is not without a corresponding drawback: they must feed frequently to replenish their reserves of energy.

If they are unable to feed after any great exertion, or are denied food for any length of time, the Skaven swiftly weaken, facing the very real prospect of dying from starvation during any protracted period of shortage. It is this that gives rise to the phenomena known among them

as "The Black Hunger": a sudden and frantic hunger so all-consuming it can cause the Ratmen to ignore everything else, even their own safety, in their desperation to sate it. Gripped by the Black Hunger, the Skaven will devour any food in their path, even going so far as to kill and eat their own kind if no other food is available⁷.

It is perhaps a sign of the stresses the rapid pace of their metabolism puts on their bodies, but the lifespan of the Skaven is brutally short. As a rule, the typical Skaven male attains adulthood within five years of birth. Assuming he does not succumb to hunger or violence in the meantime, he may live as long as perhaps twenty years – little more than a third of the natural span of a man⁸. Balanced against this is the fact that the Ratmen breed prolifically, demonstrating a fecundity far in excess of that of any other race. The Skaven female, or "breeder" can produce from three to five litters a year, with each litter containing up to twenty young.

Granting that many of these young will not live to reach maturity, the fact remains that, even if her reproductive life lasts no longer than ten years, a single female can produce anything up to a thousand offspring! A sobering statistic which I ask the reader to dwell on for a moment as, in the next chapter, we turn to see how knowledge of the factors of Skaven biology I have elucidated here are central to understanding the full and true nature of the threat the Ratmen represent to mankind and its allies.

6. Something which, given the nature of the Skaven's natural habitat, may not be entirely without practical purpose – allowing them to more easily distinguish their more lightly-coloured leaders in the darkness underground.

7. This phenomena of the Black Hunger goes some way to explain the Skaven propensity for feasting on the fallen – both enemy casualties and their own – in the aftermath of battles. It also suggests the wisdom in adopting a "scorched earth" policy whenever engaged in war with them – burning crops and food stores to deny the Skaven the food they need.

8. It is interesting to note that, according to some Dwarf sources, the grey and white-furred Skaven leaders live much longer than their less favoured kin. Given that the Dwarfs claim these same leaders are also more intelligent than other Ratmen, the question is raised as to whether they represent a separate subspecies within the main Skaven genus. However, leaving aside the matter of intelligence, it seems more likely the longevity of the Skaven leadership is due to their having access to better diets and life-extending magics by dint of their position.

9. Rarely, if ever, seen above ground, Skaven females are larger than the males. What scant information is available makes it clear they are, at best, only marginally intelligent creatures who live their lives in an indolent stupor, alternating between breeding and birthing without respite. During my stay in the Dwarf Hold of Karak Kadrin, I saw the severed head of one of these creatures. It was shown to me in some excitement by a young Dwarf warrior, who claimed it was the head of a Rat Ogre, taken as a war trophy in a raid on a Skaven nest. Finding his claim met with derision by the other Dwarfs present, when his mistake was explained to him the young warrior stalked out of the tavern, stony faced. When I saw him again the next day he had styled his hair into a ragged crest and dyed it orange. Overcome by shame at having been embarrassed in the presence of his peers, he had taken the Slayer's Oath.

3. By Reason of Hunger: Conjectures as to the Skaven Worldview



(Above) *The Strange Doom of the Family De La Poer*, circa 1313 IC. Detail from a larger canvas by the Bretonnian master painter Gericat, taking as its subject the traditional Bretonnian folk tale of the same name as its title. (From the collection of the Comte d'Aquitaine: Oils on canvas)

To understand the *Weltanschauung*, or worldview, of any race is to be given fundamental insight into all the dynamics of their society.

Emil Darkheim, *The Exigencies of the Soul*¹

In the previous chapter it was said that to understand the full nature of the threat posed to Humanity by the Ratmen, we must first understand their biology. And with good reason. For, perhaps more so than any other race, the Ratmen are creatures whose

worldview – or “*Weltanschauung*”, to borrow Darkheim’s term – is almost entirely conditioned by matters of their biology. And so, having established certain facts as to the birth rate and metabolism of the Ratmen, we will turn now to investigate the defining role these key factors play in shaping the exigencies of the Skaven soul. For, as we shall see, it is in the dreadful imperatives placed upon the Ratmen by the conspiring agencies of their birth rate and metabolism that the true roots of the Skaven menace can be found.

1. Emil Darkheim, *The Exigencies of the Soul, or Towards a New Understanding of Human Society*, University Press, 2100 IC, page 113.

WAR AS AN EXPRESSION OF SKAVEN FECUNDITY

It would not be overstating the case to say that hunger, and with it the ever-present threat of famine, are the two most important realities of the Skaven world – the two immutable constants on which, ultimately, their entire society is built. Given that the high birth rate among the Ratmen has already been established, as has the fact that a single Skaven female can produce as many as a hundred offspring in a year, the reader will see at once that any society gifted with so prodigious a fecundity must always live in fear of the effects of rampant overpopulation.

Even granting that the constant warfare and strife among the Ratmen all but guarantees that few among any individual litter will live to the full extent of their years, it can be seen that population growth among the Skaven does not follow the same arithmetic and geometric models usually applied to the growth of human populations². Rather, the growth of population among the Ratmen follows what might better be termed an explosive model.

Based on their high birth rate and the usual scholarly estimates of the ratio of the numbers of rats to each human being, it may be supposed the Skaven population may well outnumber that of mankind by thirty-to-one or more³. Further, given favourable conditions, the size of that population may grow exponentially, putting ever-greater stresses on the resources of the Skaven world, stresses likely to lead inexorably to the creation of a state of famine. Eventually, a crisis point is reached whereby the Ratmen have no choice other than to expand their resources by right of war, or face the threat of a lingering death by starvation.

It is in such times that they emerge upon the surface world in vast hungry hordes, attacking until they have either seized the resources they

need, or else suffered so many losses that the population pressures which compelled their assault are relieved⁴. Thus it can be seen that, at its root, war for the Ratmen is not a matter of cultural antagonisms or territorial imperatives, rather it is simply the ultimate expression of Skaven fecundity: the Ratmen must go to war in order to control their population. What is more, given that same fecundity, it can be seen that conflict between Skaven and Man is inevitable until either one or another are destroyed. For just as there can be no trusting the good intentions of a wolf, so there can be no peace with a hungry rat.



A SOCIETY OF HUNGER

The influence of these same factors of birth rate and metabolism – coupled with the corresponding threat of overpopulation and famine – would seem to go no small way in accounting for the constant conflict which, as we shall see later, characterises the interaction between all levels of Skaven society. Living as they do in the shadow of the ever-present threat of starvation, is it at all surprising that the Ratmen are constantly at each others' throats? Theirs is a society of hunger – a world red in tooth and claw – in which each individual must be ever ready to look to his own survival, and in which every living thing is automatically judged by its potential as either food or threat; a world without pity, mercy or compassion, where only strength and cunning are respected. A world in which there is only one law, one maxim, which holds any sway. The law that says kill-or-be-killed, eat-or-be-eaten, it's the survival of the fittest. It is the law of the wilderness.

Above all else, the law of the rat.

2. See, for example, the works of Tomas Maltus. Especially, *The Arithmetic of Starvation: Factors of Population Growth as the Main Determinant in Human Famine*, Pferdmann Press, 1782 IC.

3. If this estimate is correct, and there seems no reason to disbelieve it, the Ratmen may well represent the single most populous race in the world. A fact that I am sure the reader will agree, speaks volumes as to the enormity of the Skaven threat.

4. In many ways, these sudden hunger-provoked attacks by hordes of Ratmen would seem almost to be a societal equivalent of the phenomenon of the "Black Hunger" mentioned earlier.

4. An Empire Below: The Kingdoms of the Ratmen



(Left) Preparatory sketch for an unfinished portrait of the Empire nobleman, Baron von Munkhaasen, author of a privately printed monograph entitled *The Ratmen Are Among Us!*, published in the year 2083 IC. A neglected visionary, Munkhaasen wrote of a vast intelligent army of giant rats “who walk upright on their hinde (sic) legs in loathsome imitation of Man and dwell in the sewers beneath our very feet”. Sadly, the baron’s history of making outlandish claims (he also claimed to have visited the surface of Morrslieb and to have encountered the goddess Shallya in a brothel) was held against him, and his pioneering work on the Ratmen menace was largely ignored. This sketch demonstrates that many thought everything that he wrote was literary vomit. (From the archives of the von Munkhaasen family: Charcoal on canvas)

It has been said already that the Ratmen as a species are superbly adapted for life underground. What may not be quite so clear yet to the reader, however, is the precise nature of the Ratmen’s natural habitat. For rather than the rough-cut dens and pre-existing caves that we might expect – were we to believe those who claim the Ratmen are but a race of dismal-minded primitives – instead the Skaven domain takes the form of a vast and labyrinthine network of tunnels, warrens, burrows and even underground cities. An “Under-Empire”, if you will, resembling nothing so much as an unholy mirror image of our own beloved Empire.

As distasteful as it might seem to use such a term in connection with the Ratmen, empire is indeed the only word for it. For, as evidenced by the fact that reports of the Ratmen come from places as far afield as the Southlands, Araby, Lustria and even legendary Cathay, the kingdoms of the Ratmen stretch to every corner of the known world. Theirs is a world-spanning

empire, larger indeed in terms of territory than that of any other race¹. The dark tentacles of that empire extend from beneath our greatest cities to the strongholds of Estalia and Bretonnia, from the onion-domed spires of Kislev to the kasbahs and caliphates of Araby, even from beneath the doughty Holds of the Dwarfs to the sombre necropolises of the Land of the Dead. Put simply, both in the lands known to us already and whatever unknown lands which, one day, we may discover, the Ratmen are everywhere.

Granted, some may wish to dispute these claims, refusing to believe that the lands of the Ratmen could in fact be greater in scope than those of Man. Others, perhaps including some who have encountered the Ratmen on the surface in the past and noticed their tendency to use even the most structurally unsound of buildings as shelters, rather than create their own surface dwellings, may reject my claims on the grounds that the Skaven lack the technological sophistication to construct such an empire. To adopt either position, however, is to demonstrate

1. A fact that offers telling support to the estimate of the Skaven population given earlier. If the Ratmen were not the most populous race in the world, they would never have been able to conquer – let alone hold and maintain – so large an empire.

a wilful refusal to see the facts as they are. As said previously, the Ratmen are a subterranean race whose true territories are hidden from our sight, a race that would no more think of erecting permanent structures on the surface of the world than mankind would of taking steps on either of our moons. Further, to attempt to dispute the size of the Skaven empire is to have failed to grasp its even more terrifying implications. For, by virtue of his own civilisation, Man is not content to simply build his own works on the surface. On the contrary, some of his works are built underground in the shape of sewers, cellars, mines and the like. And by intruding into the world of the Ratmen we give these foul creatures easy access into our own.

Hence, using our own network of sewers, storm drains and cellars against us, the Ratmen are allowed to come and go in our world as they please. Who is to say that the cloaked figure you see walking along the streets or passing by your window at night is not a Ratman? Worse, even as you read these words, who is to say the Ratmen do not lurk but a few feet away from you, hidden in the shadows and darkness of their world underground, biding their time to strike?

From the palaces of our kings to the most rude and ramshackle hovels, nowhere in the human world is safe from the menace of the Ratmen. How many apparently motiveless atrocities in the past may have come because human beings, in their unthinking hubris, strayed too close to one of the entrances to the Skaven domains? Truly, as said before, the Ratmen are everywhere. And, if we would make war upon them and defeat them once and for all, it is not enough that we would fight the Ratmen only when they emerge onto the surface. Rather, we must make unstinting war upon them and cast down all their works forever.

It is with this in mind that I call upon all the scholars of the world, not least those experts in the disciplines of cartography and geology, to join together with the aim of mapping the true geography of the Skaven realms. An important first step would be to correlate all existing records

of Skaven attacks, with a view to establishing some preliminary idea of the real boundaries of their world. Next, in the company of armed men, expeditions should be mounted into the Under-Empire itself for scouting purposes. It will be no easy task. Not least because to attempt such a task at all would require the coordinated efforts of scholars from many different nations and races. Moreover, it is a task with little hope of success, unless backed with sufficient will by all the governments of those same nations and races. And so it must be. Given the enormous nature of the Skaven threat, none of us can stand alone against it. We must put aside our differences and combine our efforts. Combine them in the name of brotherhood, in the name of common purpose and in the name of victory.

And, if for nothing else, in the name of our continued survival.



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. (The Emmerich Papers: Ink on vellum.)

5. Precious Damnation: The Role of Warpstone in the Skaven World

Wyrystone. Seerstone. Darkstone. The names that, over the generations, have been given to the substance we know of today as warpstone are as varied as the substance itself is rare. Counted more valuable by weight than even the most flawless of gemstones, for centuries it has been sought after by princes, alchemists and sorcerers, all of them eager to turn its remarkable powers to their own ends. With warpstone, a man is said to be able to change lead to gold, heal any wound and even bring the dead to life! But, for all that, there is a dark side to the use of warpstone that far outweighs its supposed virtues. Yes, it can work miracles. But they are miracles bought at the sure and dreadful cost of madness, mutation and death for all that come into contact with it. It is with this in mind that the authorities of the Empire have made the trafficking and possession of warpstone a crime punishable by death¹, and with good reason. For, as we shall see, warpstone is a pure and undiluted form of the same magical energies that give rise to the manifold horrors of Chaos. And, more pertinently to our present line-of-inquiry, it is a substance of immeasurable import to the Ratmen, playing a vital role in their society.



THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF WARPSTONE

If the counsels of the Elves are to be believed², despite appearances, warpstone is not part of the

ordinary physical universe as we understand it. Rather, it is a manifestation of what savants call the "Aethyr" – a vast broiling realm of magical energies that paradoxically exists all around us, yet is at the same time outside and separate from our reality. Despite this separation however, from time to time the energies of the Aethyr leak into our world. Properly refined and harnessed, these "leaked" energies form the basis of the magics used by all the world's races, not least by the members of Altdorf's recently constituted Colleges of Magic³. But, and this may shock the less-learned reader, in their unrefined form, these same energies are the basis of what we call Chaos. And it is these same raw, unrefined, dangerously Chaotic energies which give birth to the substance called warpstone.

For the most part, when the wild energies of the Aethyr flow into our world, they are at once split apart by their interaction with the physical universe, refracting into a series of different "colours" of magic – just as white light, striking a prism, will refract into a spectrum⁴.

Some energies are too powerful to be refracted, instead coalescing by some unknown process into the form of solidified pieces of raw magic – the same dark, strangely blackly glowing shards known to Man as warpstone. Representing as it does magic in its rawest and most puissant form, warpstone is at the same time both extraordinarily powerful and frighteningly dangerous. To be exposed to even the smallest piece of it, for no matter how short a period, is to run the risk of mutation, while larger pieces are capable of inflicting burns on

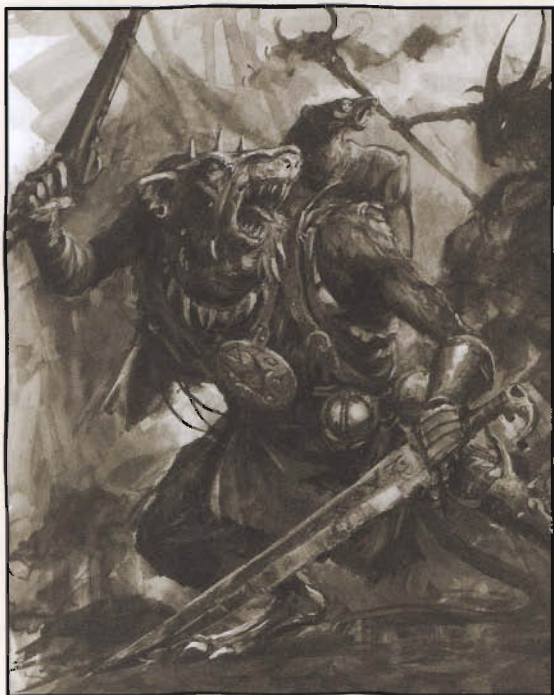
1. Strictly speaking, the laws against the possession and trafficking of warpstone date back centuries. However, they were rarely enforced. It was only recently, as one of his first official acts upon becoming Emperor, that Magnus the Pious reinforced the ban and increased the penalties to the present level. A decision that gives ample proof – as though any were needed – of the depth of his wisdom.

2. And, given their wisdom in such matters, we have no reason to doubt them.

3. The energies that leak into our world are said to represent but the smallest fraction of the energies of the Aethyr as a whole. In the words of the Elf mystic Sandrevael, "To attempt to understand the enormity of the Aethyr from the energies which flow into our world, is to attempt to understand the size of the ocean from the water collected in a horse's hoofprint after a light summer rain."

unprotected flesh, burns which never heal, all but guaranteeing the victim a long, lingering death. Given these dangers, it may seem inconceivable that any race of creatures, even one as horrifying and loathsome as the Ratmen, would willingly allow themselves to remain in proximity to warpstone for any length of time, much less making it one of the foundations of their commerce and society.

But, as we shall see over and over again in these pages, what is inconceivable to other races is common practice among the Ratmen.



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. Note the warlock pistol (The Emmerich Papers: Ink on vellum)

THE SKAVEN AND WARPSTONE

In his monumental study of the history of human progress, Jarod Karo argued that the two greatest events in human history were neither wars nor battles⁴. Rather, according to Karo, the events which most fundamentally shaped human society were the discoveries of gold and iron, the two metals on which, respectively, all our commercial and technological achievements since have been based. And, if that is true of Man, what can we say of the Ratmen? For the material that lays at the very foundation of their society is no natural metal like gold or iron. Rather, it is that most dangerous and unnatural of materials: warpstone.

It is no exaggeration to say that warpstone is the very lifeblood of the Skaven world, the vital cog without which none of their vile endeavours would be possible. Among them, warpstone is put to endless uses: it is the source of their currency, the basis of their technology, a key component in their magic and so on. It is used as an ingredient in medicines, added in minute amounts to metals to strengthen them as they are smelted, worn as protective charms and amulets, even used as the basis for inks⁵! In each case, warpstone is used to enhance the properties of the object to which it is added: making poisons more deadly, armour more impervious, blades sharper. A thousand different uses, and each of them unholy⁷. As might be expected, given its rarity and the variety of purposes to which it is put, the appetite of Skaven society for warpstone is both enormous and never-ending. Granted, they would seem to have access to sources that other races do not possess, or else their entire

4. The reader should understand that any talk of the "colours" of magic is essentially a metaphor. Even those possessing the witch-sight do not necessarily see magic at all; much less perceive it as a series of colours. From my conversations with several wizards, I am led to believe they sense the presence of magic more as a diffuse otherworldly sensation, the nature of which I am told is difficult to put into words.

5. Gold and Iron: Noble and Ignoble Metals, and their Role in Human Progress, Altdorf Press, 2298 IC, pages 283-313.

6. It goes without saying, given the scarcity of warpstone even among the Ratmen, that its inclusion as an ingredient in inks is rare, reserved only for those inks used by their sorcerers in the preparation of magically potent documents.

7. Given the mutating powers of warpstone and its prevalence in the Skaven world, it is perplexing to note the seemingly low incidence of mutants among the ranks of the ordinary Ratkin. Granted, the armies of Clan Moulder feature all manner of mutant monstrosities. But it is clear such horrors are created as the result of intentional mutation, rather than by accidental exposure to warpstone. While being unable to discount the possibility that such "accidental" Skaven mutants are either eaten by their kin or sold to Moulder as test subjects, it may be that the Ratmen are either naturally immune to warpstone's effects, or have found some way of refining it to reduce its dangers. Both of which seem equally troubling prospects.

society would have collapsed long ago. But all the same, there are no lengths to which the Ratmen will not go to acquire even the most miniscule store of warpstone. (A source of no small added danger to those fools who, despite the Emperor's edict, continue to traffic in it.) A situation that, in concert with the factors expanded upon in previous chapters, may go some way to explain the motives behind some of the Ratmen's more

militant forays onto the surface world. As to the history of these Skaven incursions, that is a subject that will be expanded upon in due course. First, we must turn in Part Two of this book, to an analysis of the natures and relationships of the diverse clans that make up Skaven society.



(Above) This nightmarish painting, entitled The Hordes Cometh, is by the heretic artist, Jaison, Son of Gib, of Nuln. His obsession and single-minded attitude to his work made him infamous among his peers. His reflection of the horror of the Skaven is, in my opinion, very well realised. (Private collection: Gouache on parchment)



Part Two

A TREACHEROUS HIERARCHY:
TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING AS
TO THE SKAVEN WORLDVIEW

1. A Tyranny of Strength: Notes on the Structure and Nature of Skaven Society

As may have been averred from remarks already made in passing, Skaven society follows a clan structure, with each individual Ratman's relationship with his fellows being defined by his membership from birth in any one of several-dozen different competing clans¹. As might be expected, given the innate fractiousness of their race, relations between these clans are characterised by relentless in-fighting as, through means of espionage, intrigue, assassination and even at times outright warfare, each clan struggles constantly for supremacy over its rivals. Nor are these struggles simply conducted between individual clans in isolation. Rather, they are part of the much broader fabric of Skaven life, conducted against the ever-changing backdrop of wider clan politics, as temporary alliances are made and broken at will, all in the name of momentary advantage.

Furthermore, what is true of inter-relationships between the clans is also true of intra-relationships between individuals within the same clan². Each Skaven clan numbers tens or hundreds of thousands of scheming and ferocious individuals, and relations between them are characterised as much by conspiracy and intimidation as those between the clans³. No matter his status, for the individual Ratman, daily life is an unending series of petty disputes and squabbles, any of which may result in a spontaneous challenge to his dominance — challenges he must fight if he is not to lose his hard-won status. For the most part these



(Above) I copied these glyphs from the wall of a ruined temple. They are of Skaven origin, but as usual the authorities ignore my findings. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

challenges are fought with tooth and claw, and though fatalities are rare, nearly all Skaven bear the scars left by these brutal encounters in the shape of torn ears, missing eyes and other diverse disfigurements⁴. Hence, the Ratman must live life in a state of constant watchfulness, forever wary of where the next challenger may come from, striving if possible to eliminate such potential rivals before they arise. A situation which favours those not simply strong in body, but strong in wits and cunning as well.

1. Strictly speaking, it is not unknown for an individual Ratman to find himself belonging to a series of different clans over the course of his lifetime. If the clan of his birth suffers sufficient reverses it may be absorbed by a larger and more powerful clan, which in turn may then be absorbed by another clan, and so on, ad infinitum. Of course, the members of clans that are so absorbed will usually find themselves reduced to the status of slaves. And, given the brutal treatment meted out to slaves across all the Skaven clans, the question of which specific clan the Ratman is actually enslaved by is largely irrelevant.

2. As within, so without, as Verdallo would have it, taking his inspiration from Proti's famous dictum.

3. If anything more so. For whereas the worst excesses of the clans may be curbed for fear of the direct intervention of the Lords of Decay, the Skaven individual need hardly fear their attentions unless his schemes are particularly grandiose.

4. Sometimes though, fatalities do occur. Not least when one of the challengers is left either crippled or so fatally weakened by the fight that, in its immediate aftermath, he is turned upon and devoured by his fellows.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of a Skaven Warlord leading a group of Clanrats forward. Notice that the Warlord seems much bigger than the Clanrats under his command – a fact he has emphasised by means of his headdress and a trophy harness bearing the heads of enemies taken in war. Establishing leadership among the common Clanrats is often more a matter of brute force than subtlety, and the larger a chieftain or Warlord appears, the less likely it is that his rule will be challenged. Although not as powerful as either the Grey Seers or the leaders of the Greater Clans, such Warlords actually serve as the rulers of the vast majority of Ratmen. It is said that certain of the greatest of the Warlords are even members of the Council of Thirteen. (Privately commissioned by the author: Water colour on canvas)

It can be seen therefore that Skaven society is perhaps best characterised as a pyramid structure built on an extreme adherence to the principle of survival of the fittest. A pyramid of the strong over the weak, extending from the Horned Rat at its apex, down past the Council of Thirteen, Grey Seers, Greater Clans and so on, all the way to the wretched Skavenslaves at its base. A restless seething tyranny of strength in which dozens of clans and millions of individuals jostle constantly for power and position. Given the nature of this pyramid – in which no alliance can last long nor ally be trusted – it may seem remarkable that the Skaven have managed to survive as a species at all.

For all their self-serving factionalism and fratricidal tendencies, it would seem that, on rare occasions, even the Ratmen are capable of putting their animosities aside for the greater good of their race. In every case, however, it is not long before their natural divisiveness reasserts itself. This is something for which Humanity has much to be thankful. For, were the Ratmen ever to finally put their differences permanently aside and unite behind the banner of a single strong leader, we might well be doomed.

5. A further example of the extreme divisiveness of Ratmen society can be seen in their languages, which, according to some Dwarf sources, are divided into literally hundreds of regional and clan-specific dialects.

2. A God in Their Own Image: The Horned Rat

Already, with barely a quarter of the pages of this book behind us, we have seen ample evidence of why the words “loathsome” and “vile” are well chosen in describing the Ratmen. Moreover, having dwelt at length on so many diverse examples of horror, even the most stoic of readers may find themselves aghast at the thought that this catalogue of monstrosities must continue. Yet, continue it must. To do anything less would be to leave ourselves blind and deaf to the sinister menace which, even now, lurks in the subterranean world beneath our feet, dreaming our demise from the shadows. The reader must steel himself: worse is still to come. For, having demonstrated just what horrors these Ratmen are, what then can be said of the unholy God that birthed them? What can be said of the Horned Rat?

It may seem difficult at first to countenance the thought that any such deity as the Ratmen's God could exist at all. Yet, at least insomuch as he is worshipped by the Ratmen and miracles are attributed to him by them, the Horned Rat would seem to exist just as surely as do the gods Sigmar, Ulric and Taa'. As to the nature of this worship, as might be expected given everything else we have learned about them, blood sacrifice features prominently among the unspeakable rites performed by the Ratmen in their God's honour; not least because his worshippers rightly fear that if the Horned Rat is left unsated they will be devoured themselves. For the most part, those sacrificed are captives and slaves — though whether they are taken from among the ranks of the Ratmen, or from unfortunate members of other races captured in war, is a question more likely to be decided by matters of availability, rather than by any specific point of religious doctrine. When a great many Ratmen have gathered together — or when their leaders

have either some great boon to ask of their God, or some great failure to atone for — the numbers of captives slain in a single act of worship can be prodigious, numbering in the hundreds, even thousands. In this context, consider for a moment the awful fate of the Tilean city of Parmis, whose ruler, a certain Duke Viallo, is said to have foolishly entered into an alliance with the Ratmen. When, as might be expected, the Skaven betrayed him, the entire adult population of the city was slain in a single day of bloodshed. Though perhaps most horrifying of all is the fact that, when scouts from a neighbouring city-state came to survey the vast piles of corpses left in Parmis's square, not a single child's body was found among them. Having killed their parents, the Ratmen had abducted every last one of the children of Parmis, for what dark purpose one can only guess.

In studying the Horned Rat, we cannot help but be drawn to the claims made by some savants that sentient beings inadvertently shape the nature of their gods through their own subconscious fears and desires. For what is the Horned Rat if not the ultimate expression of the cunning and hunger of all his children? He is an ancient evil: an ageless, endlessly patient, insidious horror, gnawing forever at the edges of reality. He is an eternal schemer, a skilled and subtle manipulator, a creature of dark and feral cunning: The Lord of the World Below. Above all else, he is our Enemy, watching us with sly and hungry eyes from the darkness, waiting for the day when Man and his works will falter and his children can rise from the shadows to engulf us. A day against which mankind must begin to arm itself. If not, then like the fools of Parmis before us, we may all of us end our days as food for the Ratkin God.

1. If it seems I have inadvertently besmirched the names of these worthies by mentioning them in connection with the Ratmen's God, I beg the reader's indulgence. However unpalatable it may seem, the point remains that while we may be horrified at the tenets of the Skaven faith, we can no more deny the existence of the Horned Rat than we can that of any other deity.

3. Those Most Treacherous Masters: The Council of Thirteen

It may seem highly improbable, given the facts already established as to the fractious nature of Skaven society, to talk in any realistic way of the Ratmen being ruled or governed – at least insofar as we might understand these terms. But for all the manifest disorder of life among the Ratmen, they are in fact possessed of a rudimentary form of government. And it is to this government, and the sinister figures known as “The Council of Thirteen”, that we will turn our attentions here.

Despite its title, and the fact its members are also known as the Thirteen Lords of Decay, with typical Skaven perversity “The Council of Thirteen” only actually numbers twelve members – the thirteenth position and place of honour at the head of the Council being taken symbolically by their God, the Horned Rat. Ruling as they do in the Horned Rat’s name, the Lords of Decay are counted as the ultimate masters of the Skaven tyranny, tasked with uniting the anarchic Ratmen hordes and forcing them to work together towards common goals. In reality, despite a veneer of common purpose, the Council are as divided against each other as every other layer of Skaven society. Nor are their lives free from the constant internecine scheming that characterises all Skaven life. Far from it, possessed as they are of a vastly extended lifespan, the members of the Council are the most accomplished schemers of them all, many of them having had centuries in which to hone their malice¹. As such, their lives are given over to endless intrigues, as each Council member plots to see himself aggrandised at the expense of his rivals, while at the same time jealously

guarding his own position. If they are different at all from their lesser brethren it is in the labyrinthine nature and far-reaching implications of their plots. For whereas their short-lived kin might have but a handful of years in which to achieve some long-cherished aim, the Lords of Decay have decades in which to weave their plans, coupled with the subtlety that comes only when one has already outlived generations of would-be rivals². A subtlety so marked, in fact, that the hapless puppets caught within these machinations rarely realise the degree to which they are being manipulated. Just as the Ratmen’s enemies – whether Man, Dwarf or Elf – have little understanding of how often their own conflicts with the Ratmen are but the accidental by-product of the political intrigues of one or another of the Lords of Decay.



(Above) The Face That Haunts My Nightmares, XII, by Niklaas van Meer. This is probably of a Clan Eshin assassin. (Private collection: Ink on vellum)

1. As remarked upon previously, Skaven leaders are much more long-lived than their lesser kin – probably a sign of their having recourse to life-extending magics. As might be expected given their place at the pinnacle of the Skaven pyramid, the Lords of Decay are the most long-lived of all, with some of them said to have lived lives in excess of two centuries in length – more than ten generations by the standards of the ordinary Ratkin.

2. It should be mentioned that, as with matters of status at every other level of Skaven society, the position of each individual Lord of Decay is open to challenge by ambitious rivals. Although, given the already remarked-upon subtlety and longevity of these creatures, it is readily apparent that such challenges are rarely successful.

4. The Chosen of the Rat God: Grey Seers

As has been previously mentioned, it is not uncommon for the future shape of an individual Ratman's life to be determined by certain of his physical attributes at birth, most commonly size and fur colour. Nowhere, however, is this process more pronounced than in the lives of the Ratmen known as Grey Seers. Like all those considered destined for future greatness, such individuals are always born with pure grey or white fur. But what makes them truly remarkable is the fact that, alone of all other Ratmen, the infant Grey Seer is born possessed of the nubs of what will in time grow to become a fully-formed pair of horns.

Among the Ratmen, such births are counted as particularly rare and auspicious events, indicating that the individual so marked has been chosen for the special favour of the Horned Rat. Accordingly, as much as anything to protect them from the attentions of their jealous siblings, such infants are usually removed from their litters at once, to be raised in the company of others of their ilk, from where later, assuming of course they live to reach maturity², they will eventually be apprenticed to an adult Grey Seer to be taught the ways of their class.

Among the Ratmen, Grey Seers are accounted as leaders of great status and rank. Prophets and visionaries, they are the priests of the Skaven religion, the intermediaries between the Horned Rat and his children, tasked with interpreting their God's whims and desires. Nor do their fell accomplishments end there. Each of them is also a powerful sorcerer, possessed of diverse and potent magical abilities, granted to them by



(Above) Eyewitness sketch of a Skaven Grey Seer, drawn from memory by the author. As noted elsewhere, these creatures are born with their horns, which are counted a mark of their status as the Chosen of the Horned Rat. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

virtue of their relationship with their unholy God. With but the merest gesture of tail or claw they can summon vast ravening swarms of rats to devour their enemies, appear and disappear at will, or channel bolts of eldritch energies from their fingertips which are capable of reducing anything they touch to steaming piles of ash. But even these represent but the tiniest proportion of their powers.

I myself have seen a Grey Seer, upon finding himself being charged by a dozen good and godly men, stretch out a taloned hand and, uttering a chittering incantation, cause his assailants to fall dead, their bodies abruptly covered in sinister black plague-marks that had

1. Leaving aside those who would try to use this fact to support the fanciful notion that the Skaven are a sub-species of Beastmen, one cannot help but be troubled by the seeming parallels with the creatures of Chaos. Horns, after all, are a common motif in the physical appearances of not just Beastmen, but Daemons and human mutants as well. Once again, the vexing question of the relationship between the Skaven and Chaos pushes itself to the fore. If only we were able to answer it.

2. Even when raised among others of his own kind, the life of a juvenile Grey Seer is no less fraught than that of the ordinary Ratman. Chief among the dangers is that another juvenile will consider him a potential future rival and take steps to have him eliminated. As mentioned previously, there is no more inalienable law among the Ratmen than that of survival of the fittest – no matter what their status.



(Above) And then Darkness, Decay, and the Horned Rat Shall Hold Illimitable Dominion Over All. Painted by the New Macabrist Marco Giannetti circa 2297 IC, one of a series of such paintings by Giannetti, inspired by the works of the fifteenth century mystic Jakob Sudenberg. (The Leitdorf Collection: Oils on canvas)

not been there a moment earlier. They are horrors, all of them, these Seers. Abominations, vile beyond the ken of Man, and we should not suffer them to live!

Creatures of great influence among their fellows, the Grey Seers are charged with unifying the fractious Ratmen hordes and forcing them to work in common purpose in the name of their God. As such, their role in Skaven society has much in common with that of the Council of Thirteen⁴. But, like the members of the Council, Grey Seers rarely stay true to the cause of unification. Like all Ratmen, they are conniving individuals whose lives – and in common with other Skaven leaders, the lives of Grey Seers are much longer than those of the more lowly Clanrats – are almost wholly

devoted to the most selfish and transient of aims. In this they are aided by their religious role, giving them as it does the power to denounce as heretics any clan or individual who stand in their way. In such cases the offending party does not last long – granted the spurious justification of holy war, their rivals will likely descend on them en masse in a feeding frenzy born of self-interest and the settling of old scores. Given this, often the mere threat of being declared heretic is enough to force a clan to kowtow to a Grey Seer's wishes. A situation that many a power-hungry Grey Seer has gladly used to his advantage.

3. The reader will forgive me if at times I am unable to preserve scholarly objectivity in my discourse on the Ratmen. Given my own experiences with them, such occasional lapses are, I think, entirely understandable.

4. It is claimed by some sources that the leader of Grey Seers, known as the Seerlord, is a member of the Council himself. However, the truth or not of this claim is impossible to verify.



(Above) Ask Not for Whom This Bell Tolls. Another in the series by the Tilean painter Marco Giannetti, inspired by the writings of Sudenberg, circa 2298 IC. (The Leitdorf Collection: Oils on canvas)

The horses were the first to be affected. With but a single haunting peal of that dreadful bell they began to panic, throwing their riders and trampling them under their hoofs in their desperation to escape. Then, as the bell rang out again and again, all good order collapsed, as to a man every one of us found ourselves gripped by the same strange and nameless terror. Here and there, seeking to restore cohesion, the captains cried out for the men to turn and face the approaching horde. But it was too late. We were already doomed...

Testimony from a survivor of the Battle of Boronadin, in the year 2303 IC

If all the strange and sinister machines of war used by the Ratmen, perhaps none is more devastating in its effect on the human spirit, and more subtly unnerving, than that example of their baleful artifice known as the "Screaming Bell". Among those men who have heard it, it is said to be a sound the like of which is never forgotten – a sound that haunts their nightmares forevermore. When that unholy Bell tolls, even the strongest of men can be reduced in his heart to little more than a frightened child. To hear the Screaming Bell is to be instantly confronted with the spectre of your own mortality, and to know just how inevitable are the gathering processes of decay. Put more succinctly, to hear it is to know the sound of Death.

Worse, when the Screaming Bell is brought to war, its very presence seems to invigorate the Ratmen, driving them to new extremes of ferocity and frenzy. Unlike other Skaven war-machines, the Screaming Bell is not

counted among the weapons of Clan Skryre. Rather, it is part of the profane paraphernalia of the Grey Seers – a mobile unholy altar from which they preach to the Ratkin masses of the coming glories of their malignant God. More than a simple war-machine, each Screaming Bell serves as both ancient relic and living testament – an eternal symbol to the Ratmen of the Horned Rat's dark and unhallowed power. With its every doom-laden peal, the Ratmen are inspired as greatly to awe and devotion as their enemies are to fear and desperation. Nor are the Bell's effects limited to the areas of mind and spirit, the sound of its relentless tolling has been known to cause walls to crack and buildings to crumble. Further proof, if any were needed, that the weapons of the Ratmen are not as those of other races. For who but the pernicious Ratmen could grind down both the souls and works of Man with something as otherwise humble and innocuous as the tolling of a bell?

5. The Greater Clans: Skryre, The Machine Builders

Among the dozens of competing clans that make up the Skaven race, there are certain clans that, possessed as they are of a superior size and power, hold a special pre-eminence in the hierarchy of their society. Known collectively as the “Greater Clans”, they are four in number: Clan Skryre, Clan Moulder, Clan Pestilens and Clan Eshin. With the exception of the Lords of Decay¹ and the Grey Seers, these four clans represent the most feared and powerful groupings in Skaven society, manifesting a far-ranging influence to which less well-placed rivals can only jealously aspire. An influence that, with characteristic Skaven selfishness, each Greater Clan ruthlessly exploits in the cause of its own self-interest. At the root of their power is the fact that each of the Greater Clans specialises in one or other strange and unique trades, leading their services to be highly sought-after by the lesser clans. The nature of trades and services will be analysed over the next several chapters, beginning here with the dubious innovations of the so-called Warlock Engineers of Clan Skryre.



OF DESIGNS DIABOLIC AND DEVICES INFERNAL

Clan Skryre are the artificers, engineers, and technologists of Ratmen society. In keeping with the predilections of their race, their technology is entirely based on the use and

manipulation of warpstone in all its forms. As such, their technology would seem to have as much in common with sorcery as it does with science². Making use of an understanding of the nature of warpstone based on the work of generations of their predecessors, the forgemasters of Clan Skryre put warpstone to an extraordinary array of uses. As an ingredient it is forged or annealed into metals, added to all manner of chemical concoctions, even used in its raw state to power strange devices. Most tellingly of all, however, the use of warpstone in which Clan Skryre most excels is in the design and manufacture of weapons.

As to the wide variety and strange natures of these weapons, that is a topic which will be dwelt on more fully in a later chapter³. For now, it is sufficient to remark that such weapons range from the relatively straightforward and commonplace – such as the Jezzails pictured overleaf – to nightmarish machines of war that would seem to give evidence to the most fantastical ravings of such tortured visionaries as Sudenberg, Hieronymus Bouscus, and Albrecht of Nuln. And while many of these same weapons are prone to often disastrous malfunction, among the Warlock Engineers of Clan Skryre this is counted as no great drawback, given that it is largely slaves and common Clanrats who must bear the brunt of such misfortunes⁴.

Given that Skaven society churns with constant warfare as rival clans seek to claim each other's territory, it will come as no surprise to the reader that Clan Skryre's mastery of the

1. As with the Grey Seers, a representative from each of the four Greater Clans is said to hold a permanent place on the Council of Thirteen.

2. Although, as distasteful as it may seem even to suggest it, the possibility cannot be discounted that the “magical” elements of Clan Skryre's devices are simply an advanced form of science, albeit one beyond our wit to understand.

3. See Part Three.

4. As has been remarked previously, this callous disregard for the lives of their fellows is endemic among the Skaven and shaped largely by the constant danger of overpopulation within their society.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of a group of Skryre Clanrats armed with Jezzails. A long-barrelled, large-bore musket based on the same principles as the warlock pistol, the bullets of the Jezzail are capable of inflicting horrifying wounds and of penetrating even the strongest of armours. It is also counted as one of the most reliable of the weapons of Clan Skryre – although for all that, it is still not unknown for a Jezzail to malfunction with predictably lethal consequences for its user. (Privately commissioned by the author: Oils on canvas)

machineries of mass slaughter is held in high regard. In any such conflict, each warring clan will often seek to outbid the other in their attempts to hire the services of Clan Skryre's specialist weapons teams, knowing that securing such aid is likely to all but guarantee their victory. A state-of-affairs the Warlock Engineers have not been slow in turning to a profit, frequently playing one side off against the other to their own advantage, before selling their services to the highest bidder. Transactions which have made Clan Skryre the wealthiest of the Skaven clans, not to say arguably the most powerful and influential.

But as ever among the Ratmen, nothing is set in stone. If the star of Clan Skryre is in the ascendant now, given the ever-shifting alliances

and loyalties of the Skaven world it may not shine so brightly forever. Even with all their power, the position of Clan Skryre is at best that of "first among equals", with their ambitions held in check by the fear of the reaction of the other Greater Clans. For should they feel sufficiently threatened in their own positions by Clan Skryre's ascendancy, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Clans Moulder, Pestilens and Eshin might one day combine their forces to make war upon Skryre. Nor is it impossible that at some point either the Grey Seers or the Lords of Decay will act to diminish the Warlock Engineers' power. Such are the vagaries of the Skaven world, a world where treachery and betrayal lurk round every corner.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of a Warlock Engineer of Clan Skryre. Masters of what is either a strange sorcery or an arcane and previously unknown form of science, the Warlock Engineers are armed with an array of bizarre devices whose full and devastating function often only becomes clear when it is already too late to escape their effects. (Privately commissioned by the author: Ink on parchment)



(Above) Urged on by their Master, they are Lean and Athirst!, by Nikolai Klimt, circa 2304 IC. Like Giannetti, Klimt was a proponent of the New Macabrist school and was forced to leave the Empire for more liberal climes after his claims that his pictures were drawn from life provoked the ire of witch hunters and the artistic establishment alike. (Private collection: Oils on canvas)

6. The Greater Clans: Moulder, The Beast Masters

Second only in wealth and prestige to Clan Skryre, Clan Moulder is a powerful force in Skaven society. Like Clan Skryre before them, the roots of Moulder's power lies in the production of weapons which are highly sought-after by the other clans. But there the resemblance ends. For, unlike the Warlock Engineers, the adepts of Clan Moulder are not concerned with the crafting of metals and other non-living substances, but with the crafting of living weapons from muscle, sinew and bone. They are beast masters, capable by means of cruelty of breaking the most recalcitrant of animals to their wills or, equally, turning even the most timid of beasts into vicious killers. Nor do their villainous talents end there. For their leaders, the Master Moulders of Clan Moulder, are far more than simple animal trainers. They are vile architects of the flesh, skilled in using warpstone to create all manner of mutant monstrosities.



OF WARPED BEASTS AND MUTANT HORRORS

It is said that to the Master Moulders all living things, even the strangest and most horrifying of monsters, are viewed as nothing more than subjects for future experiments. Refusing to bow to the limits of nature, and forever seeking to outdo their own previous accomplishments, they send their Packmasters out far and wide to search for and capture creatures which may be of use to them. Trolls, manticores, wyverns, chimeras, all manner of giant insects — monsters that would elicit nothing but fear and

horror in any sane creature — are regarded by the Master Moulders in much the same way as a child sees a new toy. For with each new captured creature, each new monster, comes the hope that the Master Moulders will create some new and ferocious beast of war.

By dint of use of warpstone and their own unholy skills, they can mould flesh as easily as others might mould clay, mutating some creatures into new and terrifying shapes, crossbreeding others, implanting new organs and limbs to still others. In their gruesome work, the only boundaries the Master Moulders need face are in the limits of their own fevered imaginations. And the imagination of a Master Moulder is a thing that respects little in the way of bounds.

Above all else, in their creation of all these horrors, it is the aim of the Master Moulders to create new and stable breeds of fighting beast which they can breed in great numbers to sell or hire to the other clans. But for every success they have achieved in this area, whether it be in breeding giant rats the size of wolves or the fearsome Rat Ogre, there are a hundred sterile failures which end their days fighting other twisted monstrosities for survival in the deepest and darkest recesses of the breeding pits in Moulder strongholds¹. But, even in the face of so much failure, the Master Moulders take far too much pleasure in their avocation to allow themselves to become disheartened. So long as there are beasts to mould and flesh to warp, they will continue with their ghastly work. Continue forever, all in the hope of one day creating the ultimate horror: the perfect beast of war.

1. Not, of course, that there is anything so unusual in the beasts of Moulder fighting amongst each other. Like all Skaven, the Master Moulders of Clan Moulder respect strength in all things, often utilising fights to the death among even their successful progeny in order to more finely hone the killer instinct of their creations.

7. The Greater Clans: Pestilens, The Plague Makers

What can be said of the members of Clan Pestilens? Counted strange and foul even among the ranks of their brother Ratkin, they are creatures insanely devoted to disease and decay in all its forms. Worshipers of the Horned Rat in his role as the Bringer of Pestilence, they style themselves as his priests and monks, seeking through their unstinting actions to spread the gospel of his contagions across the world. Masters in the baneful arts of epidemic and infection, they work constantly to create new and horrifying diseases, striving endlessly to make plagues which are ever more virulent and deadly. More than that, they expose themselves to their own creations with gleeful abandon, treating their own bodies as living altars to the pestilent glories of their God and greeting each new symptom of decay and ruin with awe and gratitude.



OF FEVERED WORKS AND FEVERISH DEVOTIONS

Alone among the other Greater Clans, the members of Clan Pestilens are religious zealots, devoting themselves and their works to the worship of the Horned Rat rather than seeking

personal wealth¹. At the same time though, they are equally committed to expanding the wealth and influence of their clan as a whole, reasoning that by increasing the power of Clan Pestilens they are thereby adding to the glories of the God in whose name all their malignant acts are performed. To this end they will often lease their services to one or another of the endlessly warring lesser clans, selling their aid to the highest bidder just as do the other Greater Clans. Thus has many a Skaven Warlord either realised his ambitions or cemented his power by hiring the Plague Priests to send diseases to destroy his rivals — thereby both adding to Pestilens' coffers, and offering able demonstration to the other clans of the effectiveness of their diseases as weapons².

It is when they go to war in earnest though, that the members of Clan Pestilens are at their most horrifying. Seeking to win any battle before it even begins, they will unleash the full panoply of their creations, killing combatants and non-combatants alike in vast outbreaks of plagues of no natural origin. Then, when they judge their enemies sufficiently weakened, the blighted hosts of Pestilens will finally emerge from the shadows. Preceded by vast swarms of filthy, plague-ridden rats, chanting strange chattering liturgies with unholy fervour, the armies of Clan Pestilens are an unnerving sight. Gathered beneath banners constructed from the

1. Sources differ as to the methods employed by Clan Pestilens in creating these new diseases. Some say they use magic, others claim warpstone, though it is entirely likely they use both. Perhaps only when one of their Plague Priests has been captured and interrogated will the truth finally be known. Though what methods of interrogation may prove effective on a creature immune to the threat of physical duress remains to be determined.

2. That is not to say they are any less inclined to fractious disputes, either amongst themselves or with the other clans. Far from it, obsessed as they are with a monomaniacal belief in their own righteousness, each Plague Monk strives constantly to outdo his fellows with his devotions, just as his clan as a whole strives to outdo its rivals. If anything, Clan Pestilens is even more inclined to disputes with rival clans than most, viewing any who oppose them as apostates and heretics.

3. Of course, given the difficulties faced even by the Plague Priests in controlling their diseases, it is not unknown for such campaigns to go horribly wrong. In some cases the unleashed plague will end up killing not just the Warlord's rivals but thousands of other Ratmen as, unchecked in the filth and squalor of their tunnels, the contagion spreads like wildfire into nearby burrows. Then again, considering the Plague Priests' eagerness to observe their creations "in the wild", it is impossible to say how many of these "unintended" epidemics are unleashed not by accident, but by design.

decomposing corpses of their previous victims, come endless dishevelled ranks of Plague Monks whose decaying and disease-harried flesh is hidden beneath soiled shrouds and pus-stained bandages. Accustomed to the constant pain of their many self-inflicted afflictions⁴, the Plague Monks fight with an unstoppable frenzy born of religious hysteria, showing so remarkable a resistance to injury that their enemies must often all but dismember them to stop them. Worse still are those Plague Monks so honoured for their fanaticism that they are allowed to carry a plague censer – a large, hollow-headed flail containing a foully burning incense capable of infecting those unfortunate enough to breathe it in with an instantaneously lethal form of plague. The reader should note though that the use of the word “plague” may be something of a misnomer here. For while post-mortem dissections of the fluid-filled lungs of those killed by the censer’s fumes show swelling of the interior of the lungs similar to that created by certain forms of pneumonic plague, there is no evidence of these symptoms being transmissible by other methods as they would be if the “plague” in question was truly a disease. Some insight into the question may be offered by the characteristically sickly green glow emanating from these censers when they are in use – a sure sign of the presence of warpstone. If we postulate that fragments of warpstone are burned inside the censers with some disease material, it may be that the effect is essentially that of a trade whereby the disease in question becomes far more deadly at the cost of no longer being contagious by ordinary means⁵. Whatever the case, lacking immunity to the effects of his own weapon, the maddened Censer Bearer is driven to ever greater heights of ecstatic and bloody abandon as he seeks to spread his poison to as many enemies as he can before the fumes overwhelm him. Until at last, his



(Above) *And I Saw Three Figures, Ragged Harbingers of Disease and Death, circa 2307 IC. Another example of the New Macabrist school as practised by Nikolai Kimt. According to Kimt, the manifesto of the New Macabrists is “To seek out those hidden horrors that lurk beneath the surface of things and accurately portray them in all their malignity”. A task in which here at least, as I am sure the reader will agree, Kimt appears to have succeeded admirably. (Private collection: Oils on canvas)*

strength finally giving out as his lungs fill with blood and pus, the Censer Bearer collapses among the manifold bodies of those he has killed, content that by his zeal he has served the greater purposes of his pestilent and malicious God.

4. The reader may rightly ask how it is the Plague Monks survive at all when their bodies are so wracked with deadly diseases. Perhaps generations of such exposure have hardened the bodies of their clan against the effects of the more common contagions, or else the presence of so many diseases somehow creates an equilibrium whereby each disease constrains its brothers. Then again, perhaps they are correct in their assertion that the Horned Rat protects them in return for their devotions. As with so much else about the Ratmen, it remains an enigma.

5. A conjecture perhaps, though one which would certainly seem to fit the available evidence.

8. The Greater Clans: Eshin, The Death Bringers

Of all the Greater Clans whose members hold a place in the restless hierarchy of Skaven society, perhaps none are more mysterious than the fell killers of Clan Eshin. To establish anything in the way of facts about them is no easy task. For moreso even than the majority of Ratmen, the members of Clan Eshin are creatures of stealth and silence; black-furred and black-clad predators who only emerge from their concealment in the shadows in order to strike down their victims, before swiftly returning once more to the comforting embrace of darkness. They are the assassins of the Skaven world: masters above all other Ratmen in the diverse arts of sabotage, terror, and murder. They are lords of the night, more skilled and practised in the methodology of the dealing of death than the assassins of any other race¹. Dark and deadly killers, of whom it is said that to see them at all is to see the face of your own annihilation.



OF STEALTHY KILLERS AND MORE STEALTHY MURDER

For all that though, it would be a mistake for the reader to assume that all the members of Clan Eshin are equally skilled². Rather, like the other Greater Clans, they are ordered in several different ranks with each new rank possessing



(Above) Artist's impression of a Clan Eshin Assassin. Given the understandable difficulty of finding any survivors from the attacks of such Assassins for interview, certain liberties have been taken in the drawing of the creature here, with its appearance being based on reasonable supposition rather than eyewitness testimony. (Privately commissioned by the author: Ink on parchment)

more skill than the last. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the Night Runners³ — fast skirmishers who, in keeping with the characteristic Skaven disregard for the lives of their fellows, are intended to function as little more than arrow fodder and divert the enemy's attention long enough for other units to be allowed to work themselves into a position of advantage. Next, there are the so-called Gutter

1. Though those inclined to the splitting of hairs may argue that this dubious accolade is more fittingly applied to the master-assassins among those dark kin of the Elves of Ulthuan known as the Druchii.

2. Something for which we can give thanks. If all the members of Clan Eshin were possessed of the same incomparable levels of skill, surely no force in creation could stand against them.

3. Strictly speaking there are some counted below even the lowly Night Runners in the Eshin hierarchy. Like the other clans, Clan Eshin may be expected to number a certain amount of ordinary Clanrats confined to menial duties among their ranks. Then there is the matter of enslaved Skaven, bought to perform tasks considered too onerous and dangerous for even these menials. However, given that such individuals are counted so low in status as to be almost excluded from the ranks of the Eshin hierarchy and are in any case seldom seen outside the confines of the clan's strongholds, there seems little reason to dwell on them further here.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on the author's sketch, of a group of Clan Eshin warriors seen attempting to ambush a merchant caravan en route to the Dwarf Hold of Karak Kadrin. Although it can be difficult to distinguish between the different ranks of Clan Eshin members by appearance, the ambushers were most likely Night Runners rather than the more experienced and senior Gutter Runners. Not least because Gutter Runners would be unlikely to have made the mistake of launching an attack so close to dawn, thus allowing themselves to be caught out in the open by the light of the rising sun in full view of their intended victims. (Privately commissioned by the author: Oils on canvas)

Runners – a rank achieved, as ever with the Ratmen, by the expedient of the law of survival of the fittest. Drawn from among those few Night Runners who manage to survive long enough to be considered as showing a natural aptitude by their superiors, Gutter Runners are trained in the skills of infiltration and stealthy murder. Operating in small groups as scouts and saboteurs behind enemy lines, Gutter Runners often seem to appear as if from nowhere to strike fear and dissension into the hearts of even the most well-ordered troops⁴. But even the skills of the Gutter Runners are as nothing compared to those of their true masters, the Assassins of Clan Eshin.

Drawn from the ranks of the Gutter Runners, just as the Gutter Runners are drawn from among the Night Runners, each Clan Eshin Assassin is a supreme master of the arts of the murder, proficient in ways beyond the wildest dreams of even the most ambitious human assassin⁵. Aided by the agility, dexterity and astonishing reflexes common to all Skaven, it is said that through years of training the Assassins of Clan Eshin are capable of achieving the most astounding of feats: leaping many times their own height into the air, outrunning a galloping horse, climbing the sheerest of surfaces. Nor do their talents end there. For their minds and wills are said to be as highly trained as their bodies, allowing them to remain motionless in hiding for days if need be, unsleeping, senses ever alert for the approach of their target. Adept with all manner of strange and exotic weapons, skilled in the setting of traps and use of poisons, almost preternaturally swift and silent, it is said the Assassins of Clan Eshin never fail⁶ and that to be marked for death by them is to be as good as dead already.

As might be expected given their gifts, the services of Clan Eshin are held in high esteem by the other Skaven clans, who strive to outbid each other for those services just as much as they do



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of a Clan Eshin Gutter Runner. Though not as adept in the ways of stealth and murder as the full-fledged Assassin, the Gutter Runners share their higher-ranking brethren's predilection for fighting by night and launching sudden surprise attacks from ambush. (Privately commissioned by the author: Ink on parchment)

the services of Clans Skryre, Moulder, and Pestilens. There can be few though who hold Clan Eshin's assassins in greater regard than do the Council of Thirteen. For though Clan Eshin are happy to complete freelance assassinations on behalf of the other clans and, it is claimed, any other race or individual prepared to meet their price, by far their most lucrative contracts are those performed on behalf of the Lords of Decay. It would not be stretching a point to say that Clan Eshin acts as the Council's de facto secret police, enforcing the Council's will through murder and terror on any Warlord or clan judged to be disloyal. If the Council of Thirteen is the hand that directs the Skaven tyranny, then Clan Eshin is the sword in that hand. Or, more accurately, the dagger.

The dagger of night, sudden death, and the Assassin.

4. It may be that they make use of the extensive tunnel system of the Skaven Under-Empire to help them achieve this.

5. Unless, of course, the reader gives countenance to some of the more extravagant claims made about the peoples of the lands of Cathay and Nippon.

6. Though this is, presumably, an exaggeration.

9. Multitudes Without Number: The Warlord, or Lesser Clans

Clans Skaar, Sleekit, Skaul, and Verm. Such are the names of but a handful of the dozens, even hundreds of remaining clans which complete the Skaven plurality. Ranging from small clans perhaps only a few hundred members in size to enormous conglomerations hundreds of thousands strong, these so-called “lesser” clans make up the vast majority of Skaven society. And while they cannot compete with the Greater Clans in terms of wealth and prestige, the largest among them – rising stars such as Clans Mors and Skab – are counted considerable powers in their own right. These diverse clans serve as the foundation of the Skaven world, supplying the vast verminous hordes of Clanrat warriors which make up the bulk of any army when the Ratmen go to war, not to mention providing that same world with the anonymous and ill-regarded toilers whose unceasing labours sustain it in times of peace. They are the foul bedrock on which all the Ratmen’s tainted achievements are built. And, as such, we would be remiss if we did not consider the composition and nature of these clans in further depth here.



OF TEEMING HORDES AND SCHEMING MASTERS

As has been previously affirmed, the social structure of each Skaven clan is a microcosm of the wider societal structures around it: a seething pyramid of strength in which

thousands of individuals plot and struggle against each other constantly in search of dominance. In the case of the lesser clans², the position on the lowest rung of this hierarchy is taken by the numberless hordes of short-lived slaves either taken as captives in the fratricidal disputes between clans or captured when the Skaven go to war with other races. Above them in the clan hierarchy are the equally numberless hordes of the ordinary Ratkin known as Clanrats. Such Clanrats make up the majority of the membership of any individual clan. They are the Skaven’s worker-caste – lowly menials who perform by far the greatest share of the duties of food-gathering, tunnel excavation, and a dozen other such vital tasks on which the continued survival of their clan depends. Set above these Clanrats are those Ratmen who, by dint of superior size or cunning, have proven themselves worthy to be elevated to the Skaven warrior-caste – the Clanrat warriors. Even though they number but a fraction of the larger strength of their clans, there are literally millions of such “foot soldiers” within the Skaven nation – a vast and feral host which, taken in their totality, may well outnumber the armies of all the other known races of the world put together.

Existing somewhere outside the normal hierarchy of the clan are the groups of elite Clanrat warriors known as Stormvermin. Hand-picked at birth from among the litters of ordinary Ratkin for their larger size, build, and darker-coloured fur, the Stormvermin³ are better-trained and equipped than the common Clanrat, serving

1. Given that Skaven society constantly churns with warfare between its members, the word “peace” is used loosely here in the cause of rhetorical effect rather than in the more strict and accurate sense of its actual meaning.

2. And to varying degrees the Greater Clans as well.

3. Interestingly, black-furred Ratmen always seem taller and more muscular than their more commonly-coloured kin. Though whether this superior mass is the product of the action of some unknown factor of Skaven biology, or simply because those so marked have access to a better and more varied diet by virtue of their position, is a question to which no unequivocal answer can at present be given.



(Above) Valiant to the Last, Sir Roland is Overwhelmed by the Perfidious Hordes of the Ratmen, circa 1822 IC. Painted by Henri Jacques, court artist to the Duc de Parravon, the painting depicts the death of the Duc's cousin, Sir Roland La Malchance, at the Battle of Remarché in the year 1813 IC. (The collection of the Duc de Parravon: Oils on canvas')

1. The events leading up to the Battle of Remarché, in which the combined armies of the Duc de Parravon and the Elves of Athel Loren destroyed a Skaven horde as it attempted to lay siege to the Bretonnian cities of Quenelles and Brionne, are dealt with at greater length in Part Four of this book. It should be noted that in his attempts to please his patron, the artist has taken some liberties with the historical facts. Rather than suffering a heroic death while fighting impossible odds, accounts written at the time make it clear La Malchance was actually shot from his saddle by the bullet from a Jezzail, then set upon by a swarm of rats as he lay dying in the mud. Also, in an unrelated aside that may be of interest to the reader, the unicorn motif repeated several times on La Malchance's weapons and armour is no mere decoration, but a symbol among the Bretonnians that the knight in question is on good terms with the Lorenite Elves.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on the author's own testimony, of one of the elite black-furred Clanrat warriors called Stormvermin. Trained from birth to be both more skilled and ferocious than their smaller Clanrat kin, the arms and armour given to the Stormvermin are of a better quality than most Skaven equipment. (Privately commissioned by the author: Ink on parchment)

in small groups as the personal bodyguards of important Skaven dignitaries and leaders.

Set above all these are a bewildering and endlessly competing array of minor chieftains, each of whom owes supposed allegiance to the head of the clan, or "Warlord". (Hence, these lesser clans are usually known as Warlord clans in deference to the title of their leader.) But as ever among the Ratmen each chieftain dreams of

power, scheming constantly to remove his rivals and assure his own ascent to the heady heights of leadership of his clan⁴. Given the fluid and brutal dynamics of power in the Skaven world, in which he who is leader one day can be set upon and cast down by his enemies the next, the clan Warlord must be on his guard every moment of his life. As might be expected therefore, by process of elimination, only the most cunning and treacherous of Ratmen ever ascend to such a rank, while those that do can never afford the luxury of sleeping easy in their burrows. Rather, with glowering eyes they must be ever alert to the ambitions of their subordinates, while at the same time possessed of the strength of sinew and will to ruthlessly crush all who would oppose them. Well can it be said that he who would be lord among the Ratmen must be the epitome of all their vices, well-gifted in those dark characteristics which make the Ratmen more loathsome than any other creature.

For, in the society of the Ratmen, only the most loathsome among them can ever hope to one day be counted king.



(Above) Artist's impression of charging Clanrats. Note the crude armour and bent swords. (Private collection: Ink on canvas)

4. It should be noted that such treachery is accepted, even lauded, among the Ratmen. To their eyes, the ambitious chieftain who manages to murder his Warlord and assume his position is acting in concert with a path to power within their society laid out by the Horned Rat – a God who respects only strength, whether it be strength of body, strength of wits, or both. Similarly, the Warlord who fails to protect himself against such plots, either by besting the would-be betrayer personally or having him killed before he can put his plans in motion, is counted as having failed the test of strength, and accordingly is viewed as deserving nothing but death.

10. Lowly and Most Wretched: The Slaves of the Ratmen

In all creation can there be any creature more wretched, yet undeserving of our compassion, than those creatures kept as slaves by the Ratmen? Housed in filthy overcrowded pens which are considered squalid even by the standards of their masters, poorly clothed and fed, deprived of sleep and rest, forced to undertake long hours of dangerous and strength-sapping work with the lash of their overseers constantly at their backs, such creatures live the most wretched and intolerable lives imaginable. Drawn in the most part from among the broken remnants of Skaven clans defeated in war¹, slaves occupy the lowest rung in the hierarchy of each individual clan. As such, they might be said to exist almost outside the normal order of Skaven society, so lowly and piteous is their status. At the same time though, their sufferings form the very backbone of the Skaven economy, an economy built on the exploitation of an endless and readily available supply of slave labour. And yet even here, among the most wretched of the world, the ruthlessly hierarchical nature of the society of the Ratmen still holds true. A hierarchy divided between those slave-creatures considered to have intrinsic value by their masters – Rat Ogres say, or Skaven females – and the common rank of “worthless” slaves. Further, it may be reasonably supposed – given that the ranks of such “worthless slaves” are almost entirely made up of Ratmen – that there are hierarchies of dominance between the slaves themselves, decided through challenges and fights over status³. Whatever the facts of the matter, to their

masters, the vast bulk of their slaves are little more than disposable chattels, to be worked until they drop or else used as a convenient source of arrow-fodder in time of war. Although arrow-fodder is perhaps something of an over-simplification. For as we shall see in Part Three of this work, Skaven leaders have developed many cunning and disreputable tactics in their use of slaves in war. Tactics, the callous barbarity of which exist in direct relationship to the degree to which the lives of such slaves are considered entirely without value.



(Above) Sketch of an enslaved Clanrat, drawn by a witness of the Battle of Boronadin, 2303 IC. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

1. The reader should understand that when I speak of them as being undeserving of our compassion I am referring to the Ratmen's Skaven and Goblinoid slaves. As for those unfortunate human souls who find themselves held captive by the Ratmen, we can only pray the gods grant them the mercy of a quick death.

2. Again though, it should be emphasised that some small part of the Ratmen's slaves come from the members of other races taken as captives in war. Given the savage inequities and brutal maltreatment heaped on the shoulders of all slaves, such non-Skaven captives rarely last any great length of time in their captivity. The one exception to this may be the Goblins captured by the Skaven in wars with the Greenskins of the Dark Lands and Worlds Edge Mountains.

3. Such slave hierarchies are, however, rarely recognised by their masters. As in human societies, power is a thing in the eye of him that holds the whip.



(Above) Over the Hills of Dead They Come, by Stefan Crouche. This powerful painting hangs in one of the corridors of Rathoch castle. Two centuries ago, the lord of the castle was a renowned lunatic. He became obsessed with giant rats after he marched his army north to deal with an Orc incursion but instead met an army of the Ratmen. He commissioned this piece in light of his alleged experiences. (Private collection: Oils on canvas)



(Above) Tresspass the Ratboy (Author's collection: Watercolour on parchment)

During my lengthy investigation of the tunnels under Middenheim, I heard of a strange tale called the "The Rat Son of the Butcher, or "The Sad Story of Tresspass the Ratboy" from the men who patrol their depths. The tale says that many years ago, a butcher in Middenheim had a son who was born with an extra toe. And so it was that a band of unscrupulous Skaven worshipping cultists stole

him away, because they believed him to be "chosen of the Rat-God!" They murdered his mother and took him into their underground lair.

The butcher armed himself and spent the rest of his days in a search for his lost child. The charismatic leader of the cult was an ordinary citizen until he came across a shard of warpstone that infected his mind and drove him insane. He



(Above) Skaven Cult Leader (Author's collection: Watercolour on parchment)

began to worship the Ratmen and build up a circle of followers. When the butcher's child was delivered to him he tied a fragment of warpstone to his leg. Over the years, the child became dreadfully mutated. His leg turned into a rat limb and the other atrophied and became crippled. He became more and more twisted and deformed. It became his work to take hordes of diseased rats into Empire cities to spread infection.

He uses his mechanical arm to catch rats, and he carries cow-bells and gaff hooks because he has an attraction to them. There is still some semblance of the butcher's child he once was and he possesses a vestige of knowledge of his former life.

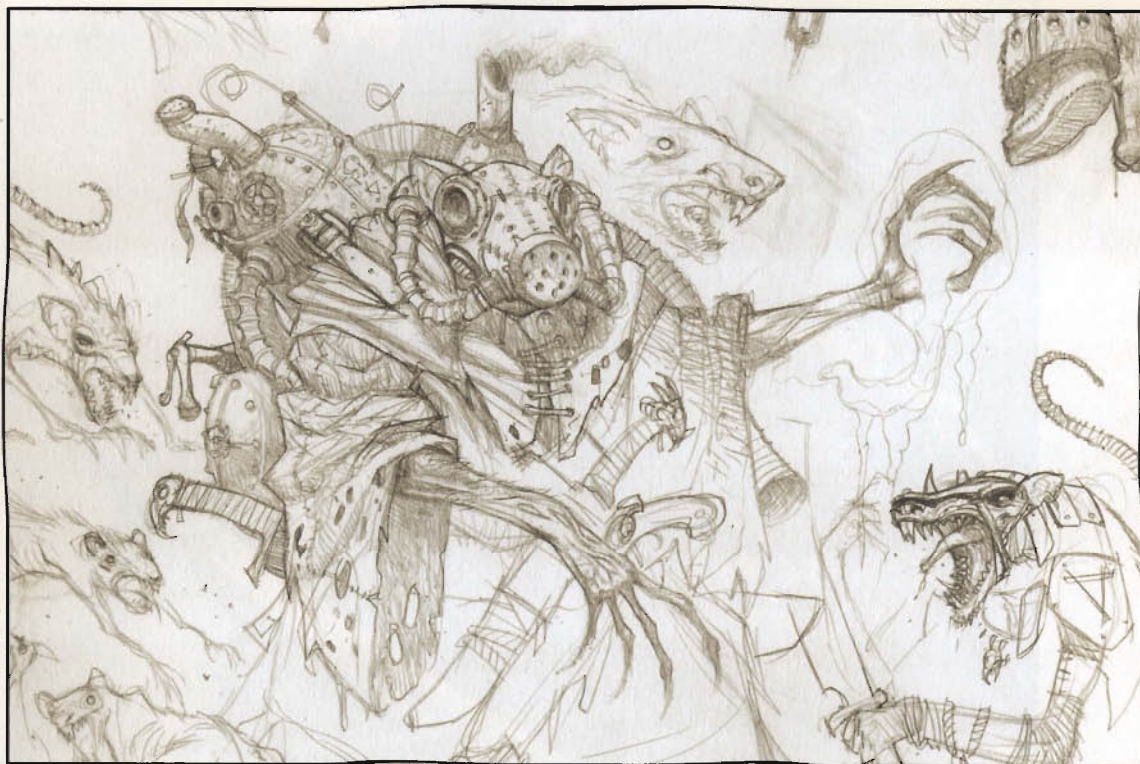
The fate of the child is terrible to contemplate, but I fear that there could be more than a grain of truth in the tale. I believe such abductions happen more often than we would like to admit.



Part Three

DAMNABLE WORKS:
THE HIDEOUS FRUITS OF
SKAVEN ENDEAVOUR

1. By Tooth, Claw and Deceit: Towards an Understanding of the Skaven Way of War



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. The subject is a Poisoned Wind Globadier of Clan Skryre. (The Emmerich Papers: Graphite on canvas)

Among those few readers who have read before of the Ratmen in the works of other, probably less well-informed authors, it may have been an occasion for the raising of the eyebrows when earlier I referred to the “natural ferocity” of the Skaven race. For most, if not all, of those scholars willing to admit to the Ratmen’s existence contend uniformly that, for all the fearsome horror of their appearance, the Ratmen are a cowardly breed at heart¹. Further, they then extend their error by contending this “character flaw” means the Ratmen are easily defeated in war. An entirely erroneous conclusion that would seem to

spring as much from a misunderstanding of the motives behind certain Skaven behaviours, as it does from the fact that few of these would-be commentators have ever seen a Ratman in the flesh.

For while it is not unknown for Ratmen armies to collapse in spectacular disarray after only relatively minor reverses, to see in this the signs of cowardice would be to fatally misjudge the temper of the Skaven mindset. Significantly, such collapses most often occur when the Ratmen find themselves engaged in battle during the hours of daylight – even more so when the extent of their casualties means they

1. One is reminded of those well-meaning parents who, despite the fact that their offspring is but half the size of the village bully, encourage their child to fight him with the idiot maxim “all bullies are cowards”. A maxim seemingly designed to see further injury and humiliation inflicted on the child foolish enough to believe it.

can no longer rely on sheer weight-of-numbers to overwhelm their enemies. To understand the reasons for this we need only look at the realities of the Skaven domain, specifically the cramped and overcrowded conditions in which each Ratman is raised from birth. Accustomed as they are to the darkness underground and the press of bodies in their warrens, it is quite natural that the Ratmen find such things comforting². Equally, it is entirely understandable that, denied these comforts when forced to fight in daylight or when excessive casualties have thinned their numbers, the Ratmen are unsettled and more prone to sudden panic. Just as even the most disciplined of human troops are more likely to see their good order dissolve when fighting in unfamiliar conditions, for example when attacked by night.

It is perhaps one of the dark ironies of the enmity between Skaven and Man that their armies are at their most effective where the other's are at their weakest. For example, while most human troops favour doing battle during the day in open fields with clear lines of advance and fire, for the Ratmen the reverse is true³. To the Ratmen, war is a thing best conducted either underground or by use of the weapons of night and stealth. Moreover, when they field large armies in plain sight, especially in the light of day and out in the open, it is likely either a sign of desperation on the part of their leader or else an indication they feel the battle is all but won. Though, for all that, the human general should always be wary of reading too much of the Ratmen's intentions from the disposition of

their forces. As ever, they are a treacherous race. Not least when they go to war.



TO WIN BY ANY MEANS, OR THE ESSENCE OF SKAVEN STRATEGY

If there is anything which marks out the characteristic methods of warfare of the Skaven race, it is the willingness of their leaders to sacrifice vast numbers of their own followers in pursuit of seemingly minor objectives⁴. But as we have already seen, war for the Skaven is a function of their own fecundity – the Skaven general who shows a cavalier disregard for the lives of his troops might almost be said to be performing a valuable public service for his race in limiting the likelihood that overpopulation among them will lead to famine⁵.

As might be expected, those that bear the brunt of this callousness are already lowest in the Ratkin hierarchy – the Skaven's slaves. The purposes to which slaves are put in warfare by the Ratmen might almost be considered a separate tactical discipline in and of itself, so many and varied are the ways by which their leaders use them. Counted even more expendable than the common Clanrat, most commonly such slaves are deployed in enormous unwieldy masses to divert enemy missile fire and hide the movements of more "valuable" troops. At other times, they are pushed towards the enemy line as

2. Further, as stated previously, the Ratman's sense of smell is particularly sharp, raising the possibility that when grouped together, each Ratman's psychological state is subtly emboldened by the musks and scent-cues emanating from his fellows. This may help account for the fact that when Skaven morale collapses, it does so with astonishing abruptness. Perhaps there is a specific scent-cue associated in the Skaven mind with fear – a "musk of fear" if you will – the emitting of which by one Ratman leads to a sudden chain reaction whereby, as each Ratman senses it and responds in kind, entire armies may flee in sudden and unreasoned terror. If such a musk does exist and could somehow be isolated and distilled, it might prove a telling and invaluable weapon in Man's fight against the Ratmen.

3. One rat's meat is another man's poison, as the idiot aphorisms of Beymer the Sagacious would have it.

4. Though, granted, it could be argued Orc leaders display a similar attitude to their Goblin followers.

5. Of course, insofar as he is also limiting the numbers of Ratmen overall, the same general might be said to be performing a service for all the races of the world.



(Above) Let this picture serve as a warning to all. (Author's collection: Graphite of parchment)

a first wave of attack, intended to test the enemy's defences and weaken his troops for a second wave of attacks by more formidable Clanrat warriors or Stormvermin. But perhaps nothing more ably demonstrates the degree to which the lives of slaves are considered worthless than the oft-used Skaven tactic of sending them forward to hold up the advance of rapid-moving enemy units such as cavalry, then firing volley after volley of missiles indiscriminately into the ensuing melee to kill the enemy and slaves alike. Similarly, when assaulting a fortified enemy position, the Skaven general will often send wave after wave of slaves forward to be slaughtered in their thousands, allowing the following troops to climb the "ramp" left by the slaves' dead bodies and attack the enemy directly⁶.

But it is not just the lives of slaves that are treated with such disregard. To the Skaven leader, all his followers are ultimately expendable – it is only a matter of where and when they can be sacrificed to best effect. Hence, the fact that all Skaven leaders – no matter their relative rank – almost invariably "lead" their followers from

the rear, allowing those in front of them to pay the price for any tactical miscalculation their leader may make. It is this same obsessive self-interest, coupled with the relentless infighting that characterises Ratmen society, which may often lead to a Skaven army being defeated from within, as the general finds himself betrayed and murdered by one or another of his subordinates. On such occasions it is not unknown for entire armies to erupt into fratricidal strife even in the midst of battle, with the clan chieftains turning their forces upon each other in a "feeding frenzy" born of a reckless eagerness to seize control of the suddenly vacant seat of power. Unless a particularly strong and ruthless chieftain arises swiftly to make himself general and contain this strife, the army will usually abruptly disperse at this point, much to the surprise of the Skaven's enemies.

Again, as remarked upon before, we see that we have much to be thankful for in the fractiousness of the children of the Rat.

6. Again, it is not unknown for Orc generals to use similar tactics.

2. Sinister Artifice: The Strange Machineries of Clan Skryre

In all the armouries of the world, can there be any war-machines more destructive, and at the same time as fearful and horrifying in their effects as those of Clan Skryre? For what are the cannons of Man and Dwarf, the bolt throwers of the Elves, the rock-lobbers of the Orcs, even such strange devices as the Halfling Hot Pot and Goblin Doom Diver catapult, as compared to the lethal arsenal of the Warlock Engineers? As said before, it is in the making of weapons that Clan Skryre excels. Utilising an unparalleled understanding of the properties of warpstone, coupled with a sinister artifice that seems half-science and half-sorcery in nature, the adepts of Skryre have created an array of nightmarish machines as diverse as they are profane. Granted, some of their war-machines would appear to be experimental – as likely to destroy the user and those around him, as they are the enemy. But among the Ratmen this is considered a small price to pay for weapons capable of unleashing such an awesome amount of devastation. When the Ratmen go to war, the Warlock Engineers go with them, taking their creations to bring fire and ruin in their wake.

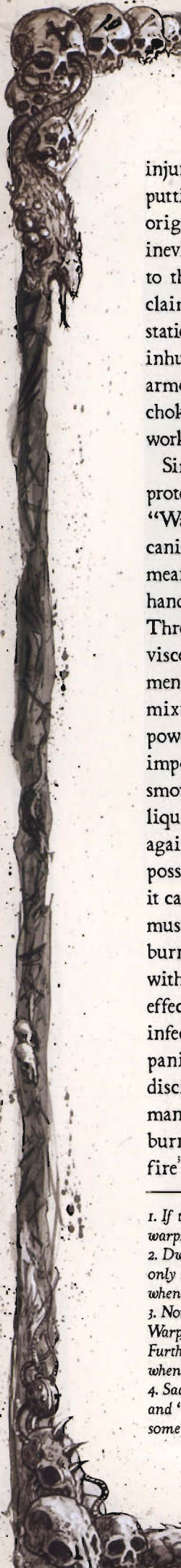
Leaving aside such commonplace horrors as the Jezzail and warplock pistol, the balefully effective nature of whose warpstone-crafted bullets have already been discussed, the weapons of Clan Skryre seem as strange as they are deadly. Consider for a moment the “Poisoned Wind Globe”, a fragile glass sphere designed to shatter on impact when thrown to release a noxious cloud of toxic green vapours. Any man or animal breathing in even the smallest part of such vapours is all but guaranteed a gruesome death, gasping out the last of their life in agony and terror as their lungs fill with blood and vile froth bubbles from their mouth.

Given their similarly lethal effect, the reader may be tempted to see some connection between the Poisoned Wind Globe and the plague censers



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of Clan Skryre Clanrats armed with Poisoned Wind Globes. The masks and other strange paraphernalia the Ratmen are wearing are believed to be protective devices designed to prevent them from succumbing to the effects of their own weapons. Given that it is unusual for Skaven leaders to take any steps whatsoever to protect the lives of their followers, it must be supposed such “Globadiers” undergo some form of long and specialised training that makes them difficult to replace. (Privately commissioned by the author: Oils on canvas)

of Clan Pestilens. But, despite an apparent commonality of appearance and symptom of their respective vapours, post-mortem dissections of those killed by Poisoned Wind show sores and scarring on the interior surfaces of the lungs not unlike the corrosive burns left by caustic agents, rather than the plague-like



injuries caused by the Pestilens censer¹. But, putting to one side questions of cause and origin, what is without doubt is the inevitability of death for those who fall victim to the Poisoned Wind Globe, death which has claimed many a noble soul irrespective of their station or rank. For, like many other of the inhuman machineries of Clan Skryre, no armour or magical protection can prevent these choking clouds from doing their insidious work².

Similarly, what armour or magic could offer protection to those unfortunates targeted by the "Warpfire Thrower"? Consisting of a large canister carried by one Ratman, connected by means of a flexible tube to a firing device in the hands of another, when fired, the Warpfire Thrower emits a burning spray of flaming viscous liquid large enough to engulf a dozen men at once. Produced as they are by a volatile mixture of inflammable chemicals and powdered warpstone, such flames are all but impossible to put out – even if extinguished by smothering or by being placed under water, the liquid re-ignites again the moment it is once again exposed to air. Worse, the ignited liquid possesses hellishly adhesive qualities that means it cannot be wiped away. To remove it, the flesh must be scraped away. As might be expected, the burns inflicted by this weapon are horrendous, with even those who survive its immediate effects likely to die once their wounds become infected. It is a weapon of terror, made to incite panic and disorder among even the most disciplined of troops and their mounts. For what man or animal does not baulk at the smell of burning flesh or dread the prospect of death by fire³?

Even more devastating in its effects than the Warpfire Thrower is that deadly apparatus known as the "Ratling Gun". A multi-barrelled firearm crewed by a team of two Skryre Clanrats, it is capable of a ferocious and sustained rate of fire – firing as many as a hundred warpstone-crafted bullets a minute with but a single pull of the trigger. As such it is surely the most fearsome machinery of mass slaughter yet developed in the entire history of warfare, capable of reducing even the strongest units to little more than a memory in all but the blink of an eye. And so, once more, the reader is given pause to thank the gods that the weapons of Clan Skryre are so prone to malfunction. For, should such a mechanism as the Ratling Gun ever become perfected enough as to be considered truly reliable, the frightening prospect is raised that it would require no more than a handful of such weapons to destroy an entire army. And with it the final victory of the Ratmen would be assured. For how then could any of us hope to stand long against them?

And yet still, despite all the horrors seen and discussed thus far, the awful catalogue of the armouries of Clan Skryre is not yet done. Even leaving aside those whispered rumours which speak of other unknown machineries of destruction yet more terrible than those already mentioned⁴, what analysis of the infernal artifice of Skryre could in good conscience reach its end without first turning to consider the Warlock Engineers themselves?

Each individual Warlock Engineer is a walking arsenal in his own right – a weapon every bit as deadly as the Jezzail, Poisoned Wind Globe, Warpfire Thrower or Ratling Gun. Menacing and unearthly figures, Warlock

1. If there is any connection between the two it is in the fact that both weapons likely draw upon the unholy properties of warpstone to achieve their effect.

2. Dwarf sources claim breathing through a rag soaked in urine may offer some protection. However, it is not clear whether only Dwarf urine has this property, or whether the urine of any race will do. A question perhaps not as ridiculous as it seems, when one considers the almost miraculous powers attributed to Dwarf ales.

3. Not least those armed with the Warpfire Thrower themselves. For even more so than most of Clan Skryre's inventions, the Warpfire Thrower is prone to sudden and spectacular malfunction, setting fire to its crew or exploding in catastrophic fashion. Further, it is not unknown for such explosions to result from the jostling motion of the volatile liquid in the canister caused when the carrier is running.

4. Sadly, I have as yet been unable to gather any concrete evidence as to the function of the devices known as "The Doomwheel" and "The Black Arc", nor even been able to establish whether they exist at all, or are simply products of the imaginations of some of my more unreliable sources. A frustrating state-of-affairs, perhaps, but thus was it ever with the study of the Ratmen.



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of a pair of Clan Skryre Clanrats armed with a Warpfire Thrower. Such "weapons teams" are most often found attached to larger units of Clanrat warriors or Stormvermin, so that by use of the horrifying power of their weapons they might support their fellows' advance. (Privately commissioned by the author: Ink on canvas)

Engineers wear a harness covered in all manner of gauges, tubing, eyepieces, antennae, dials and other bizarre devices whose different functions can hardly be guessed at until the Engineer lifts the strange blade-like devices they all bear, either set at the end of a polearm or fused to the flesh of their arms! Abruptly, the harness comes alive, humming with the power of unknown mechanisms as the gauges flicker and coruscating eldritch energies play across its surface; energies that are suddenly unleashed from the Warlock Engineer's blades as bolts of vivid lightning capable of reducing their victims to charred cinders. Of all the strange and devious devices of Clan Skryre, could any be more unholy than this?

But for all the malevolent inventiveness of Clan Skryre, hidden in the designs of their nightmare machines we can see not just the astonishing breadth of Skaven innovation, but its very real limitations as well. I ask the reader this: what is the origin of each of these designs? Obviously, the warlock pistol is based upon the same principles as the wheel-lock pistols of

Dwarf and Man, but what of Clan Skryre's other devices? Who can look at the Jezzail without seeing echoes of the long rifles used by the hunters of Hochland? Who can look at the Warpfire Thrower and Ratling Gun without seeing resemblances to the Flame Cannons of the Dwarfs or some of the more fantastical sketches from the workbooks of Leonardo da Miragliano? We are struck at once by the dichotomy that exists at the heart of all Skaven innovation. On the one hand, they are possessed of a technology that other races cannot hope to understand. Yet, at the same time, the vast majority of their devices seem based on designs stolen from other races, then adapted to the Ratmen's use. At heart, like the rats they resemble, the Skaven are scavengers, content to live on the detritus of the more noble civilisations above them. And that they are able to make any of their devices work at all perhaps speaks as loudly of the unholy motive powers of warpstone as it does to any special genius of the Skaven mind.

3. Against nature: The Monstrous Progeny of Clan Moulder



(Above) Artist's impression, based on eyewitness testimony, of a pair of Rat Ogres. Ferocious and deadly killers, Rat Ogres are considered among the most fearsome of the warpstone-mutated beasts of Clan Moulder. (Privately commissioned by the author: Watercolour on canvas)

The Greater Ratkin, or "Rat Ogre" to give its more common name, stands perhaps eight feet tall at the shoulder and is a terrible beast to behold. Massively muscled and gifted with razor-sharp teeth and claws, the name Rat Ogre is well chosen, possessing as it does the size and strength of the true Ogre coupled with the speed and ferocity of the enraged rat.

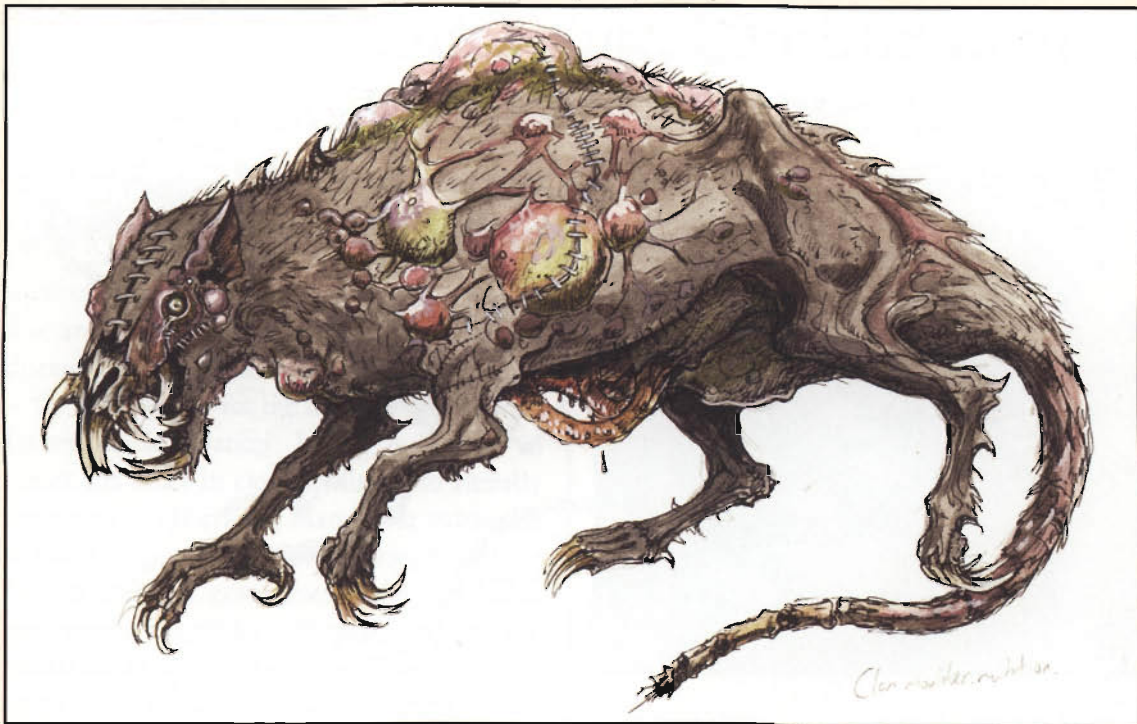
Johannes Krueger¹

It was with these words in the year 1509 IC that the scholar Johannes Krueger finally gave name in print to creatures whose bestial fury and unrelenting bloodlust had been the source of many tales among the

Dwarfs for generations. What was unknown to Krueger however – although it is now known to us – is that the Rat Ogres are not naturally occurring beasts. Far from it, their origins are entirely unnatural, born in the horrific experiments of the Master Moulders of Clan Moulder.

To build the perfect beast-of-war. Such is the Master Moulder's ominous and ignoble aim, an aim towards which they expend their energies with unflinching devotion. For it is more than just an aim to such creatures. It is an obsession around which every moment of their lives revolve. It is the sum total of all their desires and

1. Quoted from Johannes Krueger, *The Bestiarium*, page 229. See bibliography. Some brief words of explanation as to Krueger's choice of terminology are no doubt in order. Lacking our understanding of the role warpstone plays in the creation of the Rat Ogre, Krueger saw them as a sub-species of the Skaven. Accordingly, he named them "Rat Ogre" in order to distinguish them from the common Ratman. Interestingly, Krueger also believed the Grey Seers represented a sub-species in their own right.

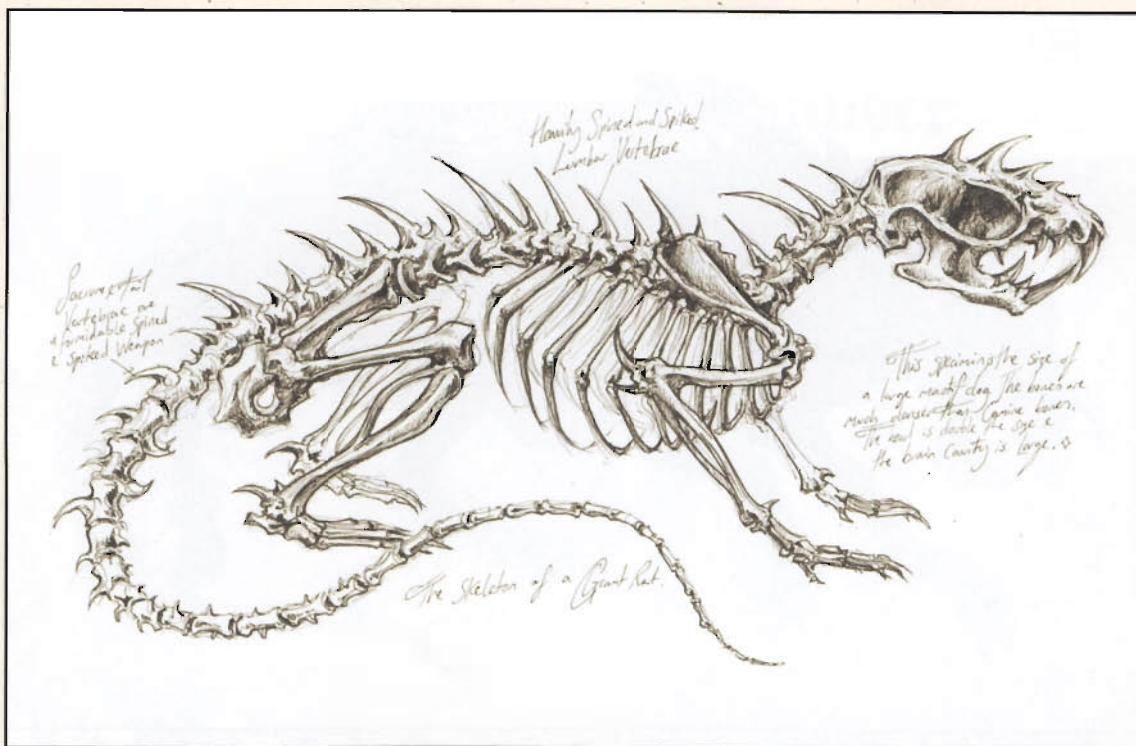


(Above) Sketch by an eyewitness of a giant rat, killed by the Rat-Catchers of Miragliano in one of their nightly sweeps of their city's cellars. While not perhaps as immediately horrifying to the eye as some of the other beasts of Clan Moulder, the dangers faced in fighting such creatures should not be underestimated. When measured after its death, the beast shown here proved to be over four feet long, not counting the length of its tail. Moreover, it should be remembered such creatures are most often encountered in packs numbering a dozen or more individuals. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

aspirations. In the words of the Bretonnians, it is their *raison d'être*.

Driven beyond the bounds of decency and sanity, unmindful of the laws of holy nature, the Master Moulder respects no boundaries in his obsession. No cruelty is beyond him, no act too heinous or foul. Granted the ability to mould flesh by dint of hellish warpstone, he cares not for the suffering of those subjected to his experiments. By mixing powdered warpstone into all manner of balms and ointments, the Master Moulder can warp their charges' tortured flesh at will, utilising surgical techniques that, were it not for the mutating presence of warpstone, would kill the patient at once. And, though the changes wrought by warpstone rarely breed true, Clan Moulder can boast of several successes, not least in the shape of the Rat Ogre and the giant rat. These are but the most commonly seen of Moulder's beasts. In Kislev, there have been sightings of curiously

furred and stunted breeds of troll, ravenous packs of rat-wolves and huge nocturnal rat-like burrowers that live beneath the earth. Who knows what other monstrosities may be taking shape in the laboratories and breeding pits of Clan Moulder even now? What rough beasts wait for their hour to come round at last and be born? Nor do the horrors of Clan Moulder end there. For the Master Moulders warp their own flesh just as eagerly as they do the flesh of others. There are tales of Clan Moulder armies led by Skaven with three arms, others with bony mace-like appendages at the ends of their tails, even some able to spit venom like a snake. Horror after horror after horror. And yet still, the Master Moulders are not satisfied. Time and time again, they create some new grotesque only to turn once more to resume their work, their curiosity never sated. Their aim, as ever, the same: to build the perfect beast of war.



(Above) Sketch of a skeleton of another giant rat encountered in the cellars of Miragliano. Notice that the creature has undergone further mutations – presumably in an attempt to make it a more efficient killer. (Author's collection: Graphite on parchment)



(Above) Sketch by an eyewitness of a mutated Clanrat – likely an assistant to a Master Moulder, unfortunate enough to be chosen to take part in his master's experiments. (Author's collection: Graphite on parchment)



(Above) Sketch by an eyewitness of a Rat Ogre seen during the Battle of Boronadin in the year 2303 IC. The value of Rat Ogres to Clan Moulder lies not just in their size and ferocity, but also in the fact that having such a creature as a bodyguard is seen as a sign of great status among Skaven leaders. (Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

4. Wilful Contagion: The Virulent Creations of Clan Pestilens

Among all the diverse forms of threat posed to Man by the existence of the Ratmen, there can be none more inimical to the cause of Humanity's continued survival than the dire and baneful works of Clan Pestilens. For disease is the great enemy of human civilisation – the price we pay for the fruits of all our not-inconsiderable advances. Living as he does in towns and cities in close proximity to literally thousands of his fellows, Man is ever vulnerable to the scourge of contagion. Worse, for all the best efforts of government and charitable institutions, the standard of public hygiene and sanitation in these same urban centres is often sorely lacking, with no small fraction of the human population living in conditions of filth and squalor that would appal the more fastidious races of Elf and Dwarf. Is it therefore any great wonder that the histories of the human kingdoms have been so frequently blemished by outbreaks of pestilence and plague? Epidemics which have claimed more human lives than all the wars of history combined¹. Given what has been established already of the ways of the Ratmen, who can fail to see the fell hand of Clan Pestilens at work in at least some of these misfortunes?²

Above all other Ratmen³, the Plague Priests of Clan Pestilens are creatures of the shadows. Pernicious and invidious beyond all wit of Man, for the most part they are content to remain hidden, observing the effects from afar as they unleash contagion after contagion on an unsuspecting Humanity. It is a task of which they never tire; a task they approach nightly with undiminished relish. For, just as with the adepts of Clans Skryre and Moulder, the Plague Priests commit their crimes in the name of perfection.



(Above) *Plague Bringer*, painted circa 2147 IC by the artist Luitgard Holkacs, better known as Lukacs. In his own lifetime the strange angles and skewed perspectives of Holkacs's paintings – not to mention the contentiousness of their subject matter – saw him denounced as a degenerate artist by the Church of Sigmar, forcing him to adopt the Lukacs pseudonym to save himself from exile and the attentions of the witch hunters. (The Leitdorf Collection: Oils on canvas)

For through their ceaseless experiments the Plague Priests of Clan Pestilens hope to one day breed the “perfect” disease, a disease combining extreme virulence and ease of transmission with total lethality, a disease capable of spreading like wildfire and leaving no survivors. An aim as yet uncompleted, towards which the Plague Priests work with unflinching devotion, continuing their experiments, experiments to which the entire human race is unwillingly a party. For who can say how many of the great plagues and epidemics of the past have been born of the Plague Priests' virulent creations?

1. By way of example, the Great Plague of the year 1111 IC is estimated by most reliable sources to have claimed the lives of anything between half and three-quarters of the Empire's population at the time. A death toll far in excess of all the battles fought in the entire 135-year span of the Wars of the Vampire Counts.

2. To make matters worse, the Ratmen are not alone in their use of the insidious weapons of disease. A fact to which any man who has faced the followers of the Chaos God Nurgle in battle will unhappily attest.

3. Excepting, of course, the master assassins of Clan Eshin.



(Above) A victim of the Boil Lurgy, seen in the last stages of the disease. (Taken from Grau's Principles of Medicine)

It is with the aim of further illuminating the horrors of Clan Pestilens that I present the following extracts, taken from the "Diseases of Unknown Origin" section of Hendrik Grau's encyclopaedic Principles of Medicine⁴. It is my contention that the origin of these diseases is not unknown at all. Each of them is in fact an example of the unholy creations of Clan Pestilens. The reader, however, may wish to judge the issue for himself...

BOIL LURGY: A virulent infectious disease characterised by the appearance of pustules and fluid-filled boils over all areas of the skin, coupled with sudden attacks of fever and debilitating weakness. The incubation period of the disease is unknown, but once the first boils appear its progression is very rapid, with the attacks of fever growing ever longer and more severe, in eight out of ten cases resulting in the patient's death within thirteen days of the first onset of symptoms. No efficacious treatment exists, though bed-rest and prayer may improve

the patient's chances of survival. Also, given the highly contagious nature of the disease, the patient should be kept in isolation and their body disposed of by cremation after death. Vector unknown.

FLEA BUBOES: A form of parasitic infestation characterised by large areas of painfully inflamed swelling of the skin, particularly at the groin and neck. Caused by a flea-like insect of unknown species, which burrows under the patient's skin to lay its eggs. Once hatched, these eggs give birth to hundreds of larvae that begin to eat the patient's flesh, resulting in the characteristic buboes on the surface of the skin, before metamorphosing into adults and burrowing out of the patient to begin their life cycle again. Though extremely painful, the emergence of these insects is not usually fatal in and of itself, though secondary infections or gangrene caused by the necrotised wound tissues left by the insects' feedings result in fatalities in perhaps seven out of ten cases. Recommended treatments include the application of salt or quicksilver to the surface of the swellings in ointment form to kill the larvae, coupled with orally ingested mandrake root to alleviate the pain. Although, given its addictive qualities and dangerous side effects, the patient's intake of mandrake should be carefully monitored. In those cases where the swelling appears on an extremity, amputation should be considered.



4. Hendrik Grau, Principles of Medicine (Abridged Edition), University Press, 2298 IC, pages 1036-1039.

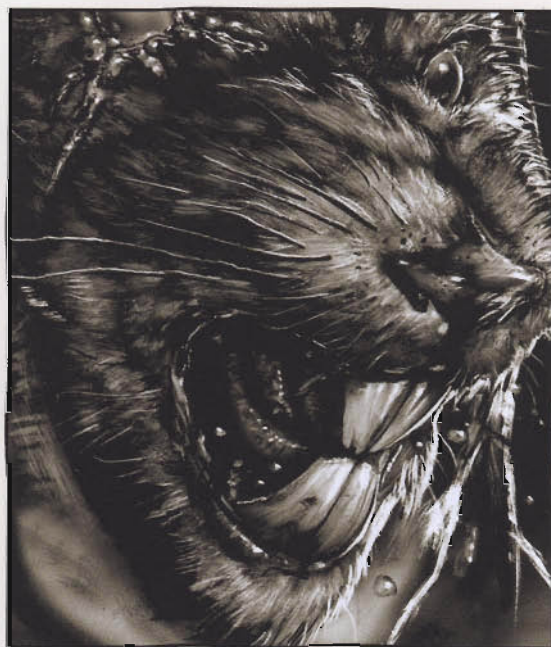
5. Silence Through Death: The Clandestine Methods of Clan Eshin

I go to my God in peace, knowing that History will record I was murdered by the Ratmen.

The last words of the Baron Dieter von Stumpflander¹

Having dwelt already at length on the varied and reprehensible works of Clans Skryre, Moulder and Pestilens, it quite naturally falls to us now to turn and discuss the works of the fourth member of the so-called Greater Clans: Clan Eshin. As might be expected, the works of the adepts of Clan Eshin are every bit as much a source of terror to Man as those of their brother Warlock Engineers, Master Moulders and Plague Priests. But where the Eshinite Assassin is different from his peers is that his work is not concerned with the creation of living things or physical objects, but rather with their destruction². It is the tools and techniques they use to achieve this aim, as well as several enlightening examples from the more recent history of their malevolent endeavours, that will be further considered here.

The weapons used by Clan Eshin run a long and deadly gamut: knives, darts, garrottes, metal claws, various styles of throwing blade, many strange and subtle poisons – such is but a fraction of their stealthy arsenal³. Weapons they use with an astounding skill born equally of long years of training and intrinsic malice. But it takes more than knowledge of their weapons to understand the Assassin. Rather, the reader



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. (The Emmerich Papers: Ink on parchment)

should realise the murderous techniques of Clan Eshin are most of all shaped by the natural Skaven aptitude for the ways of night and stealth. An aptitude in which, above all other Ratkin, the Assassin excels. It is this fact that oft-times makes it difficult to say with any surety whether a particular crime is indeed the work of Clan Eshin or that of more mundane killers. Still, with all their masterly skill at covering their tracks, sometimes the hands of Eshin can be seen almost clearly.

1. As recorded in The Annals of Nordland for the year 2002 IC. It should be noted that despite von Stumpflander's hopes, every effort is made in the annals to explain away this reference to the Ratmen by claiming the baron was delirious at the time of his death. It would seem, in common with many other educated men before and since, the writer of the annals was unwilling to countenance the fact of the Skaven's existence.

2. This is not to say that Clan Eshin is uninterested in the design and manufacture of physical objects, in the form of the various specialised weapons, poisons and other devices they use in the course of their missions. But where this is different from say, the endeavours of Clan Skryre, is that to the Assassins of Clan Eshin, such objects are created simply as tools to help them achieve their aims, while to Clan Skryre the creation of weapons and devices is an aim in and of itself.

3. Further, it is claimed by some authorities – most noticeably van Hal – that even unarmed, an Eshin Assassin is a dangerous opponent. Also, it is a curious footnote, but van Hal's account of the unarmed combat methods used by an Assassin he fought would seem to bear remarkable resemblance to the techniques of the warrior-mystics of Cathay as recorded in the tales of the Tilean merchant-adventurer Marco Polare.



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. (The Emmerich Papers: Ink on parchment)

Consider, by way of example, the murder of the Baron Dieter von Stumpflander in the year 2002 IC. A cousin to the ruling elector count of Nordland, following an accidental encounter with the Ratmen in the Cursed Marshes it is known von Stumpflander planned to petition his cousin's aid in raising troops and funds to clear the Wastelands once and for all and bring them under the rule of the Empire. A great undertaking left unrealised after the baron was found badly wounded beside the body of his wife in their bed-chamber one night, the victim of a stealthy intruder who had somehow successfully circumvented all the guards, dogs and other defences of the baron's castle. Having fought the intruder off at the cost of sustaining serious injury himself, the baron was at once commended to the hands of his physicians. But

despite the best efforts of these worthies their patient lapsed into a coma and died two days later. What is particularly illuminating about the baron's death however, and this speaks clearly as to the identity of his escaped assassin, is the weapon used to kill him. From a wound in von Stumpflander's shoulder his physicians extracted a fragment of a blade that had apparently broken off in the course of the baron's struggles with his attacker. A fragment that, in the words of one of the surgeons, "continued for some weeks to exude a corrosive green-tinted venom of unknown derivation". From the accounts of several authorities it is clear weeping blades are among the most favoured weapons of the Assassins of Clan Eshin, designed to constantly exude a warpstone-based poison that all but guarantees the death of

4. A full account of the medical procedures performed on the baron and the properties of the venom in question can be found in the copy of The Annals of Nordland held in the Salzenmund archives of the elector count's family. Sadly though, the blade fragment itself appears to have been lost.



(Above) Illustration of a Skaven warrior, found in the private papers of the artist Karl Kopinzski. The style is very similar to the pictures found in the Emmerich papers. Could there be a connection? If not one and the same person, could they not have collaborated with each other? (Private collection: Ink on parchment)

the victim even if only the most superficial of wounds is inflicted'. That the Baron von Stumpflander managed to survive for three days after being wounded with such a weapon speaks plainly of his great will and the strength of his constitution. Just as the incident of his death speaks loudly of how quick the Ratmen are to strike once they feel threatened.

In a similar vein, consider the more recent death of the scholar Anders Emmerich, slain in his home on an autumn night in the year 2307 IC by unknown assailants who then set fire to the house in an attempt to cover their tracks. From the working papers found inside a locked iron strongbox that survived the blaze, it is clear Emmerich had been engaged for some years in

the scholarly study of the Ratmen. Who knows what secrets he uncovered that may have served to decree his death? Who knows what further great stores of knowledge may have been among those papers lost in the fire? In the end we can only mourn the loss of a fellow traveller and fearless seeker of the truth, made casualty in the war with the insidious Ratmen. Mourn him, and pray that Sigmar may guard his soul forevermore in peace.



s. Van Hal speaks knowledgeably on this.

6. The Enemy Within: Traitors and Dupes in League with the Ratmen

It may seem at first inconceivable to the reader that any man could be so depraved and indifferent of consequence as to cast his lot besides those of the Ratmen. But, inconceivable or not, there is plentiful evidence that such men exist. Mention has been made already of Duke Viallo of Parmis who, by entering into unholy alliance with the Ratmen, doomed himself and his people both. And perhaps most famously of all there is the matter of the Arabian sorcerer and potentate the Sultan Jaffar, who is said to have been encouraged in his ill-considered plan for the invasion of Estalia by the counsels of the Ratmen¹. Men of many different times and lands, united only by the fact that each was willing to make common cause with Humanity's enemies. But what then could the motives of such men be?



THE INDUCEMENTS OF BETRAYAL, OR THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE DAMNED

Power perhaps, for one. Certainly in the cases averred to above, the individuals mentioned seemed consumed by a lust for power that went beyond all the normal bounds of reason and human decency. For men driven by such a lust, no crime is beyond contemplation, no alliance too malign, so long as it progresses the cause of their own advancement. And, with all the secrets and powers at their disposal, the Ratmen can do much to help such a man. What would-be despot would not be willing to sell his very soul to the Ratmen in return for the promise of their efforts and armies at his beck and call? A daemon's bargain perhaps. But there are

many desperate and benighted fools willing to make bargains with the daemons of this world, even men possessed of considerable station and power already. For once a man has given himself completely to the pursuit of power, thereafter no amount of it – no matter how great – can ever satisfy him.

Cursed by the warped perceptions of his own deluded soul, it seems forever to him that the power he truly wants is just outside his grasp. But, even when he attains it, it is never enough. There is always more power to be had and even grander ambitions to be realised. For so long as a man is controlled by the greed for power, his need for it can never be sated.

So it is also with the greed for wealth. For some at least of those who truck with the Ratmen would appear to be driven by the sin of avarice. Certainly, greed lay at the roots of Benito Grasso's fall, before the short-term successes of his alliance with the Ratmen drove him to ever-greater heights of ambition and betrayal. Impossible though it might seem, a man can grow rich trading with the Ratmen so long as he is able to procure a supply of the one commodity they value above all others.

Warpstone.

As stated previously, such is the importance of warpstone to the Skaven that they are willing to go to any lengths to obtain it. The man who possesses warpstone and is able to make contact with the Ratmen can name his price. And if that price ultimately includes the chance of mutation and madness, the threat of execution and the not-inconsiderable risks of dealing with the Ratmen, no man consumed by the greed for wealth will allow himself to be constrained by any such dangers².

1. See Part Four.

2. The reader who asks what the Ratmen use to pay for the warpstone bought in such traitorous tradings, should consider for a moment the oft-repeated fact that the Skaven are an underground race, likely to frequently encounter such materials as gold, silver and gemstones in the course of their excavations. Such materials they have little use for, but which are as highly sought-after by men as warpstone is by the Ratmen. Further, given that by dint of our own sewers and cellars the Ratmen are afforded such easy access to our world and may hear our every conversation if they so desire, there is another most valuable commodity with which the Ratmen can trade: information.

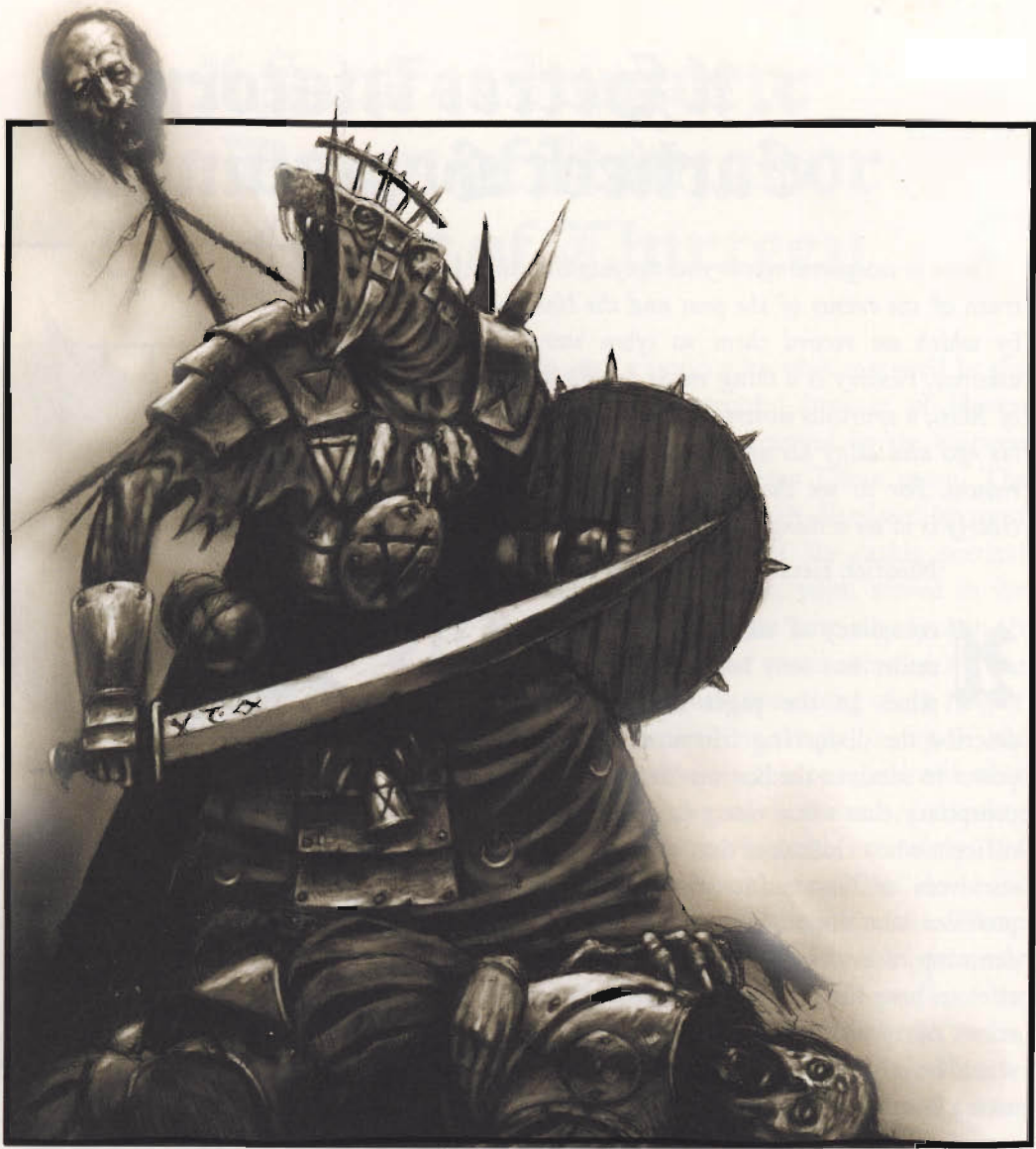


(Above) *Stilles Nacht* by Ernst Kristensen, circa 2305 IC. Produced in response to a commission by the Talabheim Gallery to create a painting on the theme of “The Magic of the Mid-Winter Festival”, Kristensen’s *Stilles Nacht* was greeted with outrage upon its first public display. As to what provoked this sudden change in Kristensen’s work is unknown – he disappeared in mysterious circumstances shortly after the painting was exhibited. (The Talabheim Gallery’s restricted archive: Oils on canvas)

But there are more debilitating human addictions even than the thirst for wealth and power. And, ever subtle in their plots against us, the Ratmen know this. Though the less-worldly reader may not be aware of its existence, there is a narcotic powder abroad in the world, known variously as “The Black Snuff”, “Dream Dust” or simply “The Dust”. Snorted in the same manner as common snuff, it is said to produce a feeling of euphoria, coupled with hallucinatory visions of strange and unknown worlds. As such, its use is most widespread by those in search of inspiration: poets, artists, musicians and other such decadents³. But it is inspiration bought at a heavy price. For it is my contention this so-called “Black Snuff” is but another variety of the warpstone powder used among the Ratmen. As such, the reader will be able to see at once the awful dangers of ingesting such a powder even once, never mind becoming so addicted as to become a habitual user. That

such a narcotic exists at all in human society can only be part of some sinister long-term scheme of the Skaven against us. Perhaps they hope to increase the incidence of mutation among us. Or, by seeking to spread the use of the powder among the highest echelons of our society, perhaps they hope to rob us of our best and brightest. Perhaps it is a question of manufacturing addicts among these same best and brightest, creating puppets who will jump whenever the hand that holds The Dust pulls their strings. Who knows whether this fact plays some fell part in the strange conspiracy of silence as to the existence of the Ratmen among those in power? Whatever the case, the fact that the Skaven are able to infiltrate their poisons and influence so easily amongst us can only bode ill for the future. For wherever the Ratmen go, so goes evil. And it is to the full and secret history of that evil that we will turn now in Part Four of this book.

³ For all his great gifts, it seems even Heinrich Bloch was not above its use. For how else should we read the references in his diaries to the “black powder of inspiration”?



Part Four

HIDDEN INFAMIES:
TOWARDS A HISTORY
OF THE SKAVEN MENACE

1. A Secret History: Earliest Beginnings

There is no great mystery to the fact that the truth of the events of the past and the histories by which we record them so often stand in askance. History is a thing made for the vanity of Man, a spurious nostrum designed to flatter his ego and allay his anxieties. And with good reason. For to see the true shape of the past clearly is to see a thing of horror.

Niedrich Fietzer, Also Sprach Mannfred¹

A conspiracy of silence. It is a phrase the reader has seen before; one used many times in the pages of this book to describe the disturbing reluctance of those in power to admit to the Ratmen's existence. It is a conspiracy that wears many faces: the military officer who ridicules the accounts of the survivors of Skaven atrocities, the learned professor who disputes even the most plain and damning of evidences, the faithless parent who tries to have his son committed for the simple crime of speaking the truth. Still, the reader would be mistaken to think I am suggesting that even a fraction of such individuals are knowing conspirators. Far from it. For the most part they are ignorant of what damage they do. They are simply men used to taking the path of least resistance: men following orders, men seeking to protect their position and their tenure, even men acting from the best of intentions. That such men so often unknowingly work against the wider interests of their race is simply another of the bitter ironies we have seen so many times already in our quest. For, make no mistake, any man, no matter what his motive, who seeks to shield Humanity by denying the existence of the Ratmen is serving the enemy's cause, not our own.

Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the degree to which the record of History has been distorted, even altered, in an attempt to

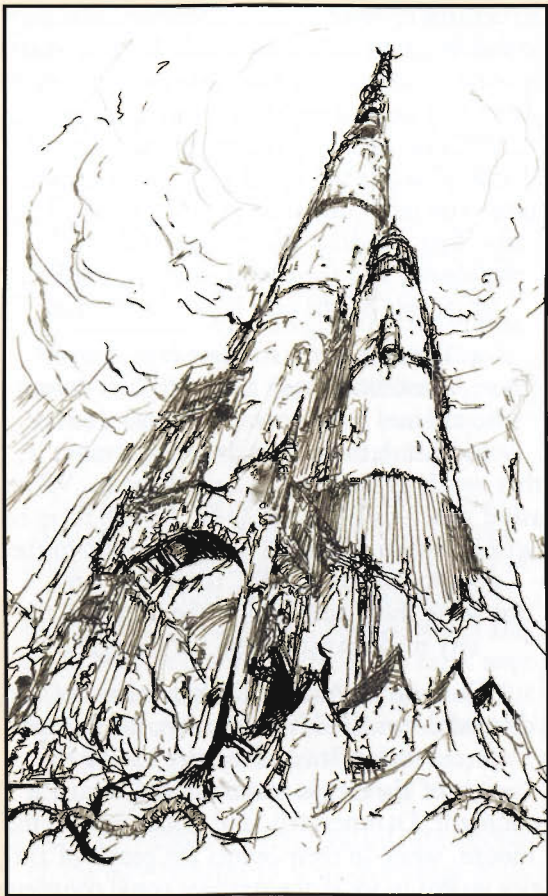


(Above) Van Meer's *The Face That Haunts My Nightmares*, DXX, circa 2256 IC. (Private collection: Ink wash on parchment)

obscure the impact of the actions of the Ratmen upon it. For, if the majority of men could see clearly just how often we have been bedevilled by the Ratmen in the past, would they be prepared to lie content in slumbering ignorance as they do today? They would not. And it is with this in mind that we must turn now to uncover the hidden infamies of the Ratmen's activities in the past, in an attempt to present the Secret History of their interaction with Man. Granted, as said before, establishing the true facts of where and when the Ratmen first appeared is difficult. Nor is it any easier to establish the precise facts of some of their more recent incursions. In the end I can only once more decry the current neglected state of contemporary scholarship in matters regarding the Ratmen, while at the same time presenting the following section as my own small poor attempt to right the balance.

1. Quoted from Niedrich Fietzer, Also Sprach Mannfred, Teufelbuch Press, 2201 IC, page 67

2. A Secret History: The Doom of Kavzar or The Curse of Thirteen



(Above) Sketch by an unnamed artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. Although it is unknown whether the tower shown above truly exists or is simply an artistic fancy, I was moved to include it here by a tantalising notation found written by the side of the sketch in Emmerich's hand. Enigmatically, the notation reads, "Kavzar is Tylos", a phrase the true meaning of which is at present unclear. (The Emmerich Papers: Pencil on parchment)

We begin with what may well be the first recorded instance of Skaven activity, preserved in the thirteen stanzas of the ancient epic Tilean poem, *The Doom of Kavzar*. Though dismissed by most scholars as an example of the darkly poetical whimsy of a bygone age, when viewed in the light of the evidences we have already seen, it would seem to me the events recorded in *The Doom of Kavzar* have something of the ring of truth about them. Put simply, many of the events described would seem to accord with what we know of the ways of the Ratmen, indicating the poem's unknown author certainly had knowledge of them at the very least. As to the broader questions of where on the Tilean peninsula the city spoken of in the poem may have been located, or whether the people of the city were the ancestors of the modern Tileans, these are matters for another time¹. For the moment, I simply present a broad prose translation of the substance of the poem, following that of Erich Toller and arranged in accord with its thirteen stanzas², thereby allowing the reader to form his own opinion as to whether or not the Ratmen played some part in the horrors depicted therein.



1. Nor are these the only perplexing mysteries associated with the poem. Not least there is the fact that, though the poem is called *The Doom of Kavzar*, the city is never referred to by that name in the text.

2. Erich Toller, *The Doom of Kavzar: A New Translation*, Wolfram Press, 2309 IC. The reader should be aware, for all its brevity, Toller's translation is characterised by a slightly dry prose style.



(Above) Illustration of the Tarot card known variously as Falls the Tower, The Tower Struck Down, or simply The Tower. An elaborate form of divination popular in Tilea, the designs of the various cards of the Major Arcana of the Tarot are said to date back a thousand years or more. Though given that the motifs used on the card above would seem to owe their inspiration to the same events recorded in *The Doom of Kavzar*, it may be the design of the card in question is of greater antiquity than has been realised. (Author's collection: Block printing on pasteboard)

1. Once there was a great city; a city where Man and Dwarf lived in harmony. In keeping with the natures of its people the city was built both above and below the earth, with Man ruling those places above and the Dwarfs ruling those places below. It was a time of plenty, and all were content.

2. Then, one day, it was decided amongst the men of the city that they must give praise to their gods for all their good fortune. Accordingly, they made plans to build a great temple. A temple greater than any the world had seen, topped by a single tower as tall as the sky. And so, having sought the advice and counsel of the Dwarfs in their halls below, the men of the city set about their work, knowing that when the temple was complete the gods would send them even greater fortune as reward for their endeavours.

3. Weeks became months, months became years, and still the men of the city built.

Growing old and grey, so long had their labours lasted, that they passed their task in time to their sons. And their sons grew old and passed the work to their sons, who likewise grew old and passed it on to theirs.

Until, at last, after many generations of ceaseless labours, the foundations and first structures of the temple lay complete and they could begin to build the tower. Further years passed, as generation after generation of men lived and worked and died to raise the tower.

And with each generation, the work grew harder. For, as the tower grew, so it became more and more difficult to bring stone to the top. And, finding their progress becoming ever slower and their work still incomplete, the people of the city began to despair.

4. It was then the stranger came among them, a hooded man in cloak of grey. A man who claimed great power, who told them he would finish their tower in a single night if they would grant him but a single boon. When asked what this boon was to be, he told them he wished simply to add his own dedication to the gods to the structure of the tower. And, thinking this a small price, the people of the city made bargain with the stranger.

5. Dusk came. And, as the last redness of the descended sun faded from the sky, the stranger entered the unfinished temple, bading the people of the city to leave him and return at midnight. Darkness fell, and clouds covered the moons, while in their homes the people of the city waited to see if the stranger could complete his task. Until, with midnight approaching, they went once more to the temple square. Went and saw a great wonder. For, up above them, the tower of the temple now stood complete, rising like a great lance stabbing at the heavens, pure and white. And, at the tower's very peak, a great rune-inscribed bell hung gleaming in the moonlight. Rejoicing then that the work of so many generations of their fathers was done, the people of the city turned in search of the stranger, seeking to praise him. But of the stranger there was no sign.

6. Then, with the coming of midnight, the bell struck unbidden. Once...twice...thrice that great bell tolled, its heavy and doom-laden tones carrying far across the city.

Four...five...six times, its beats slow and even like the pulse of a bronze giant.

Seven...eight...nine, and with each ring the bell grew ever louder, sending the people of the city staggering back from the temple, clutching their ears. Ten...eleven...twelve, and above in the sky, Mannslieb seemed to grow dimmer while the glow of Morrslieb grew ever more bright. Thirteen. And at the thirteenth stroke of that infernal bell, lightning split the skies and thunder answered it. Then, all grew dark and silent.

7. Frightened by the things they had seen, but relieved the bell had at last stopped ringing, the people of the city retreated to their beds, thinking that come the dawn they would try to enter the temple once more. But dawn never came. Next morning, they arose to find the sky shrouded in brooding storm clouds that blotted out the sun. And with those clouds came rain. Rain that was black like ash, and fell in great heavy downpours, puddling the streets with darkly iridescent colours.

8. Day after day, still the rains continued. And each night, the entrances to the temple below it sealed shut against the best efforts of Man, the bell tolled thirteen times at midnight. And so, as days became weeks and weeks became months and still the rains were unceasing, the people of the city grew fearful and sought counsel from the Dwarfs. But safe and dry in their underground fastness, the Dwarfs turned them away.

9. Their crops long ago failed, the people of the city huddled in their dwellings with fear gnawing at their hearts. Messengers were sent to faraway places in search of aid and sacrifices were made to the gods in the hope of succour. But no help was forthcoming: the messengers never returned and the gods were silent. Day after day now, the rains grew heavier, becoming at last great dark hailstones capable of killing any man caught out in the open. And still, night after night, the bell tolled its booming death-knell over the city. Soon, dark meteors fell from the heavens and, everywhere, the people of the city began to sicken and die while their newborn babes were born as loathsome twisted things. And with the meteors came the rats; skulking packs of vermin who devoured the city's last reserves of corn and brought famine to its people.

10. The elders of the city went to see the Dwarfs once more, this time to demand their aid. They told the Dwarfs they must share their food and allow the people of the city to come live under the ground with them. But the Dwarfs met these demands with anger, telling the elders their tunnels were flooded and their foodstocks had been devoured by rats. And so, with barely enough shelter and food left for them and their kinsmen, the Dwarfs cast the elders out of their halls, closing their doors behind them.

11. In the ruins of the city above, each day became worse. And driven to despair, the people began to rail against the gods they had once cherished, saying they had forsaken them. Some turned to the worship of dark powers, calling on all the princes of evil to aid them in their time of need. But no answer came. Instead, the rats grew bolder. Worse, they had grown now in both size and number. Lords now of the broken city, they roamed at will, feeding on the dead and dragging down those too weak to fight them. Men lived as hunted creatures in their own city. And with every midnight the great bell atop the tower struck thirteen, the sound seemingly ever more brazen and triumphant.

12. At last, in desperation, the remaining people of the city took what weapons they had and began to pound upon the door that led to the Dwarf halls beneath them, demanding entrance. Hearing no answer, they took up fallen beams and battered their way within, to find the tunnels below were dark and empty. Descending, they found the Dwarfs' ancient halls of kingship deserted, with but a few piles of gnawed bones and scraps of torn cloth to give testament to the fate of those who had once lived there. And then, glittering in the darkness by the dying light of their torches, the people of the city saw they were surrounded by a thousand times a thousand pairs of red and malevolent eyes.

13. Like a vast swarm shaped of liquid midnight, the rats attacked. And, standing back-to-back, outnumbered in the darkness, the shattered remnants of the once-proud people of the city fought for their lives. But to no avail; their hour was passed, and that of the Rat had come. And so it was, screaming and shrieking for mercy, that the people of the city finally passed from this world. While, above them, as though in mocking answer to their screams, the great bell struck thirteen once more.



(Above) Thorgrim's Last Stand by Andreas Schmidt, circa 1657 IC. Originally commissioned by the elector count of Wissenland as a gift to cement a trading alliance with the Dwarfs of Karak Hirn, the painting depicts the heroic last stand of Thorgrim Morgrimsson and his men during the Battle of the Fall of Karak Eight Peaks nearly five hundred years before the birth of Sigmar. Sadly, it appears the elector count underestimated the sensitivities of his would-be trading partners. Outraged to be given a painting depicting one of their most bitter defeats as a race, they perceived it as a calculated insult, causing relations between Wissenland and Karak Hirn to remain strained for some years afterwards. (Private collection: Oils on canvas)

3. A Secret History: From the Fall of the Dwarfs to the Time of Sigmar

As has been said before, the first conclusive evidence of the existence of the Ratmen can be found in the ancient records of the Dwarfs. It comes in the period known among them as the Time of Woes, approximately 1500 years before the founding of the Empire. A time that, for the Dwarfs, was well named. For in the wake of the strife and slaughter of the War of Vengeance against the Elves, even greater misfortunes befell the Dwarf race as their ancestral homelands in the Worlds Edge Mountains were suddenly rent by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Many lives were lost and countless mines and small settlements destroyed, while even the great Holds suffered as whole levels of workings and tunnels were submerged in molten lava. Worse, the vital underground thoroughfare known among the Dwarfs as the Ungdrin, or Underway, was damaged and partially blocked in places, leaving many of these same Holds more isolated than they had been before. But the hardships of the Dwarfs were not yet ended. For in the wake of these natural disasters came whole new armies of foes who would harass and besiege the embattled Dwarfs and their descendants for millennia to come. Armies comprised of Orcs, Goblins, Trolls, Beastmen, and most insidious of all, the armies of the Ratmen.

Within but a year of this first emergence of the Ratmen as a threat, one of the wealthiest and most powerful of the Dwarf Holds, Karak Varn, had fallen. Thus began the long decline of the Dwarfs as a race, as they found themselves pressed by enemies on all sides¹. One by one over the millennia, more Dwarf Holds fell. Karak Drazh, Karak Eight Peaks, Karak Azgal, Karak Vlag, whether they fell to the Ratmen, the Greenskins or natural disaster, such are the names writ large in the Great Book of Grudges of Karaz-a-Karak. And with each Hold that fell,

dozens of other settlements were either abandoned or destroyed. Is it any wonder then the Dwarfs today seem an embittered people, having so often stood alone against threats to which the human race is blissfully ignorant of? For while many a Dwarf has been of invaluable aid to me in my researches, still they can be taciturn to the point of hostility on many a subject, not least as regards to the ancient failures of their race. For in his heart, each Dwarf knows the tide of History has turned against his people. And, as much as they may rage and struggle against that tide, deep in those same hearts they realise their ultimate extinction as a culture and race may well now be inevitable.

But if such are the recorded beginnings of conflict between the Dwarfs and the Ratmen, what can we say then of that between Man and the Ratmen? A question whose answer can be found in the following brief passage from that holiest of books, the Deus Sigmar:

*And then, calling His armies to Him,
Sigmar did go to the Middle Mountains,
He did find Himself confronted by a sinful horde,
And taking His Hammer He did cast the
Ratmen down.*

The Deus Sigmar – 3, 24:5³

The reader can see therefore, that to deny the evidence of the existence of the Ratmen is to at the same time deny holy scripture. For though this is the only reference to the Ratmen in all the Sigmarite canon, its meaning could not be any plainer. In his lifetime among us, blessed Sigmar confronted the monstrous hordes of the Ratmen. Our own struggles against the Ratmen are now given the impetus of holy mission. Our God defeated them. We can only pray that, some day, we may do the same.

1. For reasons too lengthy to be discussed here, this same conflict is known among the Elves as *The War of the Beard*.
2. Of course, some would say that decline began with the loss of Karak Ungor to the Goblins a year earlier. But one might equally say it began with the events of the Time of Woe, or even the War of Vengeance, for though they count themselves as having won that war, it was clear that at its end the Golden Age of Dwarf power was done.
3. The reader will notice I am using the same text as appears in the Gutenberg Edition. In all other versions, however, the passage reads essentially the same.

4. A Secret History: The Great Plague

It is counted the single greatest disaster ever to have befallen the Empire, a disaster greater even than the Civil War and the Wars of the Vampire Counts combined. But for all that, how much does the reader truly know of the real events of the Great Plague of the year 1111 IC? Less, I suspect, than he may think. For though modern histories make no mention of it, from close analysis of the records and documents of the time, it is clear that the Great Plague was the work of the Ratmen. A shocking claim, perhaps, but one the reader will find amply evidenced in the course of the following chapter. Further, the events of the Great Plague might almost be seen as a “case history” detailing the aim and strategies of the Ratmen when they go to war against the kingdoms of the surface world. And it is with that in mind that I ask the reader to read closely of the horrors recorded herein. For as even the lowest soldier knows, to be forewarned of the methods of the enemy is to be forearmed against them.



THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CATASTROPHE

Black Plague: Also known as “The Death”. Extremely virulent infectious disease characterised by the sudden appearance of dark blotches, or “plague-marks”, on the skin, with these marks swiftly spreading to cover the patient’s entire body. The rapidly progressing symptoms of the disease include: fever, delirium, convulsions, loss of control of the bodily functions and a swelling and seizing of the major joints that causes the limbs to gnarl and twist, crippling those who manage to survive the



(Above) Further detail from the surviving central panel of Heinrich Bloch’s triptych *Visions of the Ratmen*, circa 1141 IC. (The Aeverheim Museum of the Arts: Oils on wood panel)

disease. Fatalities occur in nine out of ten cases, with death resulting from ever-worsening convulsions that begin anywhere from a few minutes to a week after the first symptoms of disease. No efficacious treatment exists, though bed-rest, prayer and fluids may improve the patient’s chances of survival, with restraints being used to contain the worst effects of the patient’s convulsions. Due to the highly infectious nature of the disease, patients should be kept in isolation and their bodies disposed of by cremation after death. Further, in order to reduce the risk of the spread of contagion, the patient’s belongings and lodgings should be burnt and a program of mass extermination of the local rat population begun immediately upon discovery of even a single case of the disease. Vector believed to be the common black rat.

Hendrik Grau, *Principles of Medicine*

1. Hendrik Grau, *Principles of Medicine (Abridged Edition)*, University Press, 2298 IC, page 1201.

It began in the winter of the year IIII IC, with seemingly spontaneous outbreaks of a strange and virulent new disease occurring simultaneously in the cities of Altdorf, Talabheim and Nuln, a disease that would quickly become known by the name "The Black Plague". Thousands died in the first outbreaks and, as ragged columns of refugees crowded every road and river crossing in their eagerness to escape its effects, the plague was quickly spread across the whole of the southern Empire. In response, many of the towns closed their gates, driving the refugees away on pain of death. But it was too late, the plague already held the Empire fast.

Within weeks of the plague's arrival entire villages were depopulated, while in the towns and cities all good order collapsed as frightened citizens barricaded themselves into their homes and ever more corpses littered the streets. Of all the great cities only Middenheim was spared, saved when its ruler, Count Mandred, ordered the viaducts that gave entrance to the city raised. Thinking the plague had been sent to judge them for their sins, vast bands of flagellants wandered the countryside, scourging themselves as they prayed to Sigmar for forgiveness. On every street corner heretic prophets proclaimed the End Times were at hand. Then, as winter turned to spring, it seemed the worst of the plague had abated. But it soon proved to be a false dawn as, from the depths beneath the earth, an even greater menace arose. A menace that sought to take advantage of the catastrophe they had created so they might be given a chance to murder and enslave the Empire's suffering population.



THE COMING OF THE RATMEN

Stories, tales and rhymes originating from the small and more far flung villages and districts of the Empire do much to tell us of the dark and deadly history that surrounds them. Scholars would do well not to ignore the fiction written for children, for much truth and history is held in the words².

With the first thaw of spring, the great malevolent hordes of the Ratmen's armies emerged to make war upon a tottering and plague-harried Empire. One by one, the depopulated towns and villages of the southern Empire were overrun, their defenders slaughtered while their settlements were burned and their crops and livestock stolen and taken underground. The electors' armies were helpless, weakened as much by years of corruption and neglect at the hands of the greedy and incompetent Emperor of the time, Boris Goldgather, as it was by the plague. Soon, only the great cities of the south still held out against the Ratmen hordes, while the plague inexorably spread to devastate the Empire's northern provinces just as it had those of the south.

Then, in the year IIII IC, the much-hated Emperor Boris Goldgather succumbed at last to the plague himself, giving his embattled people at least some cause for celebration. Ironically, Boris was one of the plague's last victims. After four years of devastation, the worst of the outbreak seemed to have run its course. But by then anywhere between half and three-quarters of the Empire's population was already dead. Huge tracts of the Empire had become wasteland, while Skaven armies raged unchecked across Reikland, Averland and Talabecland. Worse, the Ratmen's depredations and the depopulation of the grain belt of the south had resulted in a terrible famine that claimed the lives of many of those who had so far managed to survive the worst excesses of disease and war. And yet still, the horrors of those years were not yet done.

² Quoted from Josef Federmann, *Folk Memory and the Persistence of Human Knowledge*, New Scholastic Press, 2301 IC, page 76.

A War of Evils



(Above) Illustration by an unknown artist, found among the surviving working papers of the murdered scholar Anders Emmerich. (The Emmerich Papers: Ink wash on parchment)

It is a fact perhaps without ready explanation, but in studying the history of the incursions of the Ratmen against the surface world, a pattern would seem to emerge whereby these same incursions are often found to coincide with strange disturbances and erratic behaviour on the part of the lesser moon, Morrslieb. And nowhere can this pattern be seen more clearly than in the astronomical events that presaged the Great Plague of 1111 IC.

It is said that on the night of Geheimnisnacht of that year, Morrslieb was seen to glow with eldritch emerald fire, seemingly growing larger in the sky. To a man, the soothsayers and astrologists of the time saw this as proof of the coming of future ills, and with the advent of the Great Plague their prophecies seemed vindicated. But more than one horror was released into the world that night. Something the Ratmen were to learn to their cost when, having achieved so much of the destruction of the Empire already, in the year 1115 IC they invaded the province of Sylvania.

For just as the rest of the Empire had watched Morrslieb grow fat in the sky four years earlier and wondered what it might portend, a shower of incandescent meteors had struck Sylvania.

And, with that starfall began the dark horrors for which that benighted province has ever since been famed. For, from that night forward in Sylvania, the dead did not rest easy in their graves.

As with the comet that would destroy the damned city of Mordheim nearly a millennium later, it is clear the meteors which fell on Sylvania were composed wholly or in part of accursed warpstone, forever changing the character of the land they struck. At the will of the necromancer Vanhel, vast armies of the Undead rose up in Sylvania to repel the Ratmen's invasion, beginning a conflict between them that would drag on for years, a conflict for which we can only give thanks. For through it, the forces of the Ratmen and Vanhel exhausted each other, limiting the damage either party could inflict on the wider Empire. And so, not for the first time in recorded history, the actions of two evils cancelled each other out, allowing the forces of good to re-gather themselves and ultimately win through.

But pity the people of Sylvania, that they had to suffer so much and for so long since that the rest of the Empire might be spared.



(Left) This is a sketch of a mutant rat by noted artist Nula Brusch. It could be one of the dreadful creations of Clan Moulder, or it could be a rat that has been malformed by interbreeding or the effects of Warpstone. Whatever the reasons for its unshapely appearance, it is a creature from Mankind's worst nightmares. Note the strong jaw, armoured skull and whip-like, multiple tail. Sightings of such creatures are becoming more and more common in the wilds. But it is in the cities that such things feel most at home. There, they can find an abundance of food, shelter and dark places where they can hide and breed copiously. They are in our cellars and our sewers. Look to the dark places! It is there that they skulk. (Private collection: Ink on parchment)

THE HOUR OF THE RAT

I saw a scene from nightmare: a landscape pockmarked with burning pyres to the horizon, as vast black and choking clouds blotted out the sun. And all across that landscape, the rulers now not just of the lands below but by right of conquest the lands above, the hordes of the Ratmen scurried and chattered and triumphed, sure the hour of their Ascendancy had come round at last.

The Chronicles of Nuln³

Now the Ratmen struck in earnest. With the land all but on its knees after four years of plague, over the course of the next seven years they began to systematically loot the surviving settlements and enslave their human populations. By dead of night, scuttling armies of Clanrats would surround a farm or village and set fire to it, clubbing or netting the inhabitants as they tried to flee the flames. In this way tens of thousands of men, women and children were captured, to be driven in shuffling, despairing columns to great slave camps set up within the ruins of the once proud cities of Pfeildorf and Ubersreik. There, the lucky ones would find themselves forced to work

to grow food for the Ratmen above ground, while the less fortunate were dragged underground to work in the mines and forges of the Skaven Empire, never to be seen again. Soon whole swathes of the southern Empire were ruled by the Ratmen, while those few pockets of resistance that still held out — cities like Altdorf, Nuln and Talabheim — were but besieged islands set within a vast sea of evil. The greatest nation of the Old World had been reduced to little more than a shadow of its former glories, while its people suffered under the yoke of their new inhuman masters. Had the Empire fallen then, the other kingdoms of the Old World might well have followed, leaving the children of the Horned Rat to hold illimitable dominion over all. And, all across the lands of Sigmar, the people looked to the sky in search of portents, hoping against hope their God might show some sign they were still within his favour, some sign of grace. Most of all they prayed that, as had happened in the past, some hero might arise among them and lead them to deliverance. They prayed for a hero.

And soon, their prayers were answered.

³ It should be noted The Chronicles of Nuln for the years 1111–1124 IC are kept under lock and key in the restricted archives of the count of Nuln's palace, requiring either the express permission of the elector count himself or the use of considerable guile to see them.

5. A Secret History: Count Mandred Skaven Slayer, A Neglected Hero



(Above) Drawing of a Skaven warrior.
(Author's collection: Ink on parchment)

Alone of the great cities of the Empire, Middenheim had survived the years of the Great Plague and the famine that followed it largely intact. At the order of its ruler, the Elector Count Mandred, the city's viaducts had been raised at the very beginning of the disaster. Realising that so long as Middenheim stood the Empire would not fall, a vast host of the Ratmen encircled the city in the winter of the year 1118 IC.

Destroying the four viaducts that provided the only access to the city, the people of Middenheim prepared confidently for siege, their morale bolstered by the knowledge that in a thousand years their city had never fallen. But they had never faced such an enemy before. Within days of the arrival of the main Skaven armies, the first Ratmen infiltrators were found in the great network of tunnels and catacombs beneath the city. Surrounded, attacked simultaneously by siege and from below, the city seemed on the brink of falling. But at this

critical juncture Count Mandred came into his own, showing his genius for leadership and military strategy.

Mandred ordered the lower levels flooded and a series of barricades and outposts built to defend the higher levels, detailing his best troops – including such famed regiments as the Knights of the White Wolf and Mandred's own bodyguard, the Teutogen Guard – to man these defences. Often, the count patrolled these subterranean defences himself, seeking to raise the spirits of the tunnels' hard-pressed defenders. By coordinating the defence of both the tunnels and the city itself, repositioning his troops on an hourly basis in order to face the ever-changing threat, Mandred ensured the city held out for months as famine and their own pestilences began to take a heavy toll on the Ratmen hordes. By early spring, the Ratmen were so weakened and riven by internal dissent that the siege collapsed.

Hailed as the hero of the Empire, Count Mandred did not rest on his laurels. He launched a crusade to drive the Ratmen from the Empire. Gradually, the Skaven armies were driven underground. Seen now as the Empire's saviour, Mandred was elected Emperor to unanimous acclaim, henceforth to be known by the title of honour, the Emperor Mandred Skaven Slayer. The story of this great hero has been shamefully neglected and all but forgotten. Most shamefully of all, after Mandred's death¹ and as the scholars of the Empire sought desperately to deny the existence of the Ratmen, he has become known as Emperor Mandred Ratcatcher. For shame! He was a man whose acts of heroism and foresight on behalf of his people are perhaps only matched by those of the blessed Sigmar himself.

¹ It should be noted that, following the Emperor Mandred's murder, evidence was found which seemed to suggest the crime had been the work of a single deranged mutant acting alone. But despite the eagerness with which the authorities of the time seized upon such evidence, the flimsiness of the lone assassin theory is obvious. It is plain there was a conspiracy to murder Mandred, and the Ratmen lay at the heart of it.

6. A Secret History: From the Crusades to the Red Box



(Above) Illustration of a glyph used among the Lizardmen of Lustria, and said to represent the forked tongue of their serpent God Sotek. From the tales told by explorers it would appear Sotek is counted as one of the greatest gods of the Lizardman pantheon, honoured above all else for his role as the enemy of the Ratmen. (Reproduced from the journals of the Tilean explorer Marco Colombo, circa 1493 IC)

With the end of the Great Plague and the failure of their campaigns against the Empire, the Ratmen retreated to the shadows once more, no doubt returning to their underground havens to lick their wounds. But though there is no recorded evidence of their having ventured onto the surface in appreciable numbers at any time over the next four centuries, it would be a mistake to assume the plots of the Ratmen against mankind ended with the Great Plague. Rather, having failed to realise their aims by the weapons of force-of-arms and disease, the Skaven leaders turned to more subtle methods by which to try and achieve their ends.

For example, according to certain of the chronicles of Araby, it is claimed that the Sultan Jaffar sought the encouragement of the Ratmen in planning his ill-fated invasion of Estalia – an encouragement they duly supplied. And if that invasion provoked the Crusades and saw the kingdoms of the Old World combine their forces to defeat the Sultan and cast him down, Jaffar's secret masters were no doubt pleased they had so easily put the forces of Humanity at each other's throats. At the same time, as explorers returned from Lustria in the wake of Marco Colombo's discovery of the continent in the year 1492 IC, they brought back tales of sightings of the Ratmen in the New World, making it clear no corner of creation was free from the Skaven scourge. But, for all the passing mentions the Ratmen merit in the histories and chronicles of the time, their next forays against the kingdoms of the surface world in force were to come in the one nation that, above all others, has most regularly suffered their depredations: Tilea.

From the earliest records of the Tileans, it is clear the Ratmen have always lived in great numbers in and around the area of the Blighted Marshes. As might be expected, given its proximity to the Marshes, the city-state of Miragliano has accordingly suffered repeated attacks by the Ratmen over the centuries, becoming by reason of necessity something of a bastion against the Skaven threat. Despite this however, the fiercest recorded incident of Skaven aggression against the cities of Tilea came, not against Miragliano, but against the neighbouring city-state of Tobar. Built on the ruins of a long-derelict Elven outpost on a high acropolis overlooking the western approaches of the Tilean Sea, the full extent of the ancient and

1. By way of evidence, consider for a moment the words of the 16th century Arabian chronicler Ahmed Ibn Said: "And then summoning the rat-headed daemons, the Sultan did seek their counsel once more."



(Above) Detail from a statue of the Tilean prince, Meldo Marcelli, which stands in the central piazza of the city of Tobaró. The statue commemorates Marcelli's recapture of the city from the Ratmen in the year 1565 IC, and shows him in a triumphant pose with the laurel crown of victory on his brow, though with a single tear staining each of his cheeks. By nature an aloof and calculating man little given to emotion, it is said in the aftermath of victory Marcelli cried two tears – one of joy at Tobaró's liberation; the other of sorrow at the horrors the Ratmen had wreaked on his beloved city in his absence. (Drawn by the author: Charcoal on parchment)

labyrinthine catacombs beneath the city of the Tobaró only became apparent in the year 1563 IC, as vast hordes of Ratmen suddenly emerged from within them to lay waste to the city above.

Caught by surprise and with his city's fortifications made useless by the fact that the enemy had appeared from so unexpected a quarter, Tobaró's Prince Meldo Marcelli was forced to flee with what remnants of his army and ships he could save, to seek refuge in the allied city-state of Remas. But Marcelli was not a man to succumb easily, either to the vagaries of Fate or the depredations of the Ratmen. By dint of every last ducat of his fortune he

assembled one of the greatest armies of mercenaries ever seen and, reinforced by a contingent of Elven seafarers, returned to Tobaró without delay, fighting a series of bloody battles over the next two years before he was finally able to drive the Ratmen from the city itself and from the catacombs beneath it. For this act Meldo Marcelli has ever since been rightly proclaimed in his home city as the saviour of Tobaró.

The next nation to suffer the Ratmen's attentions was to be Bretonnia as, in the year 1786 IC, an outbreak of the Red Pox occurred in the city of Bordeleaux that is said to have killed a third of the city's population in the course of a single week. So virulent was the contagion that Bordeleaux's ruler, the Baron Giscard Du'ponte, gave orders for the poor quarter of the city to be put to the torch in order to contain it. This act, for all its deplorable inhumanity, served to halt the spread of the disease at once. But the outbreak in Bordeleaux was nothing more than a prelude to the Ratmen's wider schemes. The true campaign would begin over a quarter-of-a-century later, with the coming of a second outbreak of the Red Pox that was to ravage both southern Bretonnia and northern Tilea. In what appears to have been an attempt by the Ratmen to use the same tactics that had so nearly succeeded at the time of the Great Plague, they bided their time until the epidemic was at its height, before returning to the surface once more in force to raid the towns and villages along the River Brienne. From there, they turned to lay siege simultaneously to the cities of Brionne and Quenelles, before being defeated by the combined forces of the Duc de Parravon and the Elves of Athel Loren, in the decisive Battle of Remarché in the year 1813 IC. And so yet another attempt by the Ratmen to subjugate a human Kingdom ended in ignominious failure. As with the Great Plague before it, the failure of the Red Pox precipitated another lull in their activities on the surface. A lull that would last nearly two centuries, until events outside their control would force the Ratmen to emerge from hiding once more.

7. Interlude: A Visit to Miragliano

In the course of my research for this book, I have had occasion to journey to many places. But, of all those, perhaps none gave me greater pleasure than my visit to the Tilean city of Miragliano in the summer of the year 2309. As remarked upon before, it is a city that has long been a bastion against the Ratmen. And, with this in mind, I had come to consult with some of their savants in the hope of gaining greater insight into the Skaven threat. As such, I had expected great things of my visit. But all the same, as my ship docked in Miragliano and I joined the excited crowds of passengers to take my first view of the city before me, I saw a sight then that thrilled and amazed me in equal measure. This sight moved me more than all the fine artworks and sculptures I saw in the course of my month-long stay in the city. A sight that seemed to me at that moment more exquisite a thing of beauty than anything else in the world could be.

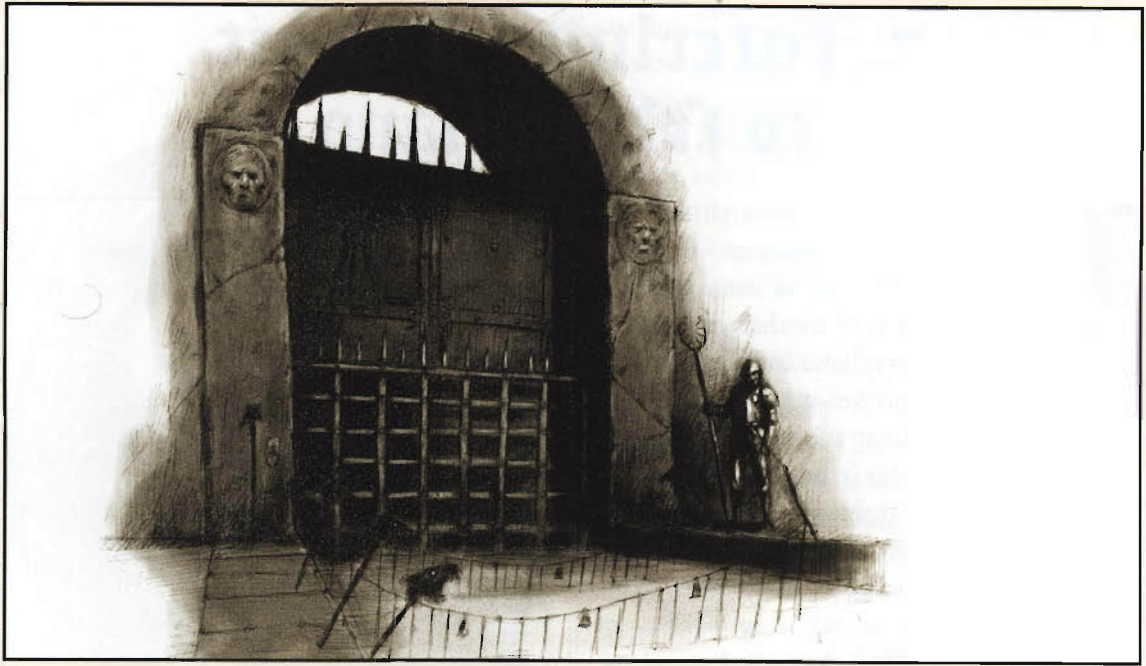
I saw a Ratman's head on a pike.

The reader may be shocked, even appalled. But, I ask you, could there be any more startling testament to the differences in the understanding of the Ratmen between Tilea and the Empire? Coming from a land where the existence of the Ratmen is denied and where my own work is reviled, I found myself instead in a land where the reality of the Ratmen's existence is readily accepted. Moreover, as I learned in the course of my time among the charming Tilean people, they are ever eager to find new allies in the struggle against the menace that has so often befouled the beauty of their city. Further, of all the cultures of the human world, none are more knowledgeable on the subject of the Ratmen than are the Tileans. And, while their knowledge in that regard may pale before that of the Dwarfs, the scholar is likely to encounter none of the difficulties with the Tileans that so often come in any dealings with that most



(Above) Sketch of the severed head of a dead Ratman, seen mounted on a pike and displayed from the walls of the Tilean city of Miragliano. From conversations with the gate guards, I learned the Ratman in question had been caught trying to infiltrate the city the previous night by the Rat-Catchers, who had decided to put his head on display as a warning to his fellows. (Drawn by the author: Ink on parchment)

taciturn of races. As I say, in the course of my visit to Miragliano, I learned much of the Ratmen I had not known before, facts that were a great aid to me in the writing of this book. I saw many more sights that aroused my interest and curiosity. And, it is in the hope that some of these same sights will be of interest to the reader that I present a small selection here.



(Above) Illustration showing one of the fortified canal gates of the Tilean city-state of Miragliano. Despite their name, such canal gates are separate from the system of gates used to maintain the water levels of Miragliano's canals. Designed to block attempts by the Ratmen to infiltrate the city's canal system, they take the form of heavy iron portcullises situated at the junctures where the canals meet the waters of the marshes outside the city. The small bells at the top of the gates are connected by thin wires to fishing hooks, intended to give the alarm by catching the clothes of passing swimmers, while both above and below the waterline the surfaces of the gates themselves are covered in viciously barbed hooks. Patrolled during the day by Miragliano's ordinary City Watch, at night the canal gates are guarded by the same men responsible for patrolling the banks of the city's many canals: the famed Rat-Catchers of Miragliano. (Drawn by the author: Ink on parchment)



(Left) Illustrations found in the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Miragliano. The illustration is believed to show a drawing of a Skaven Screaming Bell, based on Leonardo's observation of the use of such a device during the Ratmen's attack on the city of Miragliano in the year 2004 IC. (The archives of the Prince of Miragliano: Ink on vellum)



(Above) *The Rat-Catchers of Miragliano.* Founded in the aftermath of the devastation of Miragliano by the Red Fox in the year 1812 IC, the Rat-Catchers are one of the most famous and respected mercenary regiments in Tilea. Trained and equipped at the Prince of Miragliano's expense, the Rat-Catchers' main duty is to keep the city safe from Skaven incursion. Typically, each man is armed with a short sword, a crossbow and several knives, although officers often replace the crossbow with a handbow to allow them to carry a lantern in their other hand. Each patrol is also accompanied by a dog-handler with two dogs, powerful mastiffs bred to fight the Skaven from birth and fed exclusively on a diet of rat-meat. Finally, as can be seen in the illustration above, the Rat-Catchers often make use of two signature pieces of equipment when they need to drag the waters of the canals for Skaven swimmers: grappling hooks and "il Sollecitare" – "The Tickler" – a long pole covered in a profusion of barbed hooks. (Painted by the author: Oils on canvas)

8. A Secret History: The City of the Damned



(Above) *And I Heard the Sound of Hoofbeats and Saw Four Riders Approaching*. Preparatory study for an unfinished painting by the artist Werner Holst, circa 1999 IC. Claiming the inspiration of troubling dreams and visions, Holst produced dozens of such studies in the years 1997-99, all for paintings he never completed. With the appearance of the twin-tailed comet in the skies above the Empire as the year 1999 drew to a close, Holst abandoned his artistic career, gouging out his own eyes and joining a flagellant order. His subsequent fate is unknown. (Private collection: Ink wash on canvas)

With the beginning of the year 1999 IC, as the second millennium drew to a close¹, the Empire was a land gripped by crisis. After six centuries of intermittent civil war, the Imperial system had collapsed. The Emperor's throne was vacant, fought over by squabbling elector counts who gave little thought to the wider consequences of their actions. At the same time, the provinces they ruled had become all but ungovernable. Everywhere, towns and cities asserted their independence, rebelling against the rule of their counts and making laws and wars in the name of the interests of the mercantile classes. For the common people, beset on all sides by

corruption, hardship and violence, there seemed truth in the words of every doomsayer and heretic prophet. Spurred on by the centuries-old prophecies of visionary madmen like Macadamnus of Greill, the belief arose that with the end of the second millennium, Sigmar would return on wings of fire to judge the land he had founded. Then, as the last days of the year wound down, thousands looked up to see a terrible portent burning in the skies above them: a twin-tailed comet, growing ever larger and more vivid in the sky. Surely the hour of judgement was at hand, and moved by Macadamnus's prophecy that Sigmar would return to "the city of his sisters"², pilgrims

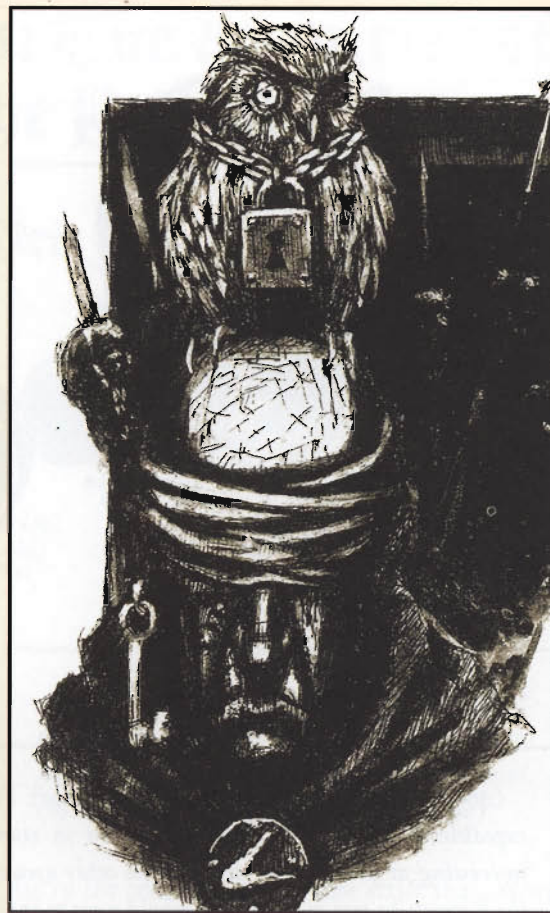
1. Of course, in the strictest scholarly sense the true end of the millennium would come a year later with the end of the year 2000 – but such subtle distinctions were lost in the hysteria of the time.

flocked in their tens of thousands to the city of Mordheim, site of the convent of the Order of the Merciful Sisters of Sigmar. But, as the comet raged closer in the heavens above, the people of Mordheim seemed overcome by a hysterical licentiousness and depravity, as though hell-bent on enjoying every forbidden and illicit pleasure left to them in life before their God could come to end it. To the last, the streets of Mordheim overflowed with unimaginable vice. And then, in a bright instant of savage fire, the city was destroyed as the comet fell to earth.

As to whether it truly was Sigmar's judgement on the people of Mordheim for their sins, or simply some random disaster accorded undue significance by the character of the age, who can say? What can be said is that the first witnesses to view its aftermath reported that the comet's fall had left a seemingly bottomless crater — henceforth known as "The Pit" — at the city's centre, surrounded by the ruined and fire-blackened shells of the buildings of the rest of the city. Perhaps a hundred thousand or more were dead, reduced to splintered bones and ash, or choked by the poisonous vapours that ushered from the Pit in the seconds after the impact. Those vapours and a pall of thick black smoke hung over the city for days. But even when it dispersed, those few hardy souls brave enough to enter the city and inspect the rubble were soon struck down by strange illnesses and foul mutations. Had it not been for the stories these dying men brought back with them, it is doubtful any would have willingly followed in their footsteps. But among their tales of the countless monstrosities that now made their home in the rubble, those first explorers told of the powers of the strangely glowing black shards of rock they had found among the debris.

Warpstone.

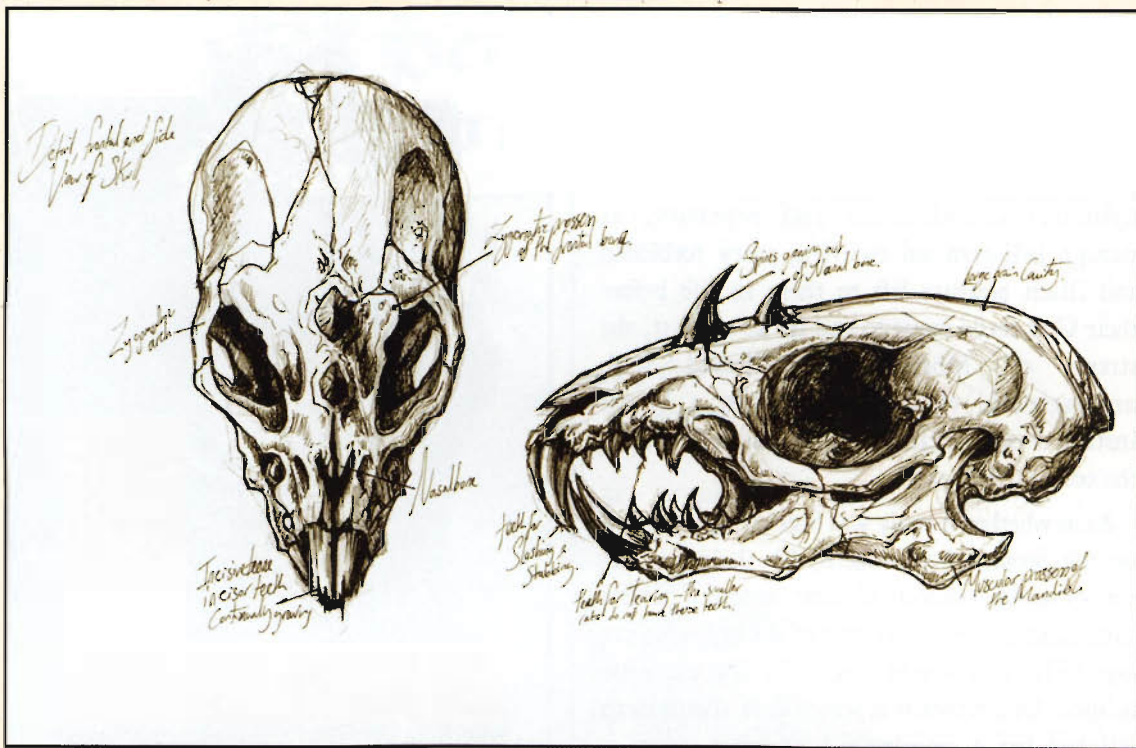
In the generations to come, those tales would lead literally thousands of desperate and foolhardy men to brave the horrors of Mordheim



(Above) Self Portrait by Werner Holst, circa 1999 IC. Believed to be Holst's last completed study, many have seen the blindfold Holst wears in the drawing less as a metaphor, and more as direct evidence of his future intentions. (Private collection: Ink on canvas)

in search of warpstone, or "wyrdstone" as it was called then. Most of them would die, killed either by Mordheim's feral mutant inhabitants, simple treachery amongst themselves, or the unholy miasma of the city itself. And yet still, day after day, more would come, hoping against hope to defy the odds and find enough warpstone to sell to make themselves wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. And with each man who survived to emerge from the city would come more tales of the horrors of that place. Tales of daemon-warped monstrosities like a melding of man and metal, of decomposing cadavers still

2. For extracts from the relevant passages in *Macadamnus*, see Reinhard Ascher, *Heresies in the Age of the Three Emperors*, pages 209–239. See bibliography.



(Above) Sketch found in the diary of Kurt Fless, a mercenary and anatomist who made several expeditions into the rubble of Mordheim in search of "wyrdstone" in the years 2000-2002 IC. It is interesting to note that, in accord with other eyewitnesses of the time, Fless's descriptions and sketches of the Ratmen he saw in the rubble would seem to indicate that only the members of Clan Eshin were present in Mordheim, although as to why that should be, I could not hazard a guess. (From the archives of the von Fless family: Ink on parchment)

walking long after their deaths and of stealthy hybrids of rat and man who seemed able to appear and disappear at will.

The Ratmen had come to Mordheim.

From a close study of the records of the time, the following facts are clear. Like the meteors that fell on Sylvania in the year 1111 IC, the comet that struck Mordheim on the first day of the year 2000 was composed wholly, or in part, of warpstone. How else are we to account for the prevalence of so much warpstone in the ruins of Mordheim thereafter? At the same time, and again like the earlier incident in Sylvania, the coming of the comet was presaged by irregularities in the behaviour of the Morrslieb moon. Combining these facts with the plentiful eyewitness accounts of Ratmen operating in the rubble of Mordheim after the comet's fall, we can see not just the characteristic Skaven hunger for warpstone, but further proof of a correlation

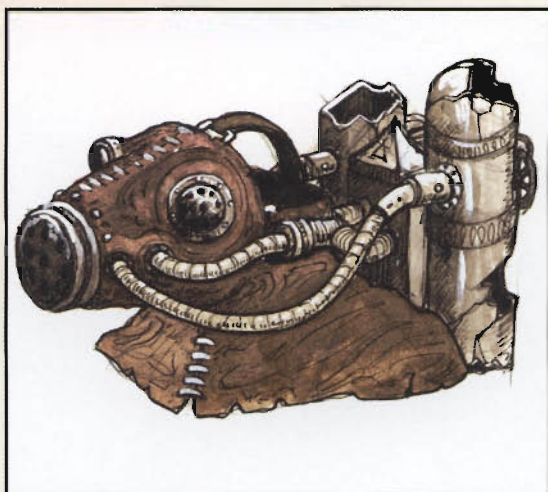
between the Ratmen's incursions against the surface world and disturbances in the size and position of Morrslieb. And while granting that it is not yet possible to establish the factors underpinning such correlations, we are left with what would seem to be an indicator which may in the future allow mankind to predict coming Skaven incursions and prepare for them accordingly. To be able to do so would be to possess a powerful weapon in the coming and inevitable war between Man and the Ratmen. A war that, as has been remarked before, we have no choice other than to win, if we would not become extinct.



9. A Secret History: The Activities of the Ratmen in the Present Era

It is a well-known fact, barely requiring comment, but the days immediately preceding the Great War Against Chaos were marked by many great signs and wonders – not least by certain disturbances in the behaviour of the lesser moon, Morrslieb. As might be expected, given the correlations already established, the same period also saw an increased incidence of the incursions of the Ratmen, though the extent of such incursions was for the most part hidden within the generalised anarchy occasioned by the larger conflicts of the time. Nor did these incursions cease with the ending of the war – as said before, Magnus’s army suffered several attacks by the Ratmen during the long march home, while at the same time outbreaks of plague occurred in the cities of Nuln, Talabheim and Marienburg. Fortunately these outbreaks were swiftly brought under control by the relevant authorities, but still, the hand of the Ratmen was plain in each one of them.

What is remarkable, given that the ending of the Great War had left the Empire all but exhausted, is that such incursions were relatively few in number. For if the secret history already outlined within these pages teaches us nothing else, it is that the Ratmen are always likely to strike when Man is at his weakest. And yet this time, with the strongest human nation all but on its knees, for some unknown reason the Ratmen confined themselves to making no more than token forays against us. As to the question of why the Ratmen refrained from going to war with Man in earnest then, there would seem only one reasonable, not to say obvious, answer. The Ratmen did not go to war because they could not. Put more simply, they were either too exhausted or hard-pressed at the time to be able to go to war with Man. Granted, given the paucity of evidence, I am unable to advance a hypothesis as to how or why such a state could have come to pass, though the answer may well

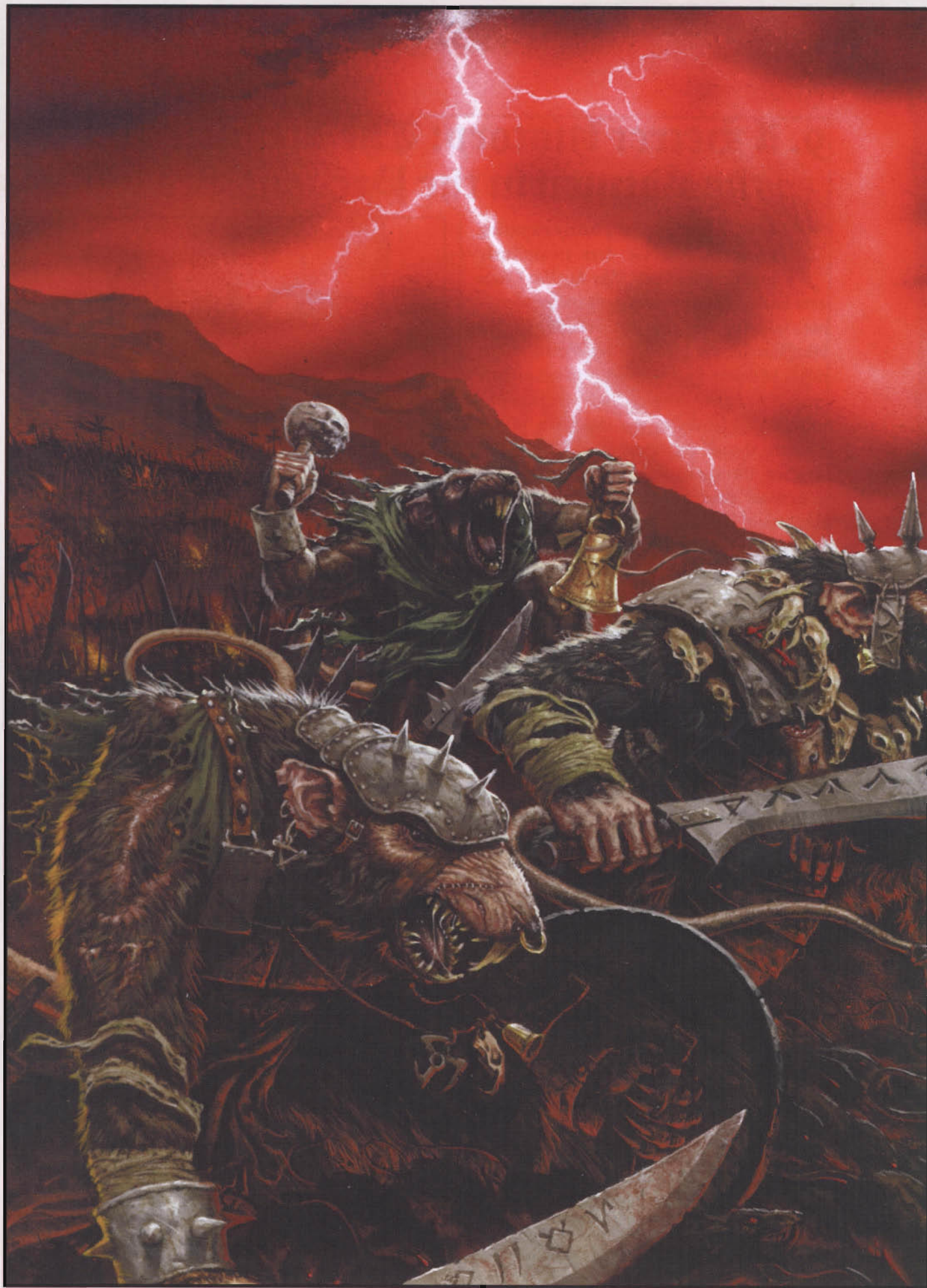


(Above) Sketch from an eyewitness account of a soldier in the Emperor's army who claimed to have battled the Ratmen south of Wissenland. (Wissenburg collection: Ink on parchment)

lie in the constant internecine strife that, as we have seen previously, characterises life among the Ratmen. What is more important however is that, if the Ratmen have exhausted themselves at present, then we may well be presented with an unprecedented opportunity. For what better time could there be for Man to take the war to the enemy? For the first time in recorded history, it might well be within the power of Humanity to destroy the menace of the Ratmen once and for all.

A thought I ask each reader to dwell upon for a moment as we put this recounting of the past horrors and crimes of the Ratmen finally aside, and turn towards the question of the future.







(Above) The Relentless Hordes by Karl Kopintzski, circa 2306 IC. Like the author, the artist was part of a unit of Magnus's army attacked by the Ratmen in the wake of the victory of Kislev – events which directly inspired the painting above. (Private collection: Watercolour on canvas)

Afterword: A Call to Action

“**T**o destroy an enemy you must first know his nature.” Such was the sentiment with which this work began. And now, having read this book and seen page after page of horrors, the reader can rightly claim to know more of the Ratmen than he did at the outset. But though the reader now has some knowledge of the nature of the enemy, our wider aim is still unrealised. Namely, now that we know the nature of the Ratmen, how will we destroy them? To answer the question I propose the following programme.



A COMMON ENEMY MAKES A COMMON PURPOSE

If we would begin earnestly to make preparation for war against the Ratmen in hope of exterminating this scourge from the world once and for all, we must first learn the lessons of the past. Too often mankind has turned upon itself in hatred, setting brother against brother, and by our disunity allow our enemies to prosper against us. Living as we do in a land that has only recently emerged from centuries of civil war, it might perhaps seem a simple truth, and yet still all too many of us are prepared to turn on each other and ignore our greater enemy. Nor when I talk of the need for unity am I referring only to the peoples of the Empire. For if we would defeat the Ratmen we must make common purpose with all the nations of the world: Bretonnia, Tilea, Estalia, Kislev, the Border Princes, even Araby and, if possible, far-flung Cathay. And not just with the human nations, but the nations of Elf, Dwarf and Halfling as well. To those readers who question whether such a thing is possible I offer the example of recent events in Kislev when, under the guiding wisdom of Magnus the Pious, both Elf and Dwarf put aside millennia of enmity



(Above) The human characteristics of this Skaven are very well shown. See how it stands on two legs and uses its front legs like arms. Notice how it manipulates its firearm! Like a man! (Scrieber Family Collection: Ink on parchment)

and fought side-by-side against the common threat. Let the reader make no mistake, the Ratmen are a threat every bit as great as are the forces of Chaos. And so, if we would defeat them, let us stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our brothers in that struggle, whatever their nation, religion or race.



A COMMON PURPOSE MAKES A COMMON RESOLVE

But the unification of our forces is but the first step: if we would destroy our enemy we must resolve to be unflinching in our war against



(Above) The Beast of Vandheim by Titus the Valiant, circa 1613 IC. Of Tilian descent, Titus was known mainly for the series of paintings featuring beasts and monsters of local legend. The horror that terrorised the town of Vandheim is believed by certain scholars to have been a rogue rat ogre, escaped from the breeding pens of Clan Moulder. (Altdorf collection: Oils on canvas)

them. As said before, it is not enough to make war upon the Ratmen when they venture onto the surface, we must take the war to them underground if we are to annihilate their threat forever. With this in mind, I call for the formation of special armies, to be trained by the Dwarfs in the methods and tactics of underground warfare. Granted, human troops may lack the specific racial abilities that predispose the Dwarfs to success in such endeavours. If we would be fitting students for their lessons, we must use every ounce of our grit and determination to counterbalance our shortcomings in this regard, to do less would be to allow the Ratmen to retreat to their boltholes in peace to re-gather their forces and trouble us again and again and again. Nor when I said we must be unflinching was it a word chosen for purposes of rhetoric.

We must be ready to make war upon the Ratmen as they would make war upon us,

giving no mercy or quarter, our only aim being their extermination. To those who would say by acting thus we run the risk of becoming like our enemy, I ask: what of it? We must use every cruelty and dark stratagem at our disposal, relying on the worst excesses of our souls to gain us victory, just as do the Ratmen. To the healers among you who may be appalled at the thought of foreswearing mercy, I ask this simple question: are you not committed to the eradication of disease? For if we would eradicate disease we must first eradicate those who so often are the ultimate source of every contagion: the Ratmen! We must kill them, burn their settlements, poison their wells, assassinate their leaders — be every bit as much a terror to the Ratmen as they are to Man. We must become as practised in the arts of outrage and atrocity as they are. We must make them fear us. We must slaughter them without stint, or pause, or remorse. And only then, when the Ratmen look



(Above) Border ornamentation from Hans Scribeber's tome *Beasts of our World*. These are mutant rats clambering over a Clan Skryre gas mask. Scribeber held some pretty outlandish views of the Skaven, most of which I disagree with. However, at least he faced up to the reality of our peril. (Scribeber Family Collection: Ink on parchment)

at Man with the same horror and loathing as we feel towards them now, will we be set upon the road to victory.



A COMMON RESOLVE MAKES A COMMON VICTORY

But it is not enough to make the Ratmen fear us. We must devote our lives to justifying those fears: developing new weapons, new methods, new strategies and tactics of warfare. Our entire society must become an instrument devoted to the sure and certain purpose of their utter destruction. We must prosecute our war against them to the fullest measure, hounding and harrying them wherever they may go, whether it should be to the ends of the world or the very depths of the earth. At the same time, we must

be ready for a long war. A war that may take decades, generations, even centuries to win. A war that will end only when the body of the very last Ratmen lies dead at our feet and we can be sure their line is finally done. Only then will we be able to rejoice in our victory and know our holy mission is at last complete. Nor do we have any choice in this mission: Man must destroy the Ratmen now, or risk being destroyed by them himself at some future date. If nothing else, the horrors written of in this book will have convinced the reader there can be no parleying or rapprochement with such creatures, the only discourse possible between Man and the Ratman is a discourse of blood, steel and fire. We must destroy them, or be ourselves destroyed. There can be no peace between our races, no diplomacy, no compromise. From first to last, they are our enemy. Our adversary. Our nemesis.

Let us go to war.

Bibliography & Notes on Sources

In the course of conducting the researches that formed the basis of this book, I travelled to many lands and benefited from the wisdoms of a great many sources. Above all else I am indebted to several members of the Dwarf race, either living as expatriates in the Empire or as residents of Karak Kadrin, without whose knowledge and forbearance – not to mention at times physical protection – this book would have never come into being. Similarly, I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of the savants, functionaries and mercenary captains of the Tilean city-state of Miragliano, who added much to the store of my knowledge as to the ways of the “Rattas”. Further, at various times in my quest I was aided by literally dozens of individuals of many persuasions and walks-of-life including, but not limited to: soldiers, scholars, sailors – both human and Elf – witch hunters, watchmen, sewerjacks, merchants, artists, noblemen, wizards, peddlers, physicians, roadwardens, alchemists and explorers, many of whom consented to be interviewed as to their direct experiences of the Skaven menace, and to all of whom I owe my thanks.

As to written sources, I am indebted to several colleagues – both from my student days and later military life – who helped me gain access by a variety of means to the original copies of several of the ancient Annals and Chronicles of the different provinces of the Empire. Further, afforded the aid of my earlier training in linguistics, I was able to consult a number of works that have yet to be translated into Reikspiel, which gave great insight into the understanding of the Ratmen in lands such as Bretonnia, Estalia and Araby. At the same time, I was further aided by the work of a number of pioneering scholars who, despite the opprobrium of their peers, refused to be deflected in the pursuit of truth. And, it is with this in mind that I present the following short bibliography of works of other authors, arranged in order of their relevance to the study of the Ratmen rather than in the usual alphabetical fashion. It is to these men, above all others, to whom I am perhaps most indebted. I am aware that if I have stood tall, it is only because I stand on the shoulders of giants.

Wilhelm Leiber 2313 IC

Helmut van Hal, *Against the Darkness, or The Record of My Struggles Against Humanity's Enemies in the Service of Our Lord Sigmar*, Armoury of Faith Press, 2098 IC (Though van Hal's memoirs are available in a number of populist editions, the reader is warned such versions are usually so bowdlerized as to be all but useless. To read of van Hal's struggles with the Ratmen, the reader should seek out the earlier, unabridged editions.)

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Viktor Ferenczy, *The Burrowers Beneath*, publisher unknown, circa 1608 IC.

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Reinhard Ascher, *Heresies in the Age of the Three Emperors*, Altdorf Press, 2273 IC

Heidmar Voln, *Rats, Lice and Man, or the Discontents of Civilisation*, Medis Press, 2262 IC



(Above) *The Triumph of the Ratmen* by Sanzio Raphaelli, circa 1593 IC. Counted by many to be Raphaelli's great masterpiece, the painting depicts the final Skaven assault on the Temple of Verena in the Tilean city of Tobaró in the year 1563 IC – an assault which ultimately culminated in the Ratmen's capture of the city. (From the *Palazzo of the Prince of Tobaró*: Oils on canvas)



While admitting that in his youth he was on occasion exhibited to the public under the name *The Amazing Rat Boy*, Mr Mitchel Scanlon wishes it to be known

he disputes in the strongest terms any suggestion he may be the 'missing link' between Rat and Man. Further, while it is true he possesses certain anatomical peculiarities which excited the interest of the medical profession at the time of his birth, he flatly rejects the suggestion he is in any way especially adapted for life underground. Nor, and he can produce signed affidavits to this effect from a number of eminent witnesses, does he possess a tail.

When not writing comics and prose for the Black Library, including the series *Tales of Hellbrandt Grimm*, *Of Ancient Blood* and *Liliana Falcone*, Mitchel Scanlon is said to reside in an isolated village in rural Derbyshire, whose good people are kind enough to refrain from taunting him about his disfigurements. Though their children do still occasionally throw stones.

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