

# Rats in the Walls



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A  
Game of  
Timeless Hatred

Written by  
Lance D. Allen

WOLVES DEN  
PRODUCTIONS

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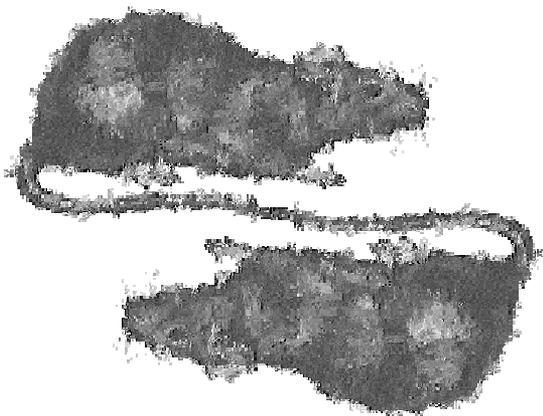
## *Inspirations:*

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

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

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

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



# *Rats*

*In the*

# *Walls*

*A game of timeless hatred*

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## *Introduction*

### **Rats in the Walls of Time**

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

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

### **About this Game**

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

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

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

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

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



## *Character Creation*

### **Character Traits**

Compared to some games, the characters in Rats in the Walls are statistically quite shallow. There are a total of 5 traits, plus a number of hatred descriptors. These traits are Profession, Ability, Wrath, Love and Hate. Below, each will be described in more detail.

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

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

**Wrath:** This is a pool of points representing how angry with his or her situation your character is, and hence, how likely it becomes that you'll go back and make a Change. It starts at zero, but don't worry; It will go up, and your very first change isn't dependent on it, anyhow.

**Love:** This is a pool of points representing the one someone or something that your character truly loves. It can refer to a person, an idea, an activity, an object or even a place. You can use points from this pool in any contest where your Love might apply. You'll need to be careful though, as your Love is the only thing that keeps you hanging on. Whenever you make changes to the past, you can also erode your Love. When you have no Love, you have nothing left; Life is over for you.

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

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

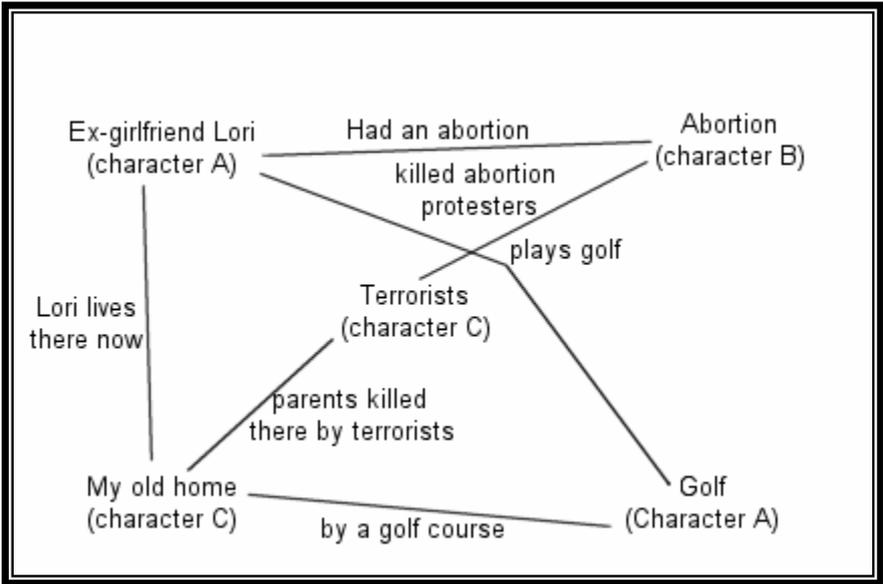
## **The Web of Hatred**

Building your web of hatreds is the first step to building a character, except for perhaps vague initial concepts. While it is possible to have an idea in mind, it is essential to realize that your character is defined by the things they hate. So now each player needs to start choosing hatreds. The minimum and maximum number can and

should be set by your individual groups. I'll toss out 5 and 10 respectively as a baseline to start from, but your minima and maxima may be lower or much higher. Once each player is satisfied by their hatreds, it's time to build the web. The best way to do this is to write all of the collective hatreds on a single piece of paper. Space them out as best you can, because you're going to need to be able to draw a bunch of lines. These lines will connect the hatreds together; Each hatred will need two or more connections to other hatreds, at least one of which must be to a hatred belonging to another player character. Along with each line there should be a brief description describing how the two things are connected. The example chart above should give you a good idea of what a web of hatreds should look like.

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

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



### Assigning Traits

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

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

- Love: 5 points per
- Ability: 2 points per
- Profession: 1 point per

You'll also need to choose descriptors for Love and Profession. Don't sweat too much over Profession, as it will

change frequently. Love may change as well, but it is more important to make sure you have one you like to start.

## **Challenge Points**

The last thing that needs to be taken care of before character generation is done is the GM's Challenge Points. As the GM doesn't have hatred or a character, they get to base their effectiveness on the group. Total up the collective Hate of the group, then multiply that number by 5. The result is the GM's Challenge Points, which the GM uses the same way the players use their Ability, Job and Love points when he has to represent some opposition in a contest, be it an NPC or a more impersonal force.

## **New Rats**

Either due to an old PC being "retired", or new players joining, occasionally new characters will enter an ongoing game. The process is almost entirely painless. Gather the group together and go through the normal character generation procedure. Add the new hatreds into the web, and with the group draw new connections between the new and existing hatreds. The GM gets additional Challenge points equal to 5 times the new character's Hate score.



# Rules

## Contests

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

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

Once all participants are satisfied with their bids, a d12 is rolled for each point bid into the contest. Keep track of which trait each die roll is for, as the roll not only determines if you succeed or fail, it also de-

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

termines whether or not you lose or keep the point, or even gain a new one for the same trait. The breakdown for each die roll is on the chart above.

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

**Gaining and Losing Wrath:** If you lose a contest, you stand to gain Wrath; Having your will balked when you try to do things the normal way is, after all, a good way to spur you to try things the other way. When you lose the contest, count up the total number of Failure results over the course of the contest. If any of your hatreds were involved in the contest, (If your GM is doing his job, there will be!) count those, and add that to your total Failures. You gain this many points of Wrath.

However, if you win a contest, it can have the opposite effect; You can lose Wrath when things go your way. When you win a contest, count the number of your hatreds involved, and remove that many Wrath points. Triumphant over your hatreds in the regular manner means you'll be less likely to want to try to Change things.

## **Scurrying Between the Walls**

This section is the meat of the game. Changing the past is the point, after all. The rules are very close to being the same. Aside from the first time described below, your character cannot simply make a change whenever they feel like it. They must have built up sufficient anger and frustration with their current situation. This is where the Wrath trait comes in. To initiate a change, you must spend a number of Wrath points equal to your character's current Love score, plus the total number of Rats in the game, including yourself. So if your Love score is currently a 4, and you're playing with 3 friends including the GM, you'll have to spend 7 Wrath to initiate a Change.

Once you initiate the Change, you must roll a d12 for

each point of your Hate score. The GM will need to roll a minimum of twice your character's Hate rating. The results are similar, but not identical to the normal Contest rules. See the chart above for details.

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

You'll notice that your loss results specify Love, not Hatred; There's a big reason for that. Making changes to the past is pretty seriously focused on your hatreds, and that kind of focus, especially with the unexpected consequences screwing with reality usually has, can have some serious affects on the things that keep one sane; In this game, your Love. It is important to note that this loss cannot make Love a negative value; It can be reduced to zero, and not lower. But all is not lost... There are two ways to prevent, and possibly even reverse, that loss of Love.

Change Points are the first of the two ways. Change points allow you to raise your stats, 1 for 1. If you raise a stat with a descriptor (Love, Profession) you may change the descriptor as well. Unless it's obvious from your other narrations, you should also take a moment to narrate why the stat raised or changed. You may also use Change Points to offset Love loss, with or without narration, as you see fit. If you raise Love from 0 with Change points, this does not count as having lost your Love, as per the end-game rules on pages 16-17.

The second way to avoid losing Love is to simply let go; Let go of some of the Hatred that's filling you. You may, during any Change that you are assigned Love loss, choose instead to lose one of your hatreds. This prevents *all* loss of Love for that Change roll. This choice should be made before Change points are applied. Choose the hatred you feel is most appropriate, and be sure to narrate how your character has let the hatred slip away, or has made peace with it. Remember as well that this will lower your Hatred score.

There are some additional limitations and special cases to keep in mind when making a change, however:

- **Age:** You cannot initially make a change outside of your character's lifespan. However, once an older character makes a change, you may go back as early as that time to make your own changes.
- **Suicide:** If any Rat decides to kill themselves off at any point in the past, they may do so, using a Succeed result from the Hate roll. Any other Succeed results may be assigned as normal. Once the Change is complete, the character will be dead during the Reshaping the Present phase, and they will no longer be a player character. If later Changes by other players revoke the death, the character will be played as an NPC, as applicable.
- **Murder:** On the other hand, if one Rat is killed by another Rat, either by means of a Change, or more mundane means, it works a bit differently. If the player of that character wishes to retire them at that point, treat it the same as a suicide, above. However, if the player

wishes to continue playing that character, then on the next Change made by another Rat, the GM may, for free, declare that the character death never happened, and the player may continue to play them as normal.

- **The First Time:** The very first time a player character makes a Change is different; None of the above rules are necessary (though Age must still be taken into account). The GM should, in the first scene or two involving a Rat, introduce several of their hatreds at once, making it clear that they can declare their intent to make a Change at any time. They then get to describe one single act that their character does in the past, and the GM should use that act to set up the current situation for the character. No ratings or descriptors on the character sheet may change, as again the idea is to set up the current situation.

## Reshaping the Present

For each Succeed result, you may narrate how you made one change or action in the past, or to declare how certain things turned out. Basically, each Succeed allows you to stake a claim on some aspect of the rewritten future. Once you've declared all of your Succeed results, the GM will declare his own Succeed results in response.

The GM must use his Succeed results well, because they determine how the Present is reshaped around the Change. He may not directly counter-act the player's narrations, but he should feel free, and in fact obligated, to change anything not nailed down, and to interpret the player's changes to make an interesting (read: complicated)

Present situation. The GM should also be sure to include the situations of other Rats when he is Reshaping the Present, though he may only change their Profession with permission. Additionally, the GM may change the character's Profession descriptor for free, unless the player had already nailed that down. If the Love was not nailed down, the GM may change it by expending one Succeed result.

### **Interference:**

There will come a time when one Rat attempts to shred the reality of another, maybe out of good intentions or ignorance, perhaps out of spite or desperation. When this happens, the targeted Rat may, without expending Wrath, roll any number of dice up to their Hate score to fight back against the interloper's influence. Note the gains and losses as well as the Succeed results from the table on page 12, and use the contest rules from page 10; Except that of course the arena for your conflict is in time, rather than set stakes.

Rather than simply changing one thing back and forth, try to hit your opponent where it'll hurt, so maybe they'll leave it alone. Be creative. After all, you're hate-driven time shifters; vicious, cornered rats, fighting within the walls of time over the scraps of your very existences.

### **Love, Life and Hate**

Love and Hate are the two things that drive your character and keep 'em going. So what happens when you run out of one or the other? Game over, man. At least for that character. A lot of people won't like that, so it's very

possible that you'll be seeing a contradictory dance of playing against the hatreds, but trying to hang on to them at the same time. This is exactly the point. The driven often struggle to overcome something, yet cling to the very things they despise because it gives them meaning and purpose. This is one of the themes this game is meant to explore.

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

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

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

your character came to possess the new hatred, or how they ended up once they lose the ability to scurry between the walls of time.

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



## *Play of the Game*



**What to do:** To be honest, it's actually going to be pretty spelled out for you once you get character's built and ready to play. You're going to have a bunch of things on your character sheet that your character hate-hate-hates, and they're probably going to want to do something about them. They may decide to try to tackle them without meddling with the past... But once the other Rats get to making Changes, it's going to become harder and harder to get by without doing it yourself.

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

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

their own, and the power to either help or hinder each other. Go nuts.

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

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

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

**Techniques:** There are various techniques that experience has shown will make this game a bit easier to play. Specifically, determining your Succeeds, Fails, Gains and Losses

has taken a lot of time, and reshaping the present can get pretty confusing. I'll try to share some things that worked well in my playtesting.

- **Die Rolls:** Once you've rolled your dice, first divide them into two piles; 6 and below, and 7 and above. The 7+ dice will be your successes, everything else will be a failure. Count them up, and make a note. Once you're done there, discard all 2s, 3s, 4s, 9s, 10s and 11s. Note the 1s and 12s, and write down gains on the appropriate traits, or note a number of Change points, depending on what sort of roll it is. Then note the 5-8s, and note losses on the appropriate traits.
- **Reshaping the Present:** When doing scenes, it's best to have a 'focus' character. That's the character who the GM should be focused on, drawing out hatreds and playing with Loves, primarily. If any Rat involved in that scene decides to make a Change, do it, reshape the present and cover the immediate aftermath of the Change. But don't linger overlong after a Change. Move on to another character when you find an appropriate shenking point.
- The next character may even be active in that scene, but at that point, focus on the Change's effects on their situation. If the character wasn't active in the scene, consider how the Changes might have effected what was going on when you last left them, as well as any other Changes made in other scenes since their last one. Feel free to play up the immediate changes if the scene ended on an up note, or feel free to focus on how things never seem to really change, if it ended on frustration.



## *Designer's Notes*

It's been almost a year since I've actually changed anything in this manuscript, and over half a year since I've even attempted playtesting. I'm not going to make excuses, because I could have found the time. Suffice to say I let things get in the way.

Regardless, I'm finally working on what may be the last alpha version now, version a1.2, which will once again be made available for playtesting, and which I will once again be making an effort to playtest myself.

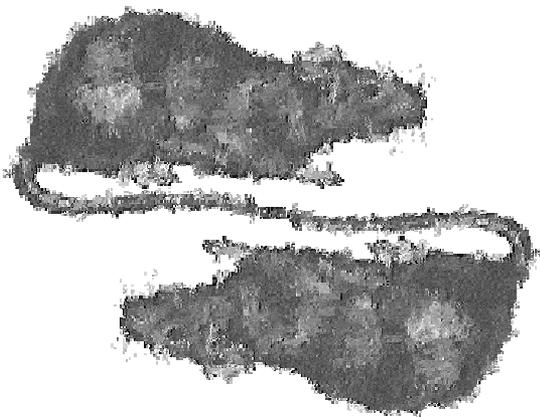
I'd like to thank my first round of playtesters (listed in the credits) for being patient enough to sit down and try to figure out this bit of fluff I threw together over the course of less than 24 hours, and which somehow, someway, managed to make the cut and become a September 2005 Ronnies Winner.

The text of version a1.2 is a slightly rewritten version of the original contest entry text, with expanded explanations, and rules additions and changes. "Examples of Play" will not be included in this version because I'm still working on getting an idea of what it does look like, as well as what it should look like. Once I've got both of those, I'll be able to better make the one match the other.

So, without further exposition, I'll close with my thanks to anyone who takes the time to read through this version of the text. If you've taken the time and would like to assist, please send any questions or comments on the text, the rules or even the art and layout to [darius-wolfe@cox.net](mailto:darius-wolfe@cox.net), or look me up on [indie-rpgs.com](http://indie-rpgs.com). If you're looking to playtest the game, I'll be doubly grateful for any feedback, positive or negative.

Thanks,

*~Lance D. Allen*  
WOLVES DEN PRODUCTIONS



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# *Rats in the Walls*

*Name:*

*Player:*

*HATE: Wrath:*

*Love:*

*Profession:*

*Ability:*

*Hatreds:*