

## Microlite20 VERMIN: Tooth and claw in the streets.

"Could you be just a little more quiet, Barkhead," growled Trom, the rat. "It's not like we're *begging* to get noticed or anything."

Barkhead snickered, "Sure... like there's anything awake in this alley in the middle of the night. Let's just go in, grab the ham and get out. I don't even know why I'm helping you guys. I don't even eat ham."

"Because, you, you, you're our friend," squeaked the little mouse sneak Keiter. "And, and, we smelled pine nuts. Promise."

Barkhead scrambled up the wall unto the windowsill. "Ok... grab this rope and get up here," he said, concentrating for a moment. "... ..," he appeared to scream. "... ..," he said, pressing a paw against the glass and concentrating again, until the window shattered in without a sound. "Looks like we're home free," he said, scrambling down the rope, as he dropped down the other side and out of the zone of silence.

The rat growled as he struggled to climb down the rope. "I can smell it. Roast ham and honey--and a dozen smelly humans, all in this one little tavern. Treat-time." The trio skittered across the floor, hungry and oblivious to the imminent danger in the window.

A brown tabby peered in the broken hole as Trom began to gorge himself. Barkhead greedily chewed up a strawberry as Keiter noticed the cat. "G-g-guys..."

The three turned as the cat put his paw against a shard of glass. "No, no, no, Alex... come 'n," begged the squirrel. "I gave you all the information you wanted just last week--and I got a friend to clean up that nasty case of mange." Alex grinned. "Sorry, chumps," he hissed, pushing the piece of glass out.

Down...

down..

down... it tumbled, and...

Shattering against the floor with a deafening sound in the near-silence of the room, shards flew everywhere, nearly hitting Keiter in the leg as he leaped away. Clomping footsteps plodded across the upstairs floor, and started down the stairs.

"Funknutty," growled Barkhead.

## Introduction

*Vermin* is a M20 game set in the streets of a dark fantasy city. Unlike most fantasy games, this one's set at dirt level--you play the tiny beasts, the dirty vermin of the city. Players can choose between Rats, Mice, Sparrows, Squirrels, Toads, Roaches, and Lizards.

These vermin are a bit different from the ones you and I know--they have human level intelligence, and tool-making ability. That said, they're smart enough not to let humans (the biggest enemy of all) find out about all this. (Hmm... adventure hook already.)

*Vermin* was written so that it is a stand-alone game, but can fit into any fantasy city (or modern city, if you can accept that animals have secret mystical powers). It might actually be interesting to run it and not specify, seeing how long it takes your characters to see the difference between Lankmar and New York City from the ground level. It can be used for a stand-alone campaign, or an interesting diversion for players to get a new perspective on your existing campaign.

It uses the basic and expert Microlite20 rules. I hope you enjoy it--and find out exactly high dirt gets in the street when you're only two inches tall.

## Stats

There are 3 stats : Strength (STR), Dexterity (DEX) and Mind (MIND).

Roll 4d6, drop lowest dice. Total remaining 3 dice and allocate to one of the stats. Repeat for remaining stats.

Stat bonus = (STAT-10)/2, round down.

## Skills

There are just 5 skills : Physical, Subterfuge, Knowledge, Communication and Survival. Roll higher than the given Difficulty Class to succeed.

Skill rank = your level + any bonus due to your class or race.

Skill roll = d20 + skill rank + whatever stat bonus is most applicable to the use + situation modifiers

For example, Climbing would use Physical + STR bonus. Dodging a falling rock is Physical + DEX bonus. Finding a trap is Subterfuge + MIND bonus. Disabling a trap is Subterfuge + DEX bonus.

Note that there are no "saving throws" in this game; use Physical + STR or DEX bonus for Fortitude and Reflex saves. Saving against magic (Will save) is usually MIND bonus + your level.

## Races

Lizard	+2 Dex, -2 Mind
Mouse	+2 Mind, -2 Str
Rat	+3 Str, -1 Comm
Roach	+2 all skill rolls
Sparrow	+2 Comm, -2 Str
Squirrel	+2 Know, -2 Mind
Toad	+2 Str, -2 Dex

## Lizards

More alien than any other vermin, lizards are the sole reptiles not reviled by the rest of the vermin. Still, their reptile heritage puts them at a disadvantage when trying to relate to their warm-blooded associates.

**Personality:** Lizards' slick reptile brains put them at a disadvantage comparing smarts to mammals. Still, they have a long racial memory, and know their way around the cities. While wary

of others, they are loyal to a fault to the few friends they make, and are usually regarded as good, if dense, creatures.

**Relations:** Lizards get along with most anyone, although they tend to be a bit standoffish at first. Their long memories do not let them forget rat abuses, though, and they usually take a while to warm up to the large rodents. Lizards, like their tremendous brethren, the dragons, usually build a small lair that they let few into, where they hoard their possessions. (This lair also gives them a place to rest during the cold night hours.)

**Names:** Lizards take alien names with many consonants. K'kyrra, Monomonomo, and Ssssh are all good lizard names.

### LIZARD RACIAL TRAITS

- +2 Dex, -2 Mind
- Base speed of 40 inches. Lizards are some fast-moving folk during the day.
- Cold-blooded: In any chilly situation, including most nights, lizards become lethargic, garnering a -2 to all actions, including combat, and slowly to a base speed of 20 inches. Lizards may make a burst of speed, eliminating all negative modifiers and moving at full speed, for one round by making a Fortitude save vs a DC of 15 (or higher for very cold environments). This can only be done (level) number of times per day.
- Regenerating tail: Whenever a lizard is caught by the tail, he can let his tail break, allowing him to escape. This causes only one point of damage to the lizard, and his tail will grow back over the span of a week.
- Natural weapons: Bite--1d4 damage, claws--1d3/1d3 damage.

## Mice

Tiny, quick, and everywhere, mice have the advantage of numbers. Their strong little hearts and a huge number of ancestors gives them spiritual strength and the ability to persevere anywhere.

**Personality:** Mice are friendly little vermin,

although a bit high-strung and worrisome. They avoid danger, and cling to each other in numbers for protection. Mice judge another mice by inner strength, which is often shown by unusual physical features--an all-white or all-black coat, albinism, a withered limb, or unusually colored eyes. They can trace back their huge ancestry easily, and tend to associate a mouse with the ancestors he physically resembles.

**Relations:** Mice get along with almost anybody, although they cling to their larger brethren, the rats, for protection. They judge vermin by their individual traits, as opposed making generalities based on racial characteristics.

**Names:** Mice have a myriad of names, which change all over the world, often being a variation on local human names. They tend to name themselves after ancestors they resemble, and are usually thought of as the embodiment of that person, a concept hard for other vermin to understand. Examples: Pred, Nob, Yohn, Macques, Naylor.

### MOUSE RACIAL TRAITS

- +2 Mind, -2 Str
- Small: +1 to attack, +1 to AC, +4 to Hide. However, they can only use Small weapons, and can only carry 2/3 of what a normal-sized vermin can carry.
- Base speed of 20 inches.
- Racial skills: At character creation, choose 1 point to put into one skill, this is in addition to the bonus for the mouse's class. This skill is inherited from an ancestor.
- Natural weapons: Bite--1d3 damage, Claws--1d2/1d2 damage.

## Rats

Big, nasty, and pervasive, rats are the born rulers of the vermin kingdom. Known for their brawn and bite more than for their charm, rats stalk the night, taking what they want from human pantries, garbage heaps, and bedrooms.

**Personality:** Rats tend to be short-tempered and mean. Gluttonous, they take the spoils of any find and gorge themselves on rubbish. Still,

individual rats take on a group of vermin they protect as "their gang." (Whether or not the rat actually is the leader of the gang is irrelevant--they think they do.) Rats tend to be bullies, and although they often have a kinder side, they are loathe to show it, and get snappish with anyone who would point it out.

**Relations:** Rats get along well with their smaller kin, mice, living in a symbiotic relationship with them--mice are good scouts and good diplomats, while rats can give them protection. They often hold the flighty sparrows in disdain, especially for their closeness with men. Rats that try to get along with other vermin often make a display of their greatness or of their wealth, trying to ply friends with gifts or protection.

**Names:** Rats take guttural names, often with a suffix to denote one of their attributes.

Examples: Rukk the Wide, Tuk the Tricky, Koff the Infectious.

### RAT RACIAL TRAITS

- +3 Strength, -2 Comm
- Base speed is 30 inches.
- Darkvision: Rats' red eyes let them see in the dark up to 60 inches. They can function well with no light.
- Infectious bite: Rats' bite usually carries virulent strains of nastiness. Anyone bitten by a rat must make a Fortitude check of 5 + the level of the rat + points of damage caused by the bite. If this check is failed, the wound will become inflamed, and cannot be healed normally, or through standard magical healing. *Remove disease* or *heal* must be cast in order to stop the disease. Each day the wound persists, the victim must make another Fortitude check--if failed, the victim loses one point of Strength and Constitution. If either of these scores reaches zero, the victim dies. (Three successful checks in a row means that the infection has been defeated by the victim's immune system. Strength and Constitution are regained at the rate of one point per day.)
- Natural weapons: Bite--1d6 damage,

Claws--1d4/1d4 damage, Tail--1d3 subdual damage.

- Skill bonus: Rats receive a +4 to Intimidation checks.

## Roaches

Roaches, the ultimate survivors, have an even bigger advantage in numbers than mice. Unlike mice, though, who derive strength from their ancestry, the clannish nature of roaches make them virtual copies of each other. The roach that breaks away from his brothers to become an individual is rare, and generally thought poorly of by other roaches.

**Personality:** Roaches are generally insular around other vermin, and follow strict social guidelines, doing nothing that all other roaches will not do with them. That said--some roaches strike out for an individual life, but are reviled by their brethren. Roaches do not have a hierarchal social structure, though--their short lifespans do not allow for it. All roaches within a caste are equal, and consider themselves brothers, subordinate only to their queen.

**Relations:** As above, roaches do not get along particularly well with any other vermin--but they don't get along particularly poorly, either. They are indifferent, except toward the sparrows, who they have a bit of a problem with (something about dinner once.) The vermin roaches most dislike are individual roaches.

**Names:** Roaches do not have names. They have their own names for the different roles they play, which all roaches in that caste are called by: Brute/Protector-- *Thrak*, Sneak-- *Waka*, Mystic-- *Boko*, Storyteller-- *Taka*, and Trickster (which are rare among roaches)-- *Hele*. Roaches that strike it out on their own often take the names of other vermin, or get nicknames such as Shellback, Rocky, or Bobo.

### ROACH RACIAL TRAITS

- Base speed is 20 inches.
- Small: +1 to attack, +1 to AC, +4 to Hide. However, they can only use Small weapons.
- Roaches have the unusual ability to carry

twice the amount as a normal vermin on their shell.

- Antennae vision: While roaches can see normally with their eyes, they also are very sensitive to vibration, and can move around and fight with no penalty in the dark or against invisible creatures.. This vision extends out 30 inches, so they can still be surprised by something leaping from a distance.
- Shell: Roaches' tough exo-skeleton give them a +2 to their Armor Class.
- Skill bonus: +3 to Climb checks.
- Save bonus: +2 to resist poisons.
- Save penalty: Because of roaches' general lack of identity, they have a hard time keeping a strong self-image. Whenever a roach has to save against in order to keep his self-identity, or has to save versus an Trick or Mystic power affecting the mind, he has a -2. This should be enhanced in role-play as well.
- Natural weapons: 1d3 bite.

## Sparrows

The flighty sparrows are the only vermin that can take to the skies of the city, giving them a perspective not from the feet of men, but from far above their heads, where they look no more like giants, but like insects. Sparrows see everything through this same sort of vision: they see nothing as of much importance on its own, but see the stories that things weave as a whole. This makes other vermin think of them as simple and flighty. They are flighty, interrupting conversations, ignoring complaints, and generally--well, flying around, but simple they aren't.

**Personality:** The most important thing to sparrows is that the world is much smaller than it looks to the vermin on the ground. Anything that seems really important probably isn't, and anything that seems like a huge danger is nothing to worry about. Even humans--the biggest danger of all--look small from above, and, plus, you can poop on them.

**Relations:** Sparrows get along with anyone,

although roaches and rats sometimes don't reciprocate those feelings. They enjoy a good joke that flies over lizards' heads, and are best friends with mice, whose tendency to worry amuses the sparrows. They respect squirrels greatly, the only vermin that ever manage to get a trick over on them.

**Names:** Sparrows usually take nature-based names, such as Needle-beak, Grey-feather, and Sky-leaf. The fiercest sparrow of all time was known as Roach-scourge, and the roaches still have a hard time with this.

### SPARROW RACIAL TRAITS

- +2 Comm, -2 Str. Sparrows' hollow bones break quite easily.
- Base speed on the ground is only 15 inches, but sparrows can fly faster than a man can walk (very fast.) Sparrows are awkward walking.
- No hands: Sparrows have no front paws. Therefore, they cannot do many of the things other vermin can, especially use weapons (although they can get pretty inventive with their beak and claws, dropping things, and carrying a sharp stick while flying to poke things with.)
- Natural weapons: 1d4 damage beak, 1d3 damage claws.
- Natural weapon: wings. Wings can be used to buffet a foe, flapping them all around his head. This does only 1 point of subdual damage, but if the victim is successfully "hit" with this attack, he must save vs. a DC of 10 + 1d6 + Strength bonus or be stunned for the next round.

## Squirrels

Squirrels, pranksters and clowns all, live more in the treetops and parks of the city than in the streets. Although they disdain the practice of trash-diving for food (they prefer acorns and fallen scraps in the park), they get along well with their fellow vermin--as long as they're playing pranks.

**Personality:** Squirrels are jokers. They jump

from tree to tree, carefree of danger, throw acorns at serious rats, steal bread from lazy-eyed humans, and get in elaborate high-flying punching matches with each other. They're the swashbucklers of the vermin, and a bit loopy. Danger never fazes a squirrel--at least not that he'd let on.

**Relations:** Squirrels think they get along with everyone, although it's not always the case. They're regarded as not just a bit unreliable, prankish, and prone to theft. Still--they can make loyal friends, and only a vermin who takes himself too seriously (like most rats) has a real problem with them--although they usually keep an eye open when a squirrel's around.

**Names:** Squirrels take nonsense names, with a little tree-ness thrown in for flavor. Examples include Boboak, Nutkin, Pinehead, Smokey, and Cholono.

### SQUIRREL RACIAL TRAITS

- +2 Know, -2 Mind
- Base speed is 40 inches.
- Skill bonus: Squirrels receive a +5 to Climb checks and a +2 to Jump checks.
- Tail: Squirrels also receive a +3 to Balance because of their tail, and can use it to swing from tree limbs.
- Bipedal: While squirrels scurry along on four feet often, they have no problem standing on two feet. Their front paws are prehensile, and they can use weapons without the normal -2 modifier
- Natural weapons: 1d4 damage bite, 1d4 subdual damage punch.

## Toads

Making their way in the urban swamp, toads are looked up to by all vermin. Rats respect their size and strength, mice see their numbers, sparrows like the fact that they don't seem to worry, and squirrels think that tongue thing is just funny.

**Personality:** Steadfast and somewhat slow to answer, toads are the kind uncles of the vermin kingdom. They're not stupid, but quiet and patient. They're not all serious, though--the dry

wit and one-line remarks of a toad humorist can beat all.

**Relations:** Toads are outsiders, used to a more wet atmosphere than most of the city, and are somewhat out of place among all the mammals. They usually do nothing to cause bad relations, though, and generally get along with all the vermin.

**Names:** Toad names vary, but usually have some reference to water, ponds, or bugs in them. Bugstick, Scumrod, and Soupeyes are all good examples.

### TOAD RACIAL TRAITS

- +2 Str, -2 Dex. Although they have strong legs, toads are not as agile on land as many other vermin.
- Base speed is 30 inches.
- Skill bonuses: +5 to Swim, +5 to Jump checks.

## Classes of Vermin

**Brute:** A vermin who lives on his combat ability and intimidation alone. **Brutes** wear any kind of armour and use shields. They have a +3 bonus to Physical and add +1 to all attack and damage rolls.

This increases by +1 at 5<sup>th</sup> level and every five levels on

**Mystic:** In touch with their spiritual side, mystics are able to use Gifts for healing, protection and divination. **Mystics** can cast divine spells (gifts) and gain +3 bonus to Communication.

**Protector:** Guardians of other vermin and their camps, these able fighters are also excellent hunters. **Protectors** are +1 to hit and damage with ranged weapons and only incur a -1 to hit penalty when fighting with 2 weapons. They have a +3 bonus to Survival.

**Sneak:** Sneaks are just what they sound like--vermin who are good at not being seen. They also make excellent scouts. **Sneaks** have a +3 bonus to Subterfuge. If they successfully Sneak (usually sub+DEX, but depends on situation) up on a foe they can add their Subterfuge skill rank to the damage of their first attack.

**Storyteller:** Storytellers keep the history of the vermin kingdom, and can usually get by on the

virtue of their anecdotes alone. **Storytellers** gain a +2 bonus to Communication, Subterfuge, and Knowledge. A storyteller can counter sound-based effects within a 30' radius. A storyteller can use his song to charm person or remove fear up to 3 times (total) per day. Beginning at 6th level, a storyteller casts spells as either a Druid or Illusionist (player's choice, from the M20 expert rules ) of 5 levels lower.

**Trickster:** The trickster uses supernatural Tricks to play jokes, win food, and help/annoy others. **Tricksters** can cast arcane spells, and gain a +3 bonus to Knowledge

## Equipment

Truth be told, the majority of creatures in the vermin kingdom use no more equipment than their own claws, and maybe a rock sometimes to bash open something. Quite a few vermin, though, have learned the skills to craft tools.

It is forbidden for a vermin to use a tool or weapon in the sight of a human--if humans were to know they had learned the secrets of tool use, extermination would be quick and devastating. A vermin caught doing this, more often than not, ends up dead, drowned in the river or chewed up in a back alley. The worst sin in the vermin kingdom is to endanger the vermin kingdom, and justice is severe.

### Materials

The majority of tools and weapons are made from wood, as it is soft and easy to carve, even with tooth and claw; rock, as it is plentiful and easily sharpened; and bone, as it is hard, yet easy to shape. Metal-working is incredibly rare--only one bellows is rumored to have been ever made in the vermin kingdom. Metal items fetch much in barter, and anyone who owns a metal object made by vermin is a wealthy vermin indeed.

Leather is another oft-used material--vermin let few things go to waste when one of them dies, and bone and leather are plentiful from the recycling of the dead. Leather is used for shelters, and, very rarely, belts, vests, scabbards, and the like. Vermin are loathe to wear such human-esque trappings, as it is unnatural, and increases the danger of being

caught.

### **Weapons**

The most common weapons made are, by far, spears. It is easy to find a solid stick of wood and attach a sliver of bone or rock to it.

Sharpened sticks, much like javelins, are also often made. It is much more rare to ever see a dagger or sword, and even rarer to see a metal-crafted one. A few bows have been seen in the hands of the fiercest warriors, but the bipedal nature of most vermin makes these difficult to use.

Weapons use the same statistics as they have in the M20 weapon list. However, bone weapons in general and rock piercing weapons take a -1 to damage (minimum 1 point.) All-wood weapons are -2 to damage (minimum 1 point.)

## Monsters of Vermin

Choose an appropriate (scale) monster from the M20 monster list to fit the situation and add any applicable special attacks and abilities. For example:

dog = M20 wyvern with no sting attack.

## Adventure ideas

I have purposefully done two things in *Vermin* to (possibly) help you out: left the setting very sketchy, and dropped plot hints all over the place. Here's what comes to mind for me, but I suggest, and hope, you come up with your own unique adventures:

- The Vermin King (or possibly the Vermin Boss for your block) has fallen ill. An old sparrow storyteller swears that it's human poison and that he knows a dusty old building where an antidote could be found--but it's inhabited by an old warlock and his cat--can you make it in and out, and figure out what in the world it is that you need?
- It's war in the streets as the Roaches finally split into two factions. They both want your favor, but the vermin are split among turf and racial lines. How will your (race-mixed) party fall?

- A legendary Toad assassin has gotten possession of twin metal curved swords, rumored to be magical, and is taking down vermin for the highest bidder. Unfortunately, the highest bidder's a giant water moccasin snake, and on top of that, word on the streets is that he was sighted by a human.
- A member of your party was stealing trash outside a window the other night when he heard cries. Climbing up onto a windowsill, he saw a wicked, wicked man beating a smaller man, probably one of his brood. It's human business--but it's wrong. What will you do? How can you stop a huge man, you worthless nothings? The main thing to remember is that the crap gets awfully high real quick when you're 4 inches tall. Keep your players busy and keep them digging their way out. Have fun, and feel free to send any comments!

## AFTERWORD

This setting is not mine, I just converted it from the original documents at:

<http://files.crngames.com/cc/vermin/vermin.html>

I couldn't find any names on the ste to credit, but I didn't want to take more credit than was my due.

HAVE FUN!!!  
---copycat042