

A Rodent Problem

A new take on the classic first adventure

Introduction: Ah, yes. The town has a problem with rats that are larger than usual coming out of the sewers, attacking people, and causing damage to shops. Any brave soul who is willing to go into the sewers to take the rats out will be grouped together with other honest adventurers and given a key to the iron grates that bar entry to the city sewers.

Killing rats as a first adventure is so cliché, it could be fun!

This adventure is designed to be run with just the basic rules that can be downloaded from the official D&D website. Of course, any additional books that you own will only increase your enjoyment of this adventure.

A 1 to 2-hour adventure for 1st level characters

by Jasen Bacon



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The Rats Invade

—the lean, filthy, ravenous army which had swept all before it and devoured fowl, cats, dogs, hogs, sheep, and even two hapless human beings before its fury was spent.

—H.P. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls"

Answering the Call

"Something must be done. The rats are coming in numbers larger than any seen before. Yes, there has been unusual rains this year, but that should not cause the vermin to spawn like this." Ordeleus, Captain of the Watch

After the bodies of a few young children were found with rats feasting upon them, the town of Oakwood has decided that it is time to escalate the situation. A meeting was held, funds were allotted, and signs were posted calling for anybody foolish or hardy enough to enter the sewers.

The characters decide to answer that call for a little extra money. Since this is an introductory adventure, it does not matter if the characters have met, or if they meet for the first time in the Halls of the Watch.

The characters have all read the signs promising a reward of a silver piece for each rat head brought out of the sewers and decided that a little extra money never hurts. So they each find their way to the Halls of the Watch, an imposing stone structure near the north wall of Oakwood, and are led into a meeting room near the entrance to wait.

Let the characters role play their initial encounters if they have not previously met, or else try to make them feel like their characters are waiting. Captain Ordeleus is taking his time getting here.

After a while of waiting, a middle aged human male with white hair walks into the room. He is wearing the tabard of the watch, but instead of the usual leather armor underneath a definite clinking of chain mail can be heard. He stands in front of the adventurers and says:

"I'm glad that you have come. I'm sorry to keep you waiting, I was hoping more would arrive. You see, We have already sent people

into the sewers yesterday, but they have not come back out. We have kept a post at the sewer entrance nearest to where the boys were found dead, but the sounds coming from within is breaking even the most hardy of my guard's resolve."

"My guard believe that magic is at work here. The rats have never been a problem like this before. An occasional fireball into the sewer drains is usually enough to keep them from coming out for a while, but that has not worked this time."

"If you find the source of the problem I will reward you greater than what I had advertised. If the problem is natural, I will reward you as promised. One silver per head."

He turns to leave, but upon reaching the door he looks back over his shoulder and adds:

"Guard Alissi will lead you to the entrance and leave you with a key." He then leaves and walks back through the halls. Moments later, a half-elven woman enters in the uniform of the Watch.

"Follow me," she states sharply and quickly turns and walks away. She will not answer any questions other than affirming that she is Alissi. After a short walk, the group comes to the west wall, which they are then lead south until they come to the west gate. Each time they walk over a storm drain in the narrow cobblestone roads a massive chittering can be heard from below.

The party follows Alissi out the west gate and south along the outer wall towards the river until Alissi comes to an abrupt halt. Two of the Watch are standing near the wall on either side of a large iron gate. A stream of nasty smelling raw sewage flows between them. The Watch look nervous.

Alissi reaches into a pouch on her belt and pulls out a heavy, corroded iron key and thrusts it towards the nearest party member.

"This opens each gate in there" she says as she immediately begins to walk away.

The guards are not talkative, but will reveal that a patrol of three Watch went into the gate the day before and have not re-

turned. The guards at the gate are more for the patrol than to keep anybody out. The superstitious people of Oakwood are doing a good job of keeping themselves out.

Into the Hole

As the party approaches the gate, the two members of the Watch appear very solemn, and they obviously pray for the safety of the group, and for a deliverance of the Watch who entered yesterday.

The key opens the lock effortlessly and the party enters into the tunnels. The overall width of the sewer tunnel is about ten feet, but only about three feet of that is flat on the bottom, the rest curves making the tunnel a tube. The flat part of the bottom is flowing with sewage.

The sewer slopes gently upwards for about fifty feet before opening into a large drainage chamber (A). The stone of this chamber is charred from decades of fireballs being hurled into here to control the rodent population. There is a large grate in the ceiling above that in the middle of the town market. Half eaten scraps, rotten meat, trash and other refuse is constantly dropped in here. This chamber is usually the most rodent filled part of the sewer, but no signs of rodents can be seen here now.

There are two locked gates on either side of this chamber. If the characters explore both before continuing then they will notice that the gate to the west has a key in it on the other side. There is a hand still holding this key, but it has been skeletonized from the wrist down. The rest of the body cannot be seen from the gate, but nonetheless the party's key cannot be inserted into this one. If the party attempts to pick the lock they will find that the key is wedged hard in the opening and the door is effectively impassable.

If the party only goes towards one gate for some reason, have the hand be at the gate they choose and then they must go to the other one.

When they get to a gate they can enter their key works effortlessly and opens into another upwardly sloping tunnel just like the entrance tunnel. After about twenty feet rats can be seen running away from the party. After about thirty feet sounds of chattering can be heard. These sounds only

become louder until they emerge in chamber B.

The light is filtering down from the street above, softly illuminating the horde of rats that are gathered near the tunnel on the south side of the room. The rats squirm and scuttle near the entrance before they rush forth and attack.

The party must defeat the Swarm of Rats before they can advance. The rules for the Swarm can be found on page 46 of the *Dungeon Master's Basic Rules*, and on page 339 of the *Monster Manual*.

Once the swarm is defeated, the parties can collect the heads for the bounty. If all of the heads are collected they will be worth a total of 2d4 gold.

From here the tunnels continue south. When they reach the next collection chamber (C) they see three huge rats gnashing at the gate. These rats are too large to fit between the bars, but if the party tries to attack the giant rats without entering the room they will retreat through the open gate on the other side.

There are three giant rats in this chamber. The rules for the giant rats can be found on page 27 of the *DM Basic Rules*, or on page 327 of the *Monster Manual*. The party can collect the heads of these, and when shown to the Watch they will pay five gold per head.

After clearing chamber C, the players have a choice. They can continue down the path to the other chamber C which can then be followed down to the other chamber B, or they can go down a southern tunnel towards Chamber D.

Each chamber that the party enters will have an identical monster group as the other chamber they have cleared with the same letter, so C has three giant rats and B has a Swarm.

The chamber B they could not access before has the remains of the two members of the Watch that were lost. Both have been heavily eaten by rats and most of their flesh, not to mention their clothing and armor, has been gnawed and destroyed. It looks as if someone drug the Watchman who was trying to open the stuck gate back to this chamber. Each Watch member's spear and shield are still usable, but the Watch will expect

their return after the party exits the Dungeon.

When the party approaches chamber D (either one as they are both identically stocked) they hear the loud chattering similar to that heard in chamber B. When they get close enough to see in the chamber they see another Swarm of Rats, but this one is accompanied by a Giant Rat. The giant rat cannot make it through the gate, but if attacked the Swarm will pour through the iron bars. While the swarm is attacking, the Giant Rat will move to the other chamber D. It will get there in two turns, and after it arrives the Swarm of Rats in that chamber will begin to move towards the party. It will arrive after two more turns, possibly before the party has finished with the first Swarm. Make sure to keep track to see where the swarm is while the party is fighting.

After both swarms are defeated the party can either move to the other chamber D to attack the two Giant Rats, or investigate the final tunnel towards chamber E.

When the party decides to investigate the final gate, have them make a perception check. If any player succeeds they will hear the sounds of stone scraping and light conversation. They cannot make anything out that is being said, yet.

If they can approach while sneaking they will see four humans working on a wall behind a small build up of debris that is keeping the flow of water from the grate above from coming near their door. They will be discussing how to lay the blocks to make a secret door.

If the party has a combat in the hallway, or if they approach without stealth then the humans will be alerted to their presence and be ready for them. In either of these cases, one of the humans will run down the path they have carved through the wall and warn the rest of the cult in the Shrine areas.

Two of the three that stay to fight, and they will fight every time in an attempt to defend their cult, will have the stats of a Guard (page 54 in the DM Basic or page 347 of the Monster Manual), while the other two, including the one who runs to warn the others, will have the stats of a Cultist (54 or 345).

If the party can somehow ambush and defeat all four before one can run then they have a

chance to ambush the cult on their home turf. If the one cultist is able to run and warn the others then the cult will be prepared for the party.

At this point, it is obvious that there is more than a rat problem in the sewers and the party can either return to the entrance with the rat heads they have collected and let the Watch take care of the humans they have found here, or they can do as most adventurers do and descend into the Rat's Nest.

If the party decides that they are done, then skip to the section titled *Out of the Sewers*.

Into the Rat's Nest

The hole that the men were working on leads down a rough cut staircase. The path is about five feet wide and nearly thirty feet long. The steps are each a couple of feet wide and very shallow, giving the impression that it does not go down very deep. There is a lot of light coming through the opening on the other end.

Two guards are in the room the stairs come out in (room F). If the cult knows the party is coming then the Guards will be ready and throw their spears at the first member of the party to emerge. If they don't know the party is coming then they will attack in hand to hand as soon as the party exits the stairs. If the party wins and decides to search the bodies they will find 2d6 gold on each, in addition to their shields, spears and chain shirts.

Even if the cult didn't know the party was coming before, the sounds of combat will definitely alert the group in the Shrine Room (room G). The center of this room has a large marble shrine carved with multiple images of rats. On top of the shrine is a large collection of rodent skulls, and a few humanoid ones as well. Standing behind the shrine is a large Thug (55 in the DM Basic, or 350 in the Monster Manual) surrounded by a Swarm of Rats. The Thug will already have his crossbow ready, as he would have heard the fight in the stairs room (F).

The Shrine is Cleansed

After the defeat of the Thug and his Swarm of Rats the party can search the Shrine. The Thug has his crossbow, mace and leather armor. In addition he has a pouch with 25 gold

pieces and a silver ring with a rat head inlaid (value 10gp).

If one of the cultists from the first group in room E ran away, then after the party is done searching and looting, have them make a perception check. If they pass they realize that that particular cultist was not one of the people they fought in the shrine. This should make them think that there is either a secret door, or the cultist could teleport. Of course the answer is the secret door.

If the party is successful in finding the secret door, they will enter the final chamber (H) and see the cultist that got away speaking with three other humans. If they sneak in they will hear the cultist describing the party finding the lair to the oldest human, who is shaking his head and looking worried.

As soon as the party is noticed, or attacks, the oldest man will run to the southwest corner and try to climb the ladder to the trap door in the ceiling. The other three Cultists will pull their scimitars and try to fight the party so their leader can escape. If the party can somehow stop the leader from escaping then he will fight with the stats of an Acolyte (page 53 in the DM Basic or 342 of the Monster Manual). If he escapes then the party will find the trap door held firmly shut and unable to be forced from this side (it would have been locked and a stone table would have been moved on top of it).

The cultists all have their scimitars, leather armor and five gold that the party can loot. If they somehow can stop the acolyte and defeat him then he is carrying 100 gold and is wearing an amulet under his shirt. This amulet is the Amulet of Rodent Command.

Out of the Sewers

Once the party has descended as far as they can and slain (and looted) as much as possible they return to the entrance where the two members of the Watch that saw them enter will lead them back to the Halls of the Watch.

There, Ordeleus and Alissi will ask the party about their trials. Alissi is a fifth level Cleric of Tyr and will use her divine magic to judge the validity of all that the party tells them. If you have access to the

Player's Handbook then Alissi uses the Zone of Truth spell on the party.

If the party is able to defeat the Acolyte without his running away then Ordeleus will know that the Acolyte was named Reskas, and he owned a tavern named The Laughing Skull. The trapdoor in chamber H leads to the storeroom of The Laughing Skull. After talking about Reskas, Ordeleus will ask for the Amulet of Rat Command. If the party gives it up, then they will get an extra reward. If the party wants to keep the item then they will be politely asked to leave town and not return.

Rewards

Calculate the XP from everything they have killed so far and divide it amongst the members of the party.

The party gains 2d4 gold for each Swarm they have defeated and 10 gold for each Giant Rat. If they find and return the weapons and shield of the fallen Watch they will gain an additional reward of 5 gold each.

Each member of the cult that the party defeats has their possible loot in their description.

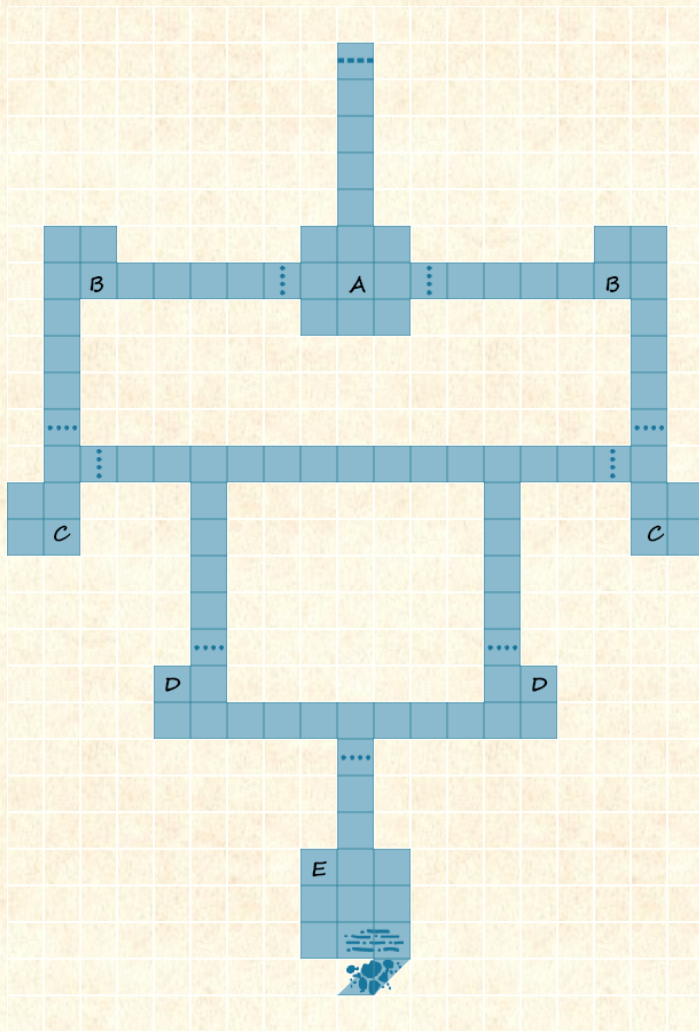
If they stop the Acolyte and return the Amulet of Rat Command to the Watch then they will each be given one month of Modest Lifestyle in the tavern which Reskas owned and operated (a value of 30 gold) while the tavern is confiscated by the watch and in the process of being sold.

Amulet of Rat Command

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

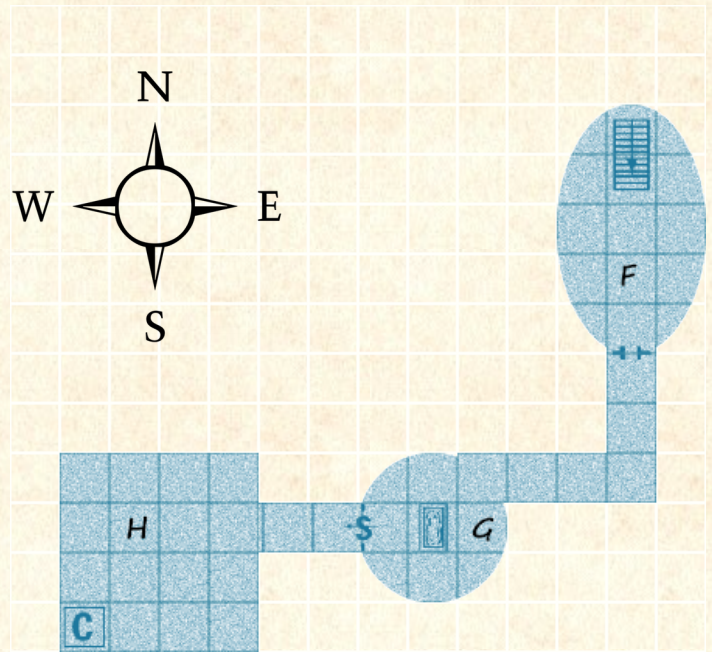
This amulet has 3 charges and recharges 1d3 charges each night at midnight. The bearer of this amulet can use a charge to call rats from the surrounding area and cause them to fight as a Swarm of Rats obedient to the amulet controller.

1 square equals ten feet



Map Key:

A: Blast room
B-D: Drain rooms
E: Terminus



Map Key:

F: Entrance room
G: Shrine room
H: Secret cult meeting hall.