

— SKAVEN AS PCs —

There are few more intimidating options than allowing your players to run free as Skaven. But what does such a course of action involve? What are the potential stumbling blocks, as well as the obvious rewards, of a player group that consists entirely of Skaven characters?

The loathsome Ratmen are not Humans in rodent costumes, nor should they be portrayed as such. They are a distinct species, with motivations born of centuries of violence, brutality, scheming, and intrigue. Though there are similarities, Skaven behaviour and Human behaviour are vastly different. There are, of course, exceptions, wherein humans might sometimes behave like Skaven, and where Skaven may occasionally show emotions and motivations that are similar to those exhibited by Humans.

SKAVEN PLAYER GROUPS

The most obvious problem with a group of Skaven is that the Ratmen value survival above all other considerations. The cost is never too high to pay. “Better them than I,” he might think, as he turns his hairless tail to the enemy and flees into the gloom of the Under-Empire, the pained squeaks and horrified chittering of his former allies ringing ever more dimly in his ears. This means that a GM’s carefully planned and challenging encounter might never be used, because the players run as soon as things seem mildly frightening.

Besides being cowardly and disloyal, Skaven are also prone to in-fighting. Such conflict provides the Skaven with a way to establish a natural pecking order within their group. Stronger Skaven are respected, feared, and envied, while weaker ones are bullied and abused by their superiors. Not all players will find this manner of interaction to be entertaining, and it can easily detract from the focus of a campaign. Though it may be a welcome change from the usual scenario, it can get tedious unless your players come to some kind of arrangement.

Obviously, then, it can be difficult to form a cohesive group of Skaven player characters. Some manner of loyalty, even if it is based solely on convenience, needs to be instilled in the group as a whole. Prior to playing, it might be necessary to discuss the ramifications of the game with the players, and ask them to work out their motivations and desires as a group. In this manner, there will be fewer surprises that might disrupt things later on.

Other ideas for creating a cohesive Skaven party are discussed below. Two or more of these suggestions can be incorporated at the same time, giving the players multiple reasons to work together.

BIRTHKIN

Though Skaven are born in large litters, they receive little succour from their birth mothers or from their birthkin. Torn from the teat of the bloated breeder, castrated males take them to special nurseries, where they receive food, water, and scraps of clothing, though never enough for everyone. The masters expect

the young to fight over the resources to weed out the runts and the weak so that only the strong survive. During this time, a strong pecking order emerges, with one or two Skaven becoming the dominant in the group—but if given an opportunity, their birthkin are quick to replace these alpha Ratmen.

This same sensibility stays with Skaven their entire lives. When assembled into a group, you should expect some posturing, aggression, and maybe even a few deaths as the more powerful character emerges to the fore. Encourage this behaviour, but remind the players that the Skaven, while individually believing they are the greatest in the world, recognise the need for others, if only to cast blame in the case of a failure. Fatalities are often lessened by the presence of a Grey Seer or Black Skaven.

CLAN AFFILIATION

To strengthen the bond in a group, have them all be from the same Clan, or at least members of allied Clans. This allows the Skaven to relax their guard—a little—and focus on the mission at hand. Still, the same seeds of treachery present everywhere in the Under-Empire are just as present within the Clan as they are without. And Skaven characters ought to jockey for positions of strength and authority to ensure their place in their unit.

THE STRONG LEADER

One sure-fire way to keep a group of Skaven PCs in line is to give them a single strong leader to either respect or despise. Their leader may charge them to remain loyal to one another,





just as he expects them to be loyal to him, and he may threaten death or other violence in the event that the bonds within the group break down. While fear of their superiors often keeps the Skaven from challenging their authority, it can also foster feelings of disdain. Like-minded Ratmen who have been abused and bullied by their leaders can sometimes pool their resources in order to take command of their own destinies. While these tendencies should be encouraged, especially due to the potential for roleplaying that they provide, they should also be seen as long-term goals. After all, once the strong leader has been dispatched, the Skaven players will have no one left to fight but each other.

EVERYONE IS ESSENTIAL

In this scenario, each character has some skill or specialty essential to the group's survival. To lose one or more of these assets means the party is less likely to survive, which also means that Skaven who do not work well together are risking their own lives. The value of each party member needs to be stressed, and this is best accomplished by giving the group obstacles that put their individual talents to good use. Remind them constantly that each character is essential to their overall survival.

POLITICS

If the PCs are all of different Clans, it can be detrimental to inter-clan relationships if they kill or maim one another. The interactions between the Clans are often less than ideal (to say the least), and even minor offences can spark open conflict between them. In order to amend these transgressions, it is easier to sacrifice a single individual...like the one who

betrayed or murdered the other Skaven...than risk warfare. What this means to a group of Skaven is that they risk the ire of their masters by fighting amongst themselves, especially if such quarrels lead to one or more deaths. So long as they are firmly instructed to keep the peace, they are more likely to keep from killing one another.

SKAVEN ADVENTURES

The Skaven see the world around them in shades of black and white. They consider themselves to be the master race, destined by their dark god to inherit the world above them. In the meantime, they are constantly beset by the intrigues and schemes of other Skaven, and must manage to survive their own kin so they can ensure the success of the Great Ascendancy.

THE QUEST FOR STATUS

Status is everything to the Skaven. Each Skaven has elaborate dreams of his own greatness, where he will be lauded by his peers, respected by his enemies, and accorded the power and reputation due by all. Much of the time, these dreams are wild and unrealized. In a world filled with millions of other Ratmen, the odds of any single Skaven rising to such heights are low, indeed.

Skaven who take a chance and adventure of their own accord strive to increase their prestige as a result. Any Skaven, given half a chance to increase his lot in life (whether through honest or underhanded means), will take it. Prestige, after all, is more valuable to a Skaven than gold, treasure, or jewels (though not Warpstone of course). The value of physical rewards lies not in their material worth, but in the temporal power they can bring to their wielder.

In this way, Skaven adventurers are different from their hairless peers. Whilst Humans, Dwarfs, and Elves risk their lives for wealth and fortune, Skaven are uninterested in such things. Rewards of rank and privilege are more likely to turn a Skaven's head than a gold crown or a bejewelled sceptre—that is, unless the items in question will increase the Ratman's odds of securing victory and promotion.

THE QUEST FOR WARPSTONE

If the Skaven have any currency at all, it is Warpstone. Warpstone is everything to the Skaven race. It is incorporated into their magic, their technology, and their lives as no other element is. The Skaven have fought many wars for Warpstone. From battles in the crumbling alleys of Mordheim to the corpse-choked fields of Sylvania, Skaven risk everything for the green-tinged stone.

Unlike other forms of material wealth (gold, silver, jewels and so on), Warpstone is predominant to the Skaven. They will do almost anything to acquire even small amounts of it. The flow of the stuff is one of the primary motivating factors of their entire society. Leaders may send groups on suicidal missions to acquire it, even if its existence in a particular location has not been definitively proven.