

HIDEOUS CREATURES

RAT-THINGS

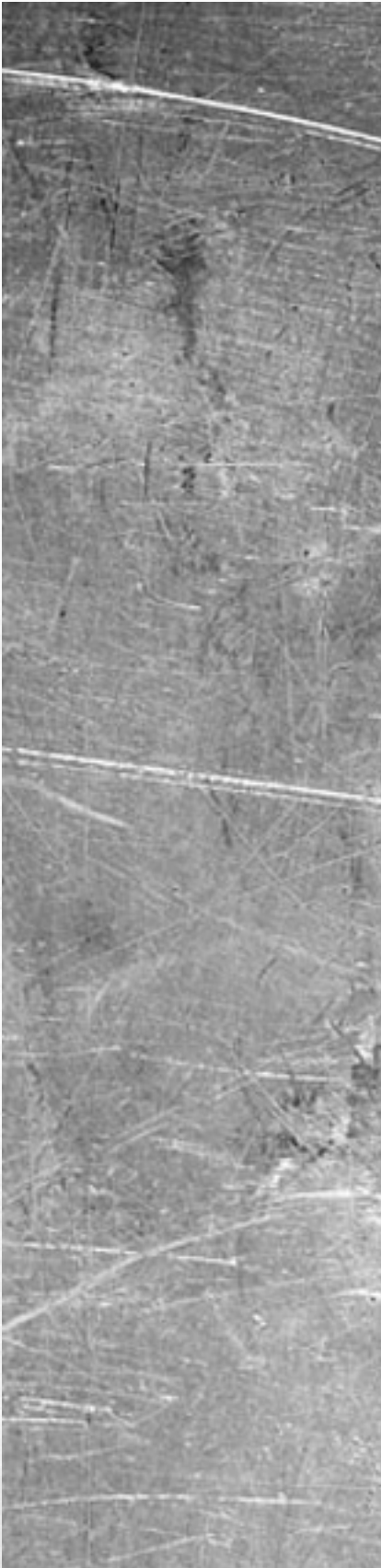
TRAIL OF CTHULHU



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RAT-THINGS

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KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

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Hideous Creatures: Introduction

Lovecraft created his various “shadowy congeners” because the stories of vampires, werewolves, and even ghosts had become too familiar and too formulaic to evoke true horror. Almost a century after he wrote, his own monstrous races have likewise begun to seem like comfortable story furniture rather than unnerving signals that the world is horrible and wrong.

Our goal with this series is to present a comprehensive look at Lovecraft’s hideous creatures, from as many angles as we can. Our goal is contradiction, surprise, and most especially the uncanny: the recognition of something familiar as something weird. As in the “Gods and Titans” section of the *Trail of Cthulhu* core book, this series deliberately contradicts itself, blurring boundaries and erasing certainties in the name of the uncanny. In your campaign, these variant truths might be misunderstandings, legends, heresies, or deliberate lies spread by the creatures to lull their foes into a false sense of familiarity.

Change anything and everything in these pages, most especially the ability scores. If you need a terrifying assassin, a brief but survivable fright, or a sanity-shattering horror, just add or subtract points at will.

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Rat-Things

“WITNESSES SAID IT HAD LONG HAIR AND THE SHAPE OF A RAT, BUT THAT ITS SHARP-TOOTHED, BEARDED FACE WAS EVILLY HUMAN WHILE ITS PAWS WERE LIKE TINY HUMAN HANDS.”

Rat-things resemble ordinary rats, and are easily mistaken for them at a distance. Their heads are nonetheless evil caricatures of human heads, and their paws are like tiny human hands. They have extremely strong, sharp teeth, canines grown forward to resemble incisors. They nuzzle and nurse on human blood from their witch companions or from convenient sleepers. Though they do not die naturally, they are now very rare. Attacking rat-things climb the legs or clothes of human opponents, or drop down from ceilings, or climb plumbing into their delicate areas at delicate moments, or tunnel up from the insides of their chests.

Frankly, the regular description of the rat-thing is horrid enough, or more than horrid enough. Combining the oily menace of the city rat with the malign features of a serial killer or sex criminal should provide nightmares for any players who glimpse the thing, much less see it grinning over their waking form, teeth and beard matted with their blood.

But you can change the rat-thing up with features from other “familiar spirits” from English and Scottish witch-lore:

- Toad-thing (bloated gluttonous warty face)
- Pullet-thing (staring mad idiot human face, razor-sharp talons)
- Cat-thing (horribly seductive or sadistic expression, fangs)

- Dog-thing (only looks human from head-on; from the side looks like a deformed or cancerous dog muzzle)
- Hare-thing (one massive chipping tooth, epileptic twitches)
- Mole-thing (eyeless human face, hands crusted with bloody dirt)
- Blackbird-thing (human eyes in an otherwise birdlike body, human hands folded up under the wings extrude slowly)
- Weasel-thing (savagery plain and simple, much wider mouth than normal)

Many rat-things know spells, either from their human existence or from centuries of association with witches and sorcerers. But the Keeper can fade such concerns into the background, compared with the ubiquity and fluidity of rat-horror. They say you are only seven feet from a rat at any time in a city. Rats outnumber people, often by five or eight to one. They use our streets, our sewers, our subways, our graveyards, our entire cities as their nests. Rats can chew through concrete, climb sheer metal, cross between houses on telephone lines, learn to avoid traps, slip into rooms while you sleep, poison food or water with diseased urine, destroy pets and children, drive the weak mad and carry rabies to destroy the strong.

And that’s all before they get 300-year-old sorcerers attached to them.

- “THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH-HOUSE”

Rat-Thing

Abilities: Athletics 9, Health 3, Scuffling 7

Magic: A rat-thing might have a Magic rating as low as 3 or 4, or more likely one in the double digits like the human wizard he once was. All rat-things know at least two other spells in addition to Contact Nyarlathotep and Contact Rat-Thing. The canonical rat-thing spell is Create Hyperspace Gate.

Hit Threshold: 6 (small and incredibly nimble)

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: -2 (bite); drained Health lost to rat-thing bite refreshes its own Health (up to 6).

Armor: None

Stability Loss: +0; +1 if the rat-thing was known to (or ancestral to) the witness when alive

Canonical Rat-Thing

Abilities

In addition to his ability to navigate hyperspace gates, Brown Jenkin shows both these powers in “Dreams in the Witch-House.”

Dream Initiation: The rat-thing can place the target in a dream state, during which it can bring her through a Gate, into another world or plane, and even carry out other magical ceremonies together and drain blood from her. This requires a Magic ability roll from the rat-thing (minimum spend of 2 Magic); the sleeper resists with a Stability roll

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with a Difficulty equal to the total of the rat-thing's roll and spend. The target can still make separate Stability rolls while in the dream-state to resist major actions such as signing the black book of Azathoth or killing a baby. The rat-thing or its witch can spend Magic to increase the Difficulty of such tests.

Internal Attack: If a target has ever participated in a ceremony with a rat-thing (even involuntarily during a dream) the rat-thing can teleport to the target's insides and chew its way out. Its internal attacks begin at Hit Threshold 0 and increment up by 1 for each attack; the first two attacks each do two instances of bite damage. When it reaches Hit Threshold 2, it emerges from the target's skin and can be attacked in turn – assuming the target has any Stability left. (Being chewed through costs 1 Stability per Health point lost; seeing the rat-thing burst from one's body is a 7-point Stability test.) Truly horrible Keepers can allow the rat-thing to target anyone it's bitten ... or seen near a Gate ... or smelled.

Possible Rat-Thing

Abilities

However they occur, rat-things are individual beings, not a species per se. They can therefore manifest very individual powers and abilities over and above their personal spell lists or customized hyperspace gates to their favorite planes and planets. Here are some "generic individualisms" you can ascribe to that special rat-thing in your own campaign.

Darkvision: A rat-thing can see into hyperspatial frequencies; they never suffer penalties for darkness, fog, cover, etc.

Diseased Bite: Bitten victims must make a Difficulty 4 Health test or be infected with some loathsome disease. Unless the Keeper has a specific disease

in mind, it onsets in 1-6 hours and affects the victim as if **Hurt**. The malady then begins draining 1 Health point per hour until the victim reaches -6, at which point he requires hospitalization and medical attention.

Dream-Chase: For 2 Magic points, a rat-thing can enter the dreams of its target. From there, it can discern its target's whereabouts, create nightmares (5-point Stability test), rotate the sleeper into hyperspace (as Create Hyperspace Gate) or into the Dreamlands (both 4 Magic points), or even emerge into the dreamer's room through rat-holes, angles in the corner, or patterns in the wallpaper.

Environmental Immunity: Rat-things can travel to all planes and planets; they suffer no ill effects from poison, vacuum, lensed gravity, interstellar cold, or other such hazards.

Hyperspatial Familiarity: Rat-things know the patterns and tangencies of hyperspace very thoroughly, even innately or intuitively. They spend only half the required Magic to Create a Hyperspace Gate. Further, they can find (or cause to be built) spots on Earth (such as non-Euclidean witch-attics) where an interplanar Gate costs them only 2 Magic to build. They can never be lost in hyperspace.

Hypnotism: Some rat-things have the Hypnosis ability (*Trail of Cthulhu*, p. 43) usually at 8+. Rat-thing Hypnosis can work on the unwilling, and includes simple commands ("open the door"); those with witch-cult ancestors take -2 to their Stability roll to resist. Such a rat-thing likely knows the Mind Exchange spell.

Magic Drain: Blood sacrificed to Nyarlathotep (or to the rat-thing's patron, if different), spilled inside a hyperspace pentacle, etc. refreshes the

rat-thing's Magic pool by an amount equal to half the Health lost.

Shapeshifting: For 2 Magic points, a rat-thing can shape-shift into a large rat, a bloated bat, or a remarkably ugly baby or dwarfish human.

Spider Climb: A rat-thing can cling to walls and ceilings made of anything but sheer glass.

VARIATIONS

As with the "Gods and Titans" section in the corebook, this compendium is intentionally self-contradictory. Its facts and theories come from Lovecraft, from later writers, and from the universe of possibilities opened up between them.

- Rat-things are created by malign sorcery from rats fed on human brains, to serve as factotums and servants to the witch-cult.
- Rat-things are sorcerers or witches who chose (or gained) transformation rather than death; they teach their ancient lore to their successors and thus continue to serve Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, or the Unnamable One.
- Ludvig Prinn invented the spell to create (or become, or summon) a rat-thing, which is why they only start appearing in witch trials after 1540.
- Rat-things are an alien species from Nyarlathotep's world orbiting Sharnoth; he seeds them among his cultists across time as spies, messengers, and instructors in hyperspatial physics.
- Rat-things are hybrids born to witches after congress with the Black Man or the Great Goddess.

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- Rat-things have no real existence – they are ghosts or hyperdimensional intruders -- but their presence tends to bloat and distort local rats in sympathetic vibration.
- Jean-Pierre Simon’s engraving “La Cochemare” (1810) depicts a rat-thing.

MYTHIC ECHOES

“OF ALL THE BIZARRE MONSTROSITIES IN GILMAN’S DREAMS, NOTHING FILLED HIM WITH GREATER PANIC AND NAUSEA THAN THIS BLASPHEMOUS AND DIMINUTIVE HYBRID, WHOSE IMAGE FLITTED ACROSS HIS VISION IN A FORM A THOUSANDFOLD MORE HATEFUL THAN ANYTHING HIS WAKING MIND HAD DEDUCED FROM THE ANCIENT RECORDS AND THE MODERN WHISPERS.”

- “THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH-HOUSE”

Lovecraft based Brown Jenkin on the (almost entirely English and Scottish) legend of the witch’s familiar, a demon in the shape of a beast provided to the witch by the devil to instruct her in the dark arts, carry out her malign bidding, and keep an eye on local matters for Lucifer. Brown Jenkin’s vampirism, human voice and features, and unusually large body all appear as familiar tropes in witch-trial testimony and scholarly 16th- and 17th-century works on witchcraft.

For example, in the Salem witch trials, Keziah Mason wasn’t the only witch with a rat-like familiar: Put to the question, Tituba testified that Sarah Osborne harbored “a thing all over hairy, all the face hairy & a long nose & I don’t know how to tell how the face looks with two Leggs, it goeth upright & is about two or three foot high.” Tituba also confessed to

- Rat-things are hermaphroditic avatars of Mormo, the Chosen Children of Mater Tenebrarum.
- Rat-things are personified facets of Nyarlathotep’s consciousness; when they summon the Black Man, they are accessing his deeper knowledge and power. All rat-things are cellular components of the vast alien mind that is Nyarlathotep.
- Rat-things are serpent folk wizards, evolved into this horrid shrew-like form at the dawn of the Age of Mammals and interbred with rats and humans since.

- Rat-things are biological beacons, points for Nyarlathotep or Yog-Sothoth to anchor their unearthly forces and geometries to in our space-time. As they spread, they undermine reality itself.
- Rat-things are vampires, shape-shifted and recruiting witch-cultists to the worship of Mordiggian or Gol-Goroth.
- Rat-things are the material manifestation of an extra-dimensional creature: a kaleidoscopic “smaller polyhedron of unknown colours and rapidly shifting surface angles.”

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seeing “two rats, a red rat and a black rat,” who called on her to “serve me.” Although the familiar spirit proper only appears in the records for a very brief period (from 1565 to c. 1700) it has informed depictions of witchcraft ever since.

The Keeper may wish to insert rat-things into anachronistic witch-covens in the medieval period or provide some explanation of their prevalence during the great witch-hunting era: Did Nyarlathotep send them to support his endangered cult, or perhaps to loot it and carry away those tomes and treasures he didn’t want hunters to find? Other mysterious demons, from other cultures besides the 17th-century British-American, might also refer to rat-things after a few generations of mythic distortion in the telling.

Or, as with the variations and possible powers above, the rat-thing might in fact more closely match its various mythic depictions than it does Lovecraft’s fiction.

Omajinaakoos (Ontario)

According to the Ojibwa Indians the “ugly one” brings bad luck to any who encounter it. The foot-long beast resembles an otter or weasel with the tail of a rat and a hairless, angry face characterized by a long nose and sharp teeth. It cruelly kills other animals, and is sometimes a messenger from angry or evil spirits.

Pairaka (Ancient Persia)

These demonic entities of ancient Mithraic lore resemble fairies; their modern Persian name, *pari*, is suggestive. They are nocturnal spell-casters and enchanters, taking alternately the forms of beautiful women, hideous rat-creatures, and shooting stars. (Witches, rats, and mysterious stars – all components of Gilman’s experience.) They seduce and entrap men with their arts, possibly draining them like succubi.

Umot Perusong (Borneo)

To the Dayak, the *umot* are inhuman spirits (as opposed to ghosts) of fierce mien, covered in reddish hair. They can be heard crunching and skittering beneath the huts and storehouses of the tribe. They can enter even locked rooms, where they devour the supplies of rice. The *umot perusong* appear as transparent *umot* or in the form of rats. Traps are useless; only shamanic magic can hold them at bay.

Viesczy (Kashubia)

The corpse of a witch or sorcerer, the *viesczy* (or *vjesci*) sucks the blood of sleepers by night. One of its trademark attacks is to scrape a hole in the victim’s chest with its barbed tongue. When in its nest, the *viesczy* chews its own clothing and flesh constantly; the sound of mastication can perhaps pinpoint its location. Like many vampires, it is compelled to count seeds, knots, or sand placed before it; this mathematical fascination parallels the hypergeometric preoccupations of the rat-thing.

When killed (usually by fire), the *viesczy* explodes into a swarm of rats – if even one of those rats escapes, the *vjesci* can return to work its magical-vampiric will. Such an escaped remnant rat might be the origin of the rat-things; conversely, the *viesczy* (and perhaps all vampires) could be mythologized versions of the original rat-thing.

The *viesczy* legend comes from Kashubia in northern Poland. In the mid-1800s many Kashubes emigrated to Ontario, Chicago, Milwaukee, and other Great Lakes destinations. They brought their beliefs with them, the *vjesci* very much included.

Yamo (Uganda)

These “airy spirits” (*yamo* means “wind”) in Lango lore take many forms, among them small humanoids (6 to 18 inches tall), toads, and rats. They dwell in close holes (such as

springs and wells) and high places (like hilltops and tall rocks). They primarily serve the spirits of the dead (*tipu*) as messengers, spies, and magical agents; they possess and captivate those marked by the *tipu*. *Yamo* are greedy for food, cloth, and money; they can be trapped in a smooth clay pot by an *adjwaka* adept with the proper chants and music.

INVESTIGATIONS

Keepers should treat this section, and use these elements, even more idiosyncratically.

Clues

Perforce, the clues in this section mostly point to “conventional” rat-things as painted in Lovecraft’s story “The Dreams in the Witch-House.” Feel free to adjust them at will.

Accounting: Looking at their accounts, the Hornby House has paid four or five times what most houses in the neighborhood pay for exterminators and pest control – and they always have it done again in November.

Anthropology: The designs chased in the metal of this chalice are very similar to those found on a bloodstained bowl taken in December 1931 from the wreckage of the old Witch-House in Arkham, which collapsed in a storm the previous March. (Archaeology)

Archaeology: “In brief, the floor was a veritable ossuary of the bones of small children—some fairly modern, but others extending back in infinite gradations to a period so remote that crumbling was almost complete. On this deep bony layer rested a knife of great size, obvious antiquity, and grotesque, ornate, and exotic design—above which the debris was piled.”

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Architecture: The dimensions of the walls and attic don't add up. Which is to say, it almost seems like the attic is larger than the house, but that's impossible. There's probably some sort of large crawlspace behind one of the interior walls.

Art History: This is by the Hungarian painter Tivadar Kosztká Csontváry; the arcing lines and broken perspectives place it in the "expressionist" style he adopted after his schizophrenic break in 1909. In Csontváry's "Old Fisherman" (1902) the devil appears if you hold a mirror to it; I wonder if that blur resolves into anything when mirrored?

Assess Honesty: Margery Gburek is definitely lying – and terrified -- when she says she saw "nothing but a rat" in the hall that night, but we know nobody could have gotten up there. Who is she so scared of, that she would cover for them even when they can't possibly find out?

Astronomy: "A definite point among the stars had a claim on him and was calling him. Apparently it was a point somewhere between Hydra and Argo Navis, and he knew that he had been urged toward it ever since he had awaked soon after dawn. In the morning it had been underfoot, and now it was roughly south but stealing toward the west. What was the meaning of this new thing?"

Biology: The skeleton is obviously that of a huge, diseased rat. That said, the bones of the paws almost seem prehensile, with joints so well developed and used as to have become arthritic. The skull is queerly flattened in front, and distended in the cranial region.

Bureaucracy: You were right! The city's Bureau of Rodent Control has never answered a call from that part of Canaryville in October or April – and

they've gotten plenty, always about rats.

Chemistry: Testing the rat urine from the dead man's clothing revealed high levels of uric acid – a compound that only appears in the urine of humans and higher apes. Must have been some contamination – some *further* contamination -- of the sample. (Biology)

Cop Talk: "Evening papers spoke of a police raid on some curious revellers in a ravine beyond Meadow Hill just before dawn, and mentioned that the white stone there was an object of age-long superstitious regard. Nobody had been caught, but among the scattering fugitives had been glimpsed a huge negro. In another column it was stated that no trace of the missing child Ladislav Wolejko had been found."

Credit Rating (6+): It took promising an endowed scholarship to do it, but you've finally got Professor Upham to give you a copy of Walter Gilman's notes, papers, and research.

Cryptography: After three solid days of work, I've uncovered the key to the Vignere cipher he used: the word 'PYEWACKIT.' Anybody know what that means? (An Investigator with Occult knows it's the name of a witch's familiar from Maningtree, Essex in 1644.)

Evidence Collection: Two of the bloody rat prints almost resemble human hand prints, except for the size, of course.

Forensics: The body was cored out and gnawed from the inside as by the teeth of an enormous rat. The path ran from the abdominal cavity up through the liver and heart and out through the base of the throat. No indication has yet been found as to how the rat got into the body cavity in the first place, however.

Geology: The soil in these tiny hand-prints is dry, highly alkaline olivine dust with no carbon component whatsoever. It must have come from somewhere with no water and no plants – not even bacteria. But how did it get into the room? (Chemistry)

History: "Other objects found included the mangled fragments of many books and papers, together with a yellowish dust left from the total disintegration of still older books and papers. All, without exception, appeared to deal with black magic in its most advanced and horrible forms; and the evidently recent date of certain items is still a mystery as unsolved as that of the modern human bones. An even greater mystery is the absolute homogeneity of the crabbed, archaic writing found on a wide range of papers whose conditions and watermarks suggest age differences of at least one hundred and fifty to two hundred years."

Languages: The high-pitched whispering we heard in the attic was English – but the English of the early 17th century.

Law: "There was much in the Essex County records about Keziah Mason's trial, and what she had admitted under pressure to the Court of Oyer and Terminer . . . She had told Judge Hathorne of lines and curves that could be made to point out directions leading through the walls of space to other spaces beyond, and had implied that such lines and curves were frequently used at certain midnight meetings in the dark valley of the white stone beyond Meadow Hill and on the unpeopled island in the river." (Library Use)

Library Use: The most scientific treatment of familiar spirits is the *Melampronoea* of Henry Hallywell, a student of the occultist Joseph Glanvil and the kabbalist George

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Rust. Published the same year (1681) as Glanvil's posthumous *Saducismus Triumphatus*, it discusses the biology and "signs" of demon familiars. We're looking for a version over 118 pages, one with an extra suppressed chapter, one that Glanvil might have died investigating. (Occult)

Medicine: "This object was the partly crushed skeleton of a huge diseased rat, whose abnormalities of form are still a topic of debate and source of singular reticence among the members of Miskatonic's department of comparative anatomy."

Occult: "Old legends are hazy and ambiguous, and in historic times all attempts at crossing forbidden gaps seem complicated by strange and terrible alliances with beings and messengers from outside. There was the immemorial figure of the deputy or messenger of hidden and terrible powers — the 'Black Man' of the witch-cult . . . There was, too, the baffling problem of the lesser messengers or intermediaries — the quasi-animals and queer hybrids which legend depicts as witches' familiars."

Oral History: "She could not tell the police, for they never believed such things. Children had been taken that way every year ever since she could remember. And her friend Pete Stowacki would not help because he wanted the child out of the way." (Streetwise)

Outdoorsman: These tracks don't fade, or go behind the wainscoting, or jump, or climb the wall. There'd be traces of those motions. There's no hesitation or rearing back; the thing didn't even stop moving. Its tracks simply vanish into the corner of the room.

Pharmacy: The parcel holds bottles of rabies vaccine dosed with arsenic and chimney soot, matching the

empty bottles we found in the icebox — I have no idea what Quinn thought he was protecting himself against, and less than no idea how he didn't poison himself taking the stuff.

Photography: The plates we took here in the attic are all very over-exposed, covered in streaks, almost like X-rays or something similar had shone through very thin slits in the wall. (Physics hints that the rays were both there and not there on a quantum level.)

Physics: "Time could not exist in certain belts of space, and by entering and remaining in such a belt one might preserve one's life and age indefinitely; never suffering organic metabolism or deterioration except for slight amounts incurred during visits to one's own or similar planes. One might, for example, pass into a timeless dimension and emerge at some remote period of the earth's history as young as before."

Sense Trouble: "That night Gilman saw the violet light again. In his dream he had heard a scratching and gnawing in the partitions, and thought that someone fumbled clumsily at the latch."

Streetwise: Nobody knows who's stealing babies every April 30, and ever since Big Jimmy D'Amato disappeared looking for his kid, nobody has tried too hard to find out. We just stay out of that part of Canaryville then, and pay off the mothers.

Theology: The medal found clenched in Miss Richards' hand depicts St. Gertrude of Nivelles and a rat — she depicted souls in Purgatory as mice or rats. She's the patron saint of travellers, the recently dead, and the insane, and invoked against rats. Was this medal for protection only, or was something deeper going on in Miss Richards' mind?

SCENARIO SEEDS

Rat-things correlate contents: they link dangers together, unconstrained by time and space. This makes them potentially incalculable threats, not just furry little imps to be kicked down the nearest attic abyss. While any witch-cult or Nyarlathotep-worship scenario can benefit from a rat-thing level boss or sidekick, here are two rat-thing mastermind possibilities to chew on.

The Rats in the Trenches

One pair of rats breeds 880 offspring in a year. Mile-wide lines of sextuple trenches and fuming shell holes, full of rations, waste, and corpses, stretched 450 miles from Switzerland to the sea for four years. The rats bred and competed and grew larger, stronger. The rat population of the Western Front may have reached 250 million, spawning and dining on human meat and human misery. Ghouls long dormant in medieval cemeteries awakened and pulled whole battalions to their death, while the rats grew ever fatter and ever more like what they grew fat on. In Lorraine, trenches cut through unconsecrated potters' fields where witches lay. One trench cut through the chest holding the rat-thing Esme La Varenne, immured in 1584.

Esme saw this new world of angled trench lines and roiling carrion as a perfect temple to the Crawling Chaos. She rejoiced with spells and ceremonies, served by bloated rats, chancreous ghouls, and a few degenerate soldiers. And then the Armistice ended her paradise. She wants it back. A few of her devoted human slaves — veterans shunned and forgotten -- have carried her into a city: New York or St. Louis, Berlin or Paris, Manchester or London. Here she cuts her geometries to open and power an immense Gate back to 1917, to bring her cult forward on an army of ghouls and super-rats, to devastate and desolate their new home and

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consecrate it to the blind and hideous piper Nyarlathotep.

The Investigators might stumble on time-slips, or a turf war in their city's ghoul-warrens, or a series of deaths in the city's underground or in its homeless veteran population. Sewers deform and echo with future ghosts, subways travel into the Dreamlands, a new cult battens in Depression mission-houses, ghost trenches appear in the park. And from everywhere resounds the squealing of pipes ... and of rats.

The Dream House in the Witch

The surgeon Harcourt Amberson has a horrible secret: he is a witch, and a slave of Shub-Niggurath. A decade or so ago, he prayed to her correctly and she sent him a rat-thing, Maggie Black, to guide his hand. Into twelve of his patients Amberson implanted rat fetuses, remote drones for Maggie Black's consciousness. These patients in turn had their houses rebuilt or bought historic properties, or sketched the proper lines on their walls or in their art.

Now Maggie has an entire dream palace, a blasphemous tesseract of twelve houses, twelve minds of unconscious servitors growing ever closer – and ever madder -- in dreams and nightmares. She uses their brains in parallel to compute ever more ornate spirals and helices to manifest Shub-Niggurath across hyperspace even on planets the Black Goat has never grazed.

This allows the Keeper to link any twelve NPCs in any twelve scenarios into one cosmic plot: Amberson's "miracle surgeries" mean he can have patients from anywhere in the world, all slowly attracted to manifestations of the Mythos. Or use some of these twelve suggestions:

- Henri Dumaine, an expressionist artist whose increasingly weird

geometries attract attention both sorcerous and connoisseurial.

- Roger Colfax, an architect whose latest experimental building collapsed while an earthquake hit another city entirely.
- Candace Robinson, whose sense of competition in small-town gardening contests begins to approach the murderous.
- Philip Travers, Lord Maupertuis, who very much wants to see Britain fund deadly new wonder-weapons and stop Hitler before he starts.
- Dr. Sterling Pierce, an astronomer who claims to have communicated with life on Neptune.
- Vera French, a singer whose newest obsession is atonal music accompanied by pipes and flutes.
- Michael Brasleton, a serial killer of pregnant women. He squats in abandoned houses in the French Hill district of Arkham.
- Giorgio "Tommy" La Tomboli, a smuggler whose vastly increased knowledge of the waterfront has him rising to the top of the local rackets.
- Dr. Althea Horsley, pioneering anthropologist, increasingly famous for her collection of artifacts from tribes and cultures long thought vanished. Her theories of matriarchy and breeding in litters are less famous.
- William Sather, bookseller, who has gone "all-in" on a number of auctions for witch-hunting manuals and geometers' notebooks, of all things.
- Charles Gage, a wannabe occultist and groupie who keeps turning up

on the fringes of things looking harmless.

- Terence Vesco, head of a very successful private detective agency specializing in everything from adultery cases to bodyguard work for leading scientists.

As the Investigators figure out Maggie's plot, she can retreat all over the country – or the world – in an instant, activate various "stay-behind" networks of rats and cultists and Dark Young, or in direst need flee with Shub-Niggurath's Seed to a new planet.

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Two Lovecraft stories that foreshadow Brown Jenkin's glory, "The Lurking Fear" and "Rats in the Walls," describe the symbolic union of man and rat. Only in the glorious hyperspace of "The Dreams in the Witch-House" does Lovecraft completely fuse the two. Brown Jenkin also symbolizes the union of witch-lore and higher mathematics, and the notion of hyperspace itself, as Fritz Leiber implicitly recognizes in the title of his essay "Through Hyperspace With Brown Jenkin."

The novel *Prey* by Graham Masterton is a remake of-sequel to "Witch-House" that casts Brown Jenkin as basically a demon child in rat-thing form (and in Victorian smallclothes). "Small Ghost" by Michael Minnis, in the *Arkham Tales* anthology, is another "Witch-House" sequel with a nice, creepy approach to Brown Jenkin's magic.

Rat-things are sadly underutilized in Cthulhu Mythos fiction, although monstrous rats are more common. Enlarged, near-sapient rats appear in H.G. Wells' *The Food of the Gods*, James Herbert's *The Rats* (followed by *The Lair* and *Domain*), Henry Kuttner's "The Graveyard Rats," Christopher Fowler's "Seven Feet," and Stephen King's "Graveyard Shift." Patricia Highsmith provides equal voice for the vermin in "The Bravest Rat in Venice."