

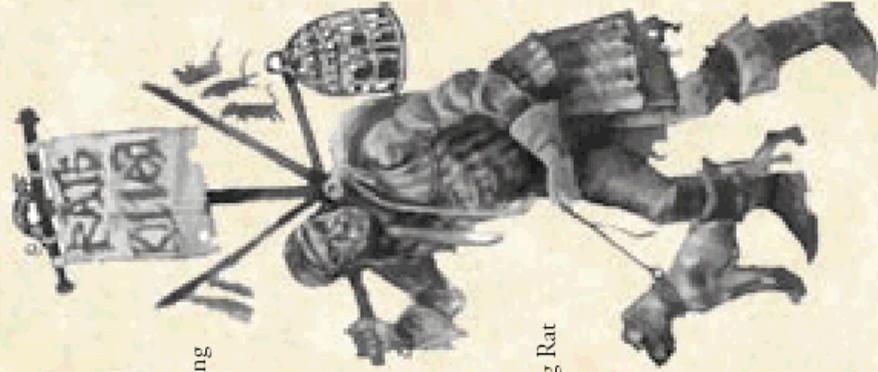


A Comprehensive Guide to Old World
Rat Catchers

— RAT CATCHER —

DESCRIPTION

The Rat Catcher is a common sight throughout the Empire. They can be found in villages, towns, and cities, making a living by disposing of the vermin that infest all dwellings in this unsanitary age. Rat Catchers are often travelling folk, although larger towns and cities have permanent contingents of "vermin soldiers." Rats are their chief enemy, but they can also dispose of moles, mice, and even fouler pests. City-dwelling Rat Catchers spend a great deal of time in the sewers, wading through rivers of filth in search of their prey. It's a dirty job but it helps keep the plague away.



— Rat Catcher Advance Scheme —

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
+5%	+10%	—	+5%	+10%	—	+10%	—

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
—	+2	—	—	—	—	—	—

Skills: Animal Care, Animal Trainer, Concealment, Perception, Search, Set Trap, Silent Move

Talents: Resistance to Disease, Resistance to Poison, Specialist Weapon Group (Sling), Tunnel Rat

Trappings: Sling with Ammunition, 4 Animal Traps, Pole with 1d10 dead rats, Small but Vicious Dog

Career Entries: Grave Robber, Jailor, Runbearer, Tomb Robber

Career Exits: Bone Picker, Cat Burglar, Grave Robber, Jailor, Shieldbreaker, Thief

Credits and Further Reading

Article compiled by Dave Allen. Sources include Children of the Horned Rat, The Loathsome Ratmen and their Vile Kin, White Dwarf, Blood on the Reik, Witch Finder, Marienburg: Sold Down the River and Middenheim: City of Chaos. Thanks to Dan White, Andy Law, Steve Darlington, Jody Macgregor and the gang on the Black Industries forums for advice on this article.

Thanks to Robin Low for his thoughts on Rat Catchers. Read Robin's in-depth article *A Fistful of Rat Tails* in issue 24 of Warpstone magazine, which gives extra information on the family unions in Altdorf, bounty payment, use of trappings and many other aspects of the 'definitive WFRP career'.

Thanks also to Tim Eccles for his thoughts on the Rechenguild of Carroburg. More information about the city and it's guilds can be found in issue 26 of Warpstone.

Jakob Bleich - Rat Catcher

Jakob is from Wurtbad. The town is not one of the Empire's largest and Jakob works alongside a small group of professional Rat Catchers who have not numbered more than a dozen during his tenure. They have formed an informal guild to make sure that commissions are shared out amongst them so that no single Rat Catcher goes without a big job for too long, and to make sure that no enthusiastic amateurs or itinerant Rat Catchers attempt to cash in on their business. Jakob has a fine reputation within this group, his skill with the sling has won him particular kudos.

Most of the commissions come from the town's famous Vintner's Guild, who pay very good coin to make sure that supplies of grain goes on to become wine without suffering from spoilage from rodents. The owners of the famous hot spring baths in Wurtbad also provide a lot of custom, as the sight of a rat or two in their buildings can be a turn off for their rich clientele.

Jakob regularly visits Wurtbad's lively Stahlstrasse, in the Griefweg neighbourhood of the town. This area can provide a lot of income for a good Rat Catcher, as the owners of the abundance of taverns, brothels and gambling dens that can be found there like to keep their premises sanitary. Jakob's connections here have netted him a lot of income that he hasn't been honest about with his fellows in the guild, a fact that would annoy them a great deal were they to discover it.

In Wurtbad the sewer system is limited to the rich part of the town, in the poorer areas shallow channels ferry effluent slowly to the Stir. The town's elite make sure the city authorities pay a very generous bounty of four pence per tail for sewer rats, and the local Shallyan Temple of the Lonely Sacrament lobbies to make sure the poor district does not go unattended. In lean times Jakob can be found patrolling the sewers and streets of the town with his small black-tan terrier, Finkler.

Jakob has never even heard of such a thing as the Skaven, the Ratmen have no presence under the town or in the immediate surrounding area. Were Jakob and his colleagues to hear of such creatures they would willingly add their voices to those who regard them as mere fancies.

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
37	41	32	39*	35	37	36	30
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	11	3	3	4	0	0	3

* An advance has been taken in this characteristic.

Skills: Animal Care (+10%), Animal Training, Gossip, Common Knowledge (The Empire), Concealment, Perception, Search, Set Trap, Silent Move, Speak Language (Reikspeil).

Talents: Marksman (added to profile above), Resistance to Disease, Resistance to Poison, Specialist Weapon Group (Sling), Tunnel Rat.

The Rat Catcher is a common sight everywhere in villages, towns and cities, making a living by disposing of the vermin which infest all dwellings in this unsanitary age.

Rat Catchers are often travelling folk, moving from village to village in order to make a living, although in a large town or city settled 'vermin soldiers' may actually be employed by the authorities and have their interests attended to by their own guild. Rats are their chief enemy, but a Rat Catcher will also be able to deal with moles, mice and similar pests. It isn't a great life, and many soon retire from the cellars and seek adventure in the clean air of the country where they become favoured scouts among adventurers who poke around in caves and caverns.

Rat Catchers are well established in most settlements of any size. They are a common sight, especially in the poorer areas, with their ratting poles and their small but vicious dogs. A Rat Catcher may be known as Cazarratas in Estalian, Rattenfänger in Reikspiel, Ratier in Bretonnian and Acchiappatopi in Estalian.

Day to Day Rat Catching

There are many reasons why an inhabitant of the Old World might take up rat catching. Most Rat Catchers are employed purely as pest controllers, accepting commissions to rid a particular area, such as a barn or a tavern kitchen, of rats or other vermin; or they make money by taking a bounty in times of plague. Some hunt rats for other reasons though, such as to provide live rats to scholars, or establishments that hold rat baits.

There is even a small market for charms made out of parts of dead rat, and in large cities you may encounter a Rat Catcher who supplements his living by peddling 'lucky rat's claws'. There are also those who have ulterior motives for delving into and surveying the sewers of the Old World's cities, these can include the cultists of some foul god, looking for a secret and secure place to hold rituals and private gatherings, as well as those who seek to uncover (or to cover up) evidence of the existence of the Skaven.

Rat Catchers work, and are invariably encountered, on their own. Rat Catching isn't a desirable job, the pay is not good and the working conditions can easily lead to an early death as the result of the infections that can be caught from rat bites or from spending time in unsanitary environments. Still, it is a living, and many cities and large towns around the Old World have a Rat Catchers' guild or union to help look after the interests of their members. The job is a relatively easy one to enter and, once established, a Rat Catcher can make a fairly steady, albeit meagre, income.

There are many opportunities available to successful Rat Catchers, though they may have to have an unscrupulous streak in order to be able to take advantage of them, after all, it is common for Rat Catchers to acquire the skills needed to become a Cat Burglar or Thief if they don't find the life of a pest controller rewarding enough.

Rats breed throughout the year, but litters born in the spring or summer months typically have more of a chance of surviving and bearing litters of their own, so Catchers tend to do brisk business between the equinoxes, Mitterfruhl and Geheimnistag. However, they tend to receive more commissions for clearing premises of rats in the winter months (when they tend to be bolder about entering buildings in order to seek shelter).

Rural Rat Catching

There isn't much in the way of underground sewer systems in the countryside, but there are lots of barns and farmhouses that can suffer from infestations of rats or mice. The arable farmland of the Empire is also home to vermin such as moles, field mice, rabbits, foxes and (during the spring when fields are being sown) crows and other birds that eat seeds.

Successful rural Rat Catchers might be called upon to deal with less mundane threats, like clearing out infestations of small greenskins such as Snotlings or Gnoblar.

Payment

Many town and city councils levy a standard bounty on rat tails. Usually this is a meagre amount, rarely exceeding a few pennies per tail, but in times of plague (or rumoured plague), or in an effort to beautify a certain area of the town or to be seen to care more for the hygiene of the city, the authorities might increase the bounty to five or more pence a tail. It is only during these times that Rat Catchers are likely to be found living up to their reputation for skulking about in the sewers to earn their living, as the money to be made from the bounty recoups the costs of regular laundry and justifies the risk of contracting some disease. Councils may well pay a higher bounty if the catcher can prove he has dealt with a giant rat, or a rat with an obvious mutation.

Councils often refuse to pay the bounty unless a certain number of rat tails are turned over at a time, a dozen or a score, for example. This prevents them from the extra administration they would have to perform should they be dealing constantly with opportunistic killers of vermin.

Most of the money a Rat Catcher makes comes from accepting a commission to rid a certain area, such as a field or a warehouse, of vermin for a private individual. Sometimes these individuals will pay for a bounty per dead rat, but to avoid unscrupulous Rat Catchers from obtaining dead rats from other sources most employers will simply pay on completion of the task, often offering the Rat Catcher relatively little up front, but then a bonus on quick and efficient completion of the task. The Rat Catcher can then take the rats he has killed and claim any bounty the local authorities award for rat tails.

More money can often be made by capturing rats alive. These can then be sold to various interested parties who will be willing to pay more than a few pence for delivery of whole live specimens. The universities in large cities pay for rats in order to teach scholars of the little understood science of Biology a little about anatomy or reproduction in animals.

Those Rat Catchers who trap large numbers of their prey alive can make extra money

Rural Rat Catchers in WFRP

Whilst most Rat Catchers in the Empire (and almost all from other areas of the Old World) work in rural communities the career as written assumes the rather more archetypal image of the urban pest controller, scouring the sewers with his Tunnel Rat talent.

Rural Rat catchers would not have had the same opportunities to develop this particular ability, but they are famous for wandering from place to place in search of work. As a result of this alternative lifestyle it is suggested that rural Rat Catchers take the Orientation talent instead of Tunnel Rat if they wish.

A Family Affair. A new run of *The Rats of Hammstadt* is being performed at the Rotunda Playhouse in Altdorf's run-down East End district. The play is unusual in that the director has cast one of the feuding families in a flattering light. The impoverished and sprawling Stahl family are usually as venal and myopic as the other members of the town, but in this production they are cast as a poor yet noble clan who urge the other families to cooperate but are ignored.

This has caused some outrage in Altdorf's Rat Catcher community, as the other families claim that the Wiesel family have obviously had some say in the production in an attempt to satirise the more successful Fretchen and Hermelin families. Asked to comment on the situation by a writer for the *Altdorf Speiler*, the aging playwright Detlef Sierck has claimed that he would "never have sunk to such a vulgar analogy in the first place", and so washes his hands of the affair.

Pieter Hermelin, one of the more senior members of his family, is curious to learn the truth of the matter, and has put the word out to some underworld contacts of his to see if some larcenous types can be hired to find or fabricate some evidence of the Wiesals' involvement with the play.

A Giant Draw. The Splintered Skull in Wurtbad is one of the more popular taverns along the town's Stahlstrasse. One of the entertainments held at the tavern is a regular rat bait, where dozens of trapped rodents are thrown into a pit and bets taken on which will be the last one standing. A recent visitor to the tavern, a northerner with some irritating airs and graces, has watched one of these baits and loudly pooh-poohed the performance. Apparently the Drowned Rat in Middenheim has a similar arrangement, except the rats they have compete against one another are three feet long, and that's not including the tails.

Leopold Arschel, the organiser of the rat baits, paid to have the northerner soundly worked over by a pair of local Protagonists, but the tale of the giant rats has excited his imagination. He's pondering getting in touch with his cousin Laurencius, who moved to Middenheim some years back to pursue a vocation in ceramics, to see if he can hire some likely lads to go to the Drowned Rat and try to get their hands on one of these monster vermin and have it sent to Wurtbad.



Adventure Seeds for Rat Catchers

A Musical Remedy. It can be tedious forever going back to the traps you have laid just to find them empty, and dangerous cornering frightened rats in the hope of taking them out with a blow from your ratting pole, and mucky and unpleasant scouring the sewers for vermin with your small dog - what if the often repeated rumours of individuals able to charm and control rats with a musical instrument were true?

People talk of the animal charmers of Ind, able to make the rats there dance to the tune of squealing flute, but stories are also told of individuals with similar skills in the Empire. The most famous of these are the tales of the Pie-Eyed Piper of Middenheim, said to be able to charm vermin from their holes with his playing. The motif has even made it into a Detlef Sierck's *The Rats of Hammstadt*, and variations on the trick are performed regularly in carnival sideshows.

Surely many a Rat Catcher has daydreamed about utilising such an easy method to make his living? However, there is a darker side to such stories, in that the musical Rat Catchers are often said to have brokered a deal with dark gods for their gifts, and that their real prey isn't rats, but children.

The Snake God. Some scholars talk of how the reptilian inhabitants of the New World once fought an infestation of rats running rampant in their jungle home and spreading a virulent disease. Myths translated from stolen stone plaques are said to speak of the priests of the lizardmen invoking an ophidian god, who sent swarms of serpents into the rats' tunnels to consume or poison them all, leaving the Lustrian jungles mysteriously free of rats to the present day, a fact many explorers of the New World confirm.

Such legends may be of great appeal to Rat Catchers, who might offer up the odd private prayer to the Lustrian snake god, or bear the likeness of a snake as some kind of personal totem. Of course, the worship of such a strange and alien deity would not be looked upon with kindness by many of the traditional religious authorities in the Old World.

A Trip to Tilea. These days the Rat Catchers who regularly patrol the sewer system of Delberz do so with a freshly formed force of Sewer Jacks. They never encounter Ratmen, but those amongst them with sharper hearing often claim to be able to hear sounds of activity emanating from below.

Direktor Liebrecht Schleicher, the head of the Delberz Guild of Safety and Sanitation (which looks after the interests of numerous parties including the town's Rat Catchers, Sewer Jacks and Dung Farmers), has studied accounts of the histories of Tobaró and Miragliano. Based on his knowledge of these cities he is planning to finance an expedition to Tilea in order to hire the services of some of the country's most experienced Skaven hunters.

However, the Skaven are keeping a careful eye on their enemies above, and plan to shadow the expedition to make sure they don't return to Delberz. They will send a party of their own to ambush the travellers in some quiet location, and may also try and get in touch with members of the Tavelli family, a Miraglianese clan who have had a longstanding alliance with the Ratmen and remain members of the dwindling Poison Claw Cult. These human followers of the Horned Rat will act to head the party off if they reach Tilean soil.

by selling rats to entertainers around the cities of the Old World, who regularly hold rat baiting contests in taverns. These betting contests take many forms, starved rats can be set on each other in a pit and bets taken on which rats will survive, or bets can be taken on how long it will take a rat dog to kill a dozen rats. The capture of a giant rat, or rats with notable mutations, can make a real draw for an establishment running such competitions. The organisers of rat baiting events may even be generous enough to allow the Catcher to remove the tails of his catch in order to collect the bounty on them.

Another group of customers who desire live rats are those who are interested in having them as pets. These can include noblewomen who have succumbed to the fashion of keeping fancy white rats in gilded cages (it is rumoured in some corners of the world that there is something special, if not even uncanny, about a rat with white fur, and some are therefore kept in the belief that they are lucky talismans). Some of these customers are even wizards, who are on the look out for a large and healthy specimen to make a suitable familiar. Pleasing such luminary customers can make the Rat Catcher a highly useful contact.

Some Rat Catchers take to breeding dogs. There is a healthy market for these animals as the small but vicious breeds favoured by the Rat Catchers are also favoured by those with an interest in animal baiting and dog fights, or even clearing out infestations of Snotlings.

What can you expect from a Rat Catchers' Guild?

Rat Catchers' guild houses tend to be poor premises – for example the Middenheim Ratter's guild is based in a room above a tavern in the somewhat rough Ostwald district of the city.

Joining a Rat Catchers' guild is often easier than most, in many towns and cities there is often a dearth of Rat Catchers, especially in times of plague (when the demand for Rat Catchers is higher) or in a location with a Skaven problem (where potential recruits can be put off by rumours of the Ratmen and Rat Catchers are more likely to meet a violent end whilst working in the sewers). As such the family ties, proofs of experience or official recommendations that more salubrious guilds might require from a potential member are often overlooked in the case of Rat Catchers.

However, because of these lax entry requirements, as well as the fact that many of their members are very impoverished, Rat Catchers' guilds can be open to corruption and bribery.

The Rat Catchers guild usually have reasonably accurate maps of the sewer systems of their home city, though in order for an inquisitive individual to get a look at one he or she would need to be a guild member, a figure of some authority, be able to pay a decent bribe or craft a convincing cover story.

Operating as a Rat Catcher without guild membership carries the usual risks, but as Rat Catchers' guilds tend not to have the funds to pursue justice via the courts a putative Rat Catcher who works without guild membership can find himself on the receiving end of some rough justice at the hands of some cheap hired thugs, rather than being forced to take part in what may be costly legal proceedings.

Rat Catching in Altdorf

Rat Catching in Altdorf is very much a family affair, with three highly nepotistic unions controlling the business within the city. As such it can be very hard for a Rat Catcher to find work in Altdorf unless they are either from one of these families or are willing to work with them (and such employment carries little chance of promotion or recognition as job opportunities are almost always only passed to family members).

There are three families who have territories divided into vague geographical areas of Altdorf. The Frettchens are the most powerful of these families, and they work in the area of the city to the south and west of the river Reik. The Hermelin family looks after matters of pest control to the north of the Reik and Talabec. The largest of these families, the Wiesel family, is also the least wealthy, and they are based in Altdorf's dilapidated East End.

Fortune has never smiled kindly upon the Wiesals, their limited resources have never kept the rampant rodent population in their territory in check, and their reputation has suffered as a result. Furthermore there has been talk of the Frettchens and Hermelins combining to form a more official Rat Catchers' guild in the capital, which has alarmed members of the Wiesel family.

The competition and disputes between the three families is said to be parodied in Detlef Sierck's famous comic opera *The Rats of Hammstadt*, in which the growing problem of a rat infestation in a sleepy Reikland hamlet goes unnoticed whilst attentions are fixed on petty disputes between village families. They play is therefore somewhat unpopular with the Rat Catchers of Altdorf, but much beloved by Rat Catchers elsewhere.

Rat Catching in Middenheim

The Ratters' Guild in Middenheim is based in a room above one of the many drinking holes in the Ostwald (an infamously rough district where many members of the city's lower classes dwell). This organisation looks after its members' interests and deals with the occasional contract from Middenheim's Kommission for Health, Education and Welfare to exterminate vermin in public buildings (in fact the Kommission is meant to permanently employ a body of Rat Catchers for this work, but since the chancellor seems reluctant to fund them, the Catchers of the city are left to operate on a freelance basis).

The guild also has long-standing contracts with the city's mercantile concerns, for dealing with the rats that infest the merchant's warehouses, which line the Sudetenweg.

Rat Catchers in Middenheim may often be distinguished by their high-crowned hats of rat-skin, this is just a popular fashion amongst members of the Guild, not a uniform as such, though it is so ubiquitous an article that it can be safely assumed that anyone wearing such a hat will be one of the city's Catchers - and that all the city's Catchers wear such hats.

Some years ago stories circled the city of an individual who was able to coax rats out of their holes by playing a bright and lively air upon a flute. Reports regarding the man differ, but most agree that he came to a bad end, exposed as a worshipper of a proscribed deity.

Trappings

Rat Catchers carry a long, sturdy pole, often adorned with the corpses of rats they have slain. This pole is partly a badge of office, a sign of the bearer's profession that is recognised throughout the Old World. It is also very useful for crushing the skull or the spine of a cornered rat. Some ratting poles may also have barbs or thorns attached to one end, so that they can catch onto the fur of a rat when swept from side to side. Suitable poles are of Common Availability, and can be bought for 2 s, but many Rat Catchers just make do with a suitably sturdy branch.

The traps carried by Rat Catchers can take many different forms, though most are simple mechanical devices with spiked jaws or solid metal bars that spring shut when a rat steps on a balanced plate, or attempts to remove food from a trap. Poisons are also commonly used by Rat Catchers, so in some cases the 'traps' employed by Catchers simply take the form of a piece of bread or meat laced with Black Lotus or some similar kind of venom. Small mechanical traps are of Common Availability, and can be bought for 1 gc.

Slings can be useful for taking out a fleeing rat, or breaking up rats in a swarm. They are the preferred missile weapons of Rat Catchers as they can be used in confined spaces (unlike many types of bow) and they don't suffer from getting damp (unlike gunpowder weapons).

Rat Dogs are small and compact breeds, trained from birth to chase down and seize vermin by the scruff of their necks, and then shake them violently to kill them. Rat dogs are also carefully trained not to consume or damage the rats they kill, but to leave the bodies intact so that the Catcher can go on to claim his bounty. Training these dogs to the sensibilities of a particular owner can be the most arduous part of joining the profession, but most Rat Catchers nevertheless develop a strong bond with their belligerent mutts.

The breed typically used by Rat Catchers are short-legged and stocky black-tan terriers, though there is a breed of Wissenland spaniel that is particularly renowned for catching and killing rats.

Some Rat Catchers take up dog breeding as a supplement to their income, earning around 3 gc for a trained young adult dog. The breeds that appeal to Rat Catchers are also in demand by those who organise animal baits, or coursing.

Not all Rat Catchers rely on their dogs however, and some of the more maverick use other animals to track down and kill rats, like cats, stoats or ferrets. There have even been reports of an Altdorf Rat Catcher who used a trained hawk to bring down his prey, though he is said to have come to a bad end which more traditional Rat Catchers ascribe to his break from the norm.

Small but Vicious Dogs

The dogs used by Rat Catchers have the following profile.

WS	BS	S	T	AG	INT	WP	FEL
30%	0%	21%	21%	30%	15%	30%	0%
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	6	2	2	6	0	0	0

Skills: Follow Trail, Perception +20%, Swim.

Talents: Flee!, Keen Senses, Natural Weapons, Warrior Born (added to profile above).

The Rat-Catchers of Miragliano

In the Tilean city of Miragliano when people talk of Rat-Catchers they don't tend to refer to pest controllers, but to the highly trained mercenaries who patrol the sewers and canals of the city. Founded in the aftermath of the devastation of Miragliano by the Red Pox in the year 1812 IC, the Rat-Catchers are one of the most renowned mercenary regiments in all of Tilea.

The Rat-Catchers are trained and equipped at the Prince of Miragliano's expense, and the regiment's main duty is to keep the city safe from a Skaven incursion. Typically, each member of the regiment is armed with a short sword, a crossbow and several knives, although officers often replace the crossbow with a handbow to allow them to carry a lantern in the other hand. Each patrol is also accompanied by a dog handler with two large and very vicious dogs, powerful mastiffs bred to fight the Skaven from birth and fed exclusively on a diet of rat-meat.

Finally the Rat-Catchers often make use of two signature pieces of equipment when they need to drag the waters of the canals for swimming Ratmen: grappling hooks and *il Sollecitare* ("the Tickler") - a long spear covered in a profusion of barbed hooks.

Rat Catchers and the Cult of Nurgle

Another menace that can have a clash of interests with the day to day working of Rat Catchers are the Cult of Nurgle. These Chaos worshippers may look upon the efforts of the Rat Catchers to halt the spread of a particular plague with antipathy. Also in some cities and towns Nurgle Cultists may choose to create a meeting place within the sewers, where they can practice their foul rites in private but also safely meet with members of Clan Pestilens, who they may do dealings with far away from the prying eyes of either the human society above, or the Skaven underworld beneath. Such is the case in Middenheim, where the city sewers and the tunnels running through the Fauschlag have long provided a haven for cultists of Nurgle and Skaven alike.

For these reasons the cultists of the Plague Lord can be every bit as much a committed adversary of Rat Catchers as the Skaven and their agents are, and followers of Nurgle can seek to neutralise the Catchers of a town or city they seek to gain a foothold in as a pressing priority.

Sometimes the cult of Nurgle can find an ally in a Rat Catcher though, after all, times of pestilence can be highly profitable as the bounty on rat tails increases. A greedy Rat Catcher can therefore prove a willing pawn in the schemes of the Plague Lord, performing tasks such as clearing a warehouse out of a plague of rats but then depositing a single specimen of a rat infected with some new and virulent plague in a secure cranny, where it can give birth and fester.

Rat-Catchers of Miragliano in WFRP

Of course there are regular Rat Catchers working within the city, and these work alongside the mercenary regiment and make up many of their new recruits.

Any Rat Catcher within the city may count Mercenary amongst their Career Exits, though they will have to acquire the following trappings in order to be considered for the regiment:

Crossbow with 10 Bolts, Mail Shirt, Leather Jack, Helmet, 2 Knives, Sword, Grappling Hook or Tickler (counts as a Spear with the Snare Quality). Ticklers can be bought as an item of Average Availability in Miragliano (Scarce elsewhere) for 11 gc.

Rat Catching in Marienburg

Life in the city of Marienburg is invariably influenced by the interests of its merchant class, and this influence even extends to the lowly Rat Catcher. There is no recognisable guild within the city, instead private individuals (who are mostly rich merchants or their lackeys) tend to employ Rat Catchers to clear vermin from warehouses and ships. Unchecked, populations of rats in these areas could devastate the cargos of grains and spices that make their way to and from the great port.

However, whilst the practices of the Rat Catchers of Marienburg are influenced by the merchants of the city they are also often swayed by another of the city's groups - it's criminal fraternity. Many of the jobs that are offered to Marienburger Rat Catchers are on board ships, and it is not unknown for some expensive items in the hold of a ship to be dropped into the waiting hands of mudlarks wading about beneath the vessels. Rat Catchers have also been caught smuggling live rats onto ships and into warehouses in an attempt to create or increase custom. Indeed, some particularly committed criminal Rat Catchers may even take to breeding their own stocks of rats specifically for this purpose.

Rat Catchers can have surprisingly good relations with the cult of Shallya, thanks to their work in preventing the spread of plague, and this relationship is particularly notable in Marienburg. The Board of Public Health, set up by Sister Anneloes van de Maarel (the city's Shallyan High Priestess), has been working to make it more rewarding for the Rat Catcher's of the city to work in public areas by petitioning the authorities to raise the bounty paid for rat tails. This is in an effort to get Rat Catchers to concentrate less on saving merchant's wares from the predations of rats, and more on controlling the population of vermin in residential areas of Marienburg where they are thought to spread disease.

Sister van der Maarel may have been persuaded to take this action on advice from one of the junior members of the priesthood. Sister Wilhemina Pleegster of the Edelmoed Temple used to be a Rat Catcher herself - taking on the profession from a desire to improve the lives of those who lived in the city's Suiddock district. Despite leaving the Rat Catcher's life when she realised she could do a greater good as a member of the Shallyan priesthood, she may well be keeping a friendly eye out for her former friends and colleagues.

Street Vendor and Rat Catcher

I remember a time in Nuln when I was on business for the elector count of Wissenland, buying what was pertained to be charred chicken breast stuffed in herbs and onion and dipped in mead sauce from a street vendor, and wolfing it down on my way to the palace. Within an hour I was lying in the gutter, curled up like a ball of wool, moaning for Morr to take me through lips frothing with vomit.

I blamed the ruffian food vendor, and I made it my business - when I had recovered - to track him down and teach him a hard lesson. I never did find him, but my investigations uncovered that I was not the only one to suffer at the mercy of his culinary crimes, and that he was often seen with the local rat catcher. The conspiracy became clear.

I did find the rat catcher, and a lesson was meted out in swift and brutal fashion.

- From *Blood on the Reik, a Journey Through the Old World* by Tobias Helmgart

Rat Catchers in Carroburg

The Rechenguild of Carroburg looks after the interests of the city's Rat Catchers and Rakers. Much of the sewerage in the city is taken care of by small channels of water running along many of the city's streets and the Rakers keep the streets clean by sweeping dung and refuse into these channels. The Rat Catchers of Carroburg find themselves working alongside the Rakers as a result - hence the formation of the guild. This arrangement is not always amicable though, and members of the two professions jockey for position within the guild if they are given the opportunity.

Recently events in the city have caused a stir within the ranks of the Rechenguild, as some grisly killings have the Rat Catchers complaining that someone has it in for them. The murders have deepened the divisions between the factions in the guild and some heated accusations have been made, resulting in threats of strikes and renewed plays for power. The guild master, Wilhelm von Elffenstein, is considering hiring some independent investigators to try and find out who is behind the murders.

Carroburg is also the centre of worship for the Cult of the Yellow Fang, who try and maintain discrete yet amicable relations with the Rechenguild through bribery. The Cult plan to use their contacts within the guild in an attempt to secure accurate maps of the sewer systems of many major settlements within the Empire.

Rat Catchers in Delberz

In contrast to the situation in Carroburg the Rat Catchers of Delberz have been far more diligent in refusing to cooperate with the Poison Claw cult of Horned Rat worshippers, to the extent of refusing bribes and reporting cult activities to the authorities. This may go some way to explaining why the fortunes of this cult have waned in these latter years.

This situation wasn't always the case, the Cult used to effectively bribe the Rat Catchers of the town into keeping clear of the sewers during times when the Skaven, or their human agents, wished to use them to meet up or to perform some grisly ceremony to the glory of the Horned Rat. However, one of these acts was stumbled upon by a group of adventurers in 2512, and since then the people of the town have been more vigilant than most men of the Empire to the reality of the Skaven menace.

Rat Catchers in Bretonnia

Whilst the practice of pest control is pretty much the same in Bretonnia as it is in the Empire there are some differences. The feudal society of Bretonnia does not look kindly on guilds or unions for professions that are seen as typical of the peasantry, and Rat Catching is among them. Bretonnian Rat Catchers can therefore expect to be much poorer than those who work in the Empire, or Kislev, and they may also suffer more from amateur or itinerant Catchers providing competition.

The links between rats and disease are not widely understood in Bretonnia, though the Shallyan priesthood in the country works hard to try and educate the peasantry in matters of hygiene, but most stubbornly prefer to believe in foul vapours and imbalance of humours as the causes of disease.

The vast majority of Rat Catchers in Bretonnia are traveling rural Rat Catchers, only a very small percentage of them work based in one of the cities of the kingdom.

Rat Catchers and the Skaven

Rat Catchers might seem like obvious candidates for Old Worlders who believe in the Skaven, but in fact many involved in the profession can be loud advocates of their non-existence and decry those who talk of 'the controversy'.

Diligent and observant Rat Catchers in cities and towns that are home to a population of Skaven may well encounter a lot of evidence as to the existence of the Ratmen, and find it highly frustrating that other people deny their existence. On the other hand, some Rat Catchers are highly dismissive of those who believe in Skaven, those who come from cities with no Skaven presence, or where the Ratmen have been effective at covering their tracks, can be vociferous exponents of the belief that "if there were organised rat-like beastmen living in the sewers we would know about it long before now".

For business reasons, this second opinion can be prevalent, with many Rat Catcher's guilds finding it sometimes hard to attract new staff due to the rumours of Skaven activity within city sewers. Senior members of Rat Catchers' guilds can also be the target of agents of the under-empire, who threaten or bribe them into cooperation. This can lead to a climate of fear within the Rat Catchers of a city with a Skaven problem, such as Altdorf or Middenheim, where Rat Catchers with information on the Skaven may be unwilling to discuss it unless well paid and reassured as to their privacy, and even then they will insist "you didn't hear it from me". Rat Catchers often employ euphemisms when discussing the Skaven amongst themselves, such as "The Big Ones", "Tall Rats", "Hind Leggers" or "Sewer Dukes".

Significant Old World settlements with and without Skaven problems.

The Skaven have large established lairs below Nuln, Marienburg, Tobaró and Middenheim, and make extensive use of the sewer systems there, to the extent of being pretty bold. Rat Catchers in such cities are therefore quite likely to come across some sign and spoor of the Ratmen, and Rat Catchers who seek to prove the existence of Skaven (or those with some reason to keep them secret) may seek employment in these cities in order to find (or suppress) such evidence.

Altdorf, Talabheim, Carroburg, Gisoreux, Bordeleaux, Remas, Kislev, Magritta, Quenelles and Parravon are amongst those cities that have Skaven lairs beneath them. Rat Catchers from these cities might come across some evidence of the Skaven, though the Ratmen keep a much lower profile here than in the settlements mentioned earlier.

The Skaven have no permanent presence beneath settlements such as Hergig, Averheim, Wolfenburg, Wurtbad, Eiches Schatten, Sartosa, Luccinni, Erengard, Praag, Bilbali, Couronne and L'Anguille. Rat Catchers from these cities (especially from those in the Empire) might be very dismissive of stories of the Skaven and the threat that they pose.