

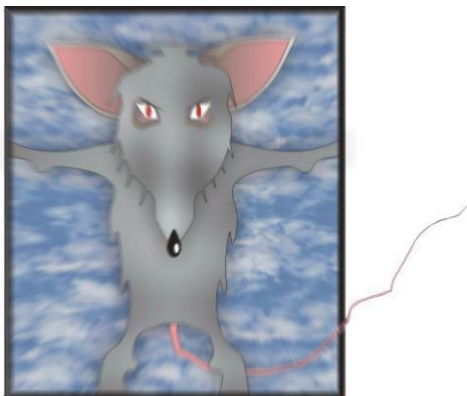
The Nezumi Network Gazetteer

History

The network was founded 800 years ago by Nezumi who had been hired as mercenaries by an ambitious provincial governor. After his defeat and the dispersion of his forces a weakened battalion of ratmen dug in at an easily defensible position, at the slopes of a small mountain, and the Imperial forces where unable to expel them. After a year of fruitless siege a peace treaty was signed. The Nezumi where granted the right to live in the mountain as long as they paid a tribute of 10% of their earnings and where giving their firstborns as scouts to the Emperor.

Over the next 150 years more and more Nezumi where born and the small fortress turned into a bustling town with a population of 1000 ratlings. When gold was found, ratmen from different burrows came to the Network. Since the gold meant an immense income for the Emperor this behaviour was tolerated.

Thus 350 years passed in relative tranquility for the network. While the ratmen where scorned when venturing outside, they where left alone save for the tax collectors. The firstborn were sent to neighbouring countries as spies and while many died the survivors where



highly valued as defenders of the network upon the end of their service.

The rebellion brought drastic changes to the Nezumi, however. With a civil war in the Empire, non-humans where lynched and prosecuted as demon kind. The ratmen retreated to their underground forts and fought off mobs and would-be slavers. After the dust settled, they sent scouts to the outside world and after 20 years, trading started again. With their huge gold mines the ratlings became more and more powerful and rich when suddenly, 4 years ago, disaster struck.

At first it seemed as if a mine had collapsed because there was a huge rumble and the miners did not return. Rescue teams however encountered huge insectoid creatures coming from the bowels of the Earth itself. Divination revealed that they were servants of some entity from beyond which has retreated underground after their defeat in the civil war. Disturbed by the mining of the Nezumi they rose from their slumber. Rumours exist that there are gates to the shadow plane in the lower reaches, opened by atrocities committed by the insects in order to reach their home plane. Others claim that somewhere at the very bottom a huge hive queen exists that spawns new abominations daily.

With their vast riches, the ratlings have hired mercenaries from all over the Empire and even beyond. The majority are humans but there are also quite a few hobgoblins from the North. These hirelings all live in the shanty town at the gates to the underground realm and wait for special missions that require their expertise.

The current population of the city is 1200 Nezumi (400 of the original 1600 were killed so far), 300 of which are trained soldiers, and 120 mercenaries.

Customs & Religion

Over the centuries the Nezumi in the Network have developed quite a few unique customs.

Society is divided into Chosen Ones, Miners, Soldiers, and Workers. The Chosen Ones are usually taller than their kin and are mutated in some way - either they have extra arms, only one eye, or other strange deformities that are almost never detrimental however. Another distinction from their normal kin is their affinity to magic - rare is the Chosen who is not a sorcerer! With their magical power and the apparent favour of the ancestors, these creatures rule over the other ratlings in a council that elects a grand master every other year. Often they also head trading houses or other enterprises. A small subgroup multiclasses as shamans and forms the priesthood.

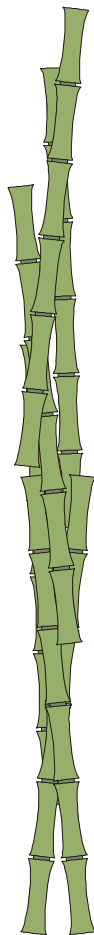
The miners and soldiers share the second rank in the Nezumi society. They often join secretive brotherhoods and proudly wear uniforms to show their allegiance. Intrigue was common between these groups but now it is frowned upon.

The lowest caste are the workers who are responsible for everything else. Women commonly belong to this group unless they are Chosen Ones. The workers are usually dirty and abused.

While the Chosen Caste is only attainable by birth, the rest of society is very flexible. A soldier who loses his ability to fight quickly falls into disgrace and a worker who manages to replace a fallen miner gains riches quickly. This social mobility helps the lower classes accept the order of things despite their chaotic nature.

Common proverbs of the Network:

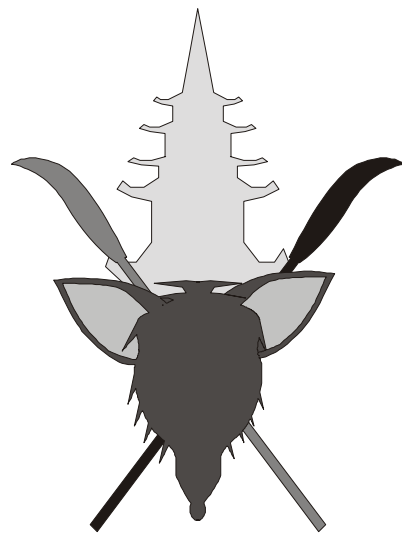
- *"A new day is a new opportunity!"*
(the Nezumi are optimists at heart)
- *"When you are alone you are dead!"*
(social ties are valued above all else)



Dress

Other than for protection the Nezumi wear little clothing. Those that belong to a brotherhood wear a scarf, vest, or hat in the colours of their group. The Chosen Ones prefer a bit more luxury and don imported silk robes.

One thing Nezumi of all stations enjoy is jewellery. Sadly enough, they favour obvious displays of wealth over tasteful arrangement. Thus they tend to wear thick chains of gold, huge uncut gems and other solid accessories.



Food

Humans are usually disgusted by Nezumi food for it consists of rats, worms and various insects which are often consumed raw. The dinners of the upper class consist of the same ingredients, however they are skilfully prepared and even human gourmets admit that the food prepared for the Chosen Ones is the best you can get outside the kitchen of the Jade Emperor.

The Brotherhoods

There are currently 65 known brotherhoods in the Nezumi Network. Some the most powerful ones are described here.

The Ring of Red Gold

The Ring is a brotherhood of miners that are renown for their willingness to go to work under even the most dire circumstances. They identify each other by the solid gold necklaces that they wear. These necklaces are enchanted to have a strong reddish tint.

The brotherhood is ruled by a grand sapper, who is responsible for keeping the shrine of the founder and for interpreting the scroll of Nog, the holy text to the Ring. They contain some rules on social conduct but are generally very lax. There are also descriptions of mining techniques which are jealously guarded from other miners.

To be accepted into this brotherhood is a big honour and requires hefty donations.

The Brothers of Stone

These Nezumi can be easily recognised by their ritual scars and ornamented earrings. Membership is for life and the last ratling to try quitting was found turned to stone.

The Brothers are mostly miners with some non-chosen sorcerers who specialise in mining magic. They are a tight community and officially have no private property, even though the spell-casters and the council of elders are practically exempt from this rule.

While originally one of the most numerous brotherhoods, the Brothers of Stone have lost a third of their members during the first attack of the insects. They are the quick to volunteer for counterstrikes.

The Iron Tails

The Iron Tails is a warrior brotherhood that is known for their fanatical loyalty to the Chosen Ones. Humour and frivolous talk is forbidden by their codex, as are alcoholic beverages and spices for food.



The Iron Tails have a strict hierarchy with autocratic rulership by the Iron Fist, which is both a title and a name for the ruler.

In the past these warriors were unpopular because of their fanaticism but in these times of dread they are gaining more and more members. Their symbol is a red scarf.

The Red Grin

Despite ugly rumours about their harbouring psychotic killers, these Nezumi are quite popular in the Network. Sporting outrageous facial paint and gaudy robes covered with grinning dragons and rats, the Red Grin are an attraction when parading through the tunnels.

Its members are all warriors that have specialised in mobile combat with pole arms and light armour. Their combat style is almost dance-like and this combined with their vows of silence make them spectacular to behold.

Nobody knows who rules the Red Grin and what their agenda is, yet they seem to have many powerful friends.

The Trading Houses

The two greatest trading houses are detailed here. There are about 10 others that struggle to rise to the top but are uninteresting for the moment.

The House of Jade

This trading house is run by Green Claw an old and ugly ratwoman with greasy long fur and impossibly long green claws. Green Claw holds absolute power over the enterprise and is addicted to luxury and young, handsome ratmen.

The House of Jade exports luxury articles made of gold and imports magical items and weapons. There are some nasty rumours that psions are in the secret employ of Green Claw to

mentally influence business partners but this could never be proven.

House of the Dark Lantern

The House of the Dark Lantern imports food and raw materials. Their vast riches come from the fact that they have a complete monopoly on the sale of war rats. Only their breeders know how to raise and train a good war rat and over the years have managed to literally eradicate the competition.

The ruler of this house is a skinny and nervous Chosen One who is a complete albino except for his magma-like eyes. Nobody knows his name and he never comes into direct contact with the public, preferring to act over middle-men.

Look and Feel

The typical tunnel in the Nezumi network looks like a nightmarish mixture between a china town mall and the mines of Moria.

Everything is crowded with Nezumis, their mobile shops, carts, colourful lanterns used to mark shops, and a mixture of bizarre smells. Visitors will stick out which will draw stares and remarks in the Nezumis native tongue that could mean anything from insult to offer of goods. Indeed few Nezumi master a foreign language and it is hard to communicate with them as they blissfully ignore sign language and keep rattling on even if not understood.

One thing to go by the coloured lanterns that sport various symbols. These are semi-official guideline to what a shop offers, what price range is covered and who the owner is.

Some symbols are:

- The Golden Gates: these stylised twin yellow gates on a red paper lantern identify shops that offer various greasy snacks.

- The Red Dragon: the silhouette of a red dragon on a white lantern identifies an arms and armour shop.
- The Green and Blue Flames: two interwoven flames on a yellow lantern identify a shop that sells magical goods.

Important Sites

- **The Library of Forbidden Fire Knowledge:** the Chosen Ones are very fond of fire magic and this library is said to contain every single fire spell available in the world. Sadly enough, it is currently in the hands of the hive.
- **The Tomb of General Chan:** Chan was a famous human general who almost managed to conquer the Network during the civil war. During the climatic battle he was slain by a powerful Chosen One. While he was an enemy of the Nezumi, they honoured him for his noble character and fair treatment of his prisoners and built him a fantastic tomb. The location of this site has been lost in antiquity but tales speak of its fantastic treasures.

