

BIG EARS, SMALL MOUSE

They lurk in the shadows, invisible to the powerful and arrogant eyes of man.

Nothing is too small to escape their notice.

Silently, they lay their intricate, complex plans. Carefully, they place their rubber-band catapults. Tonight, the cheese will be theirs!

Big Ears, Small Mouse is the American animation and comic supplement for the 2001 Origins Award nominated RPG, *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*. BESMouse introduces players to the strange but familiar world of Mousetropolis — a thriving city that is home to talking rodents, cats, and other tiny animals. This sourcebook features dozens of player character species templates, guidelines for scaling combat between small and large opponents, customized mecha and personal gear for tiny creatures, and much more!

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BIG EARS, SMALL MOUSE

BIG EARS, SMALL MOUSE

A rodent is an animal of the order Rodentia, a group of critters with chisel-like incisors that grow continuously through life and are used for gnawing. Rodentia are among the largest and most successful orders of mammals, and one of the few that can coexist with *Homo sapiens*.

This relationship has its down side. As the unwitting carrier of disease-ridden fleas, the Black Norway rat is indirectly responsible for more human deaths than any other animal in nature; most spectacularly with the Black Death. The ancient Egyptians disliked rodents so intensely they deified cats.

Despite all this, American animation has always had a love affair with rodents, spawning the strange genre of *Big Ears, Small Mouse* (*BESMouse*). Mice are small and cute, and it is easy to generate sympathy for them. In the great game called the ecology, mice are the ultimate “underdogs;” when a cat stalks a field mouse, it is hard not to root for the rodent.

Unlike the settings of most adventure fiction, the world of a rodent is our own, seen through different and smaller eyes. Although there are exceptions (such as the *Redwall* series), small animal characters in fiction seem to thrive in superficially mundane settings, which, viewed from their perspective, become places of high adventure. The framework of an average suburban home is as complex a labyrinth that Theseus faced. To a mouse, a housecat is as formidable an opponent as any dragon, while the epic battles of mouse against cat echo the adventures of Ulysses against the Cyclops.

Naturally, when you are a bug, even the mice try to slap you around.

ANIMALS AS SATIRE

There is a long tradition of satire through the use of animal characters. The court family of the Pharaoh Akhenaten was derisively sculpted as monkeys. In the novel, *The Wind in the Willows*, (1908), Mister Toad and Badger symbolized the ongoing conflict between flighty, irresponsible youth and reliable, yet rigid conservatism. The film *An American Tail* (1986) attempted to tell the remarkable story of Eastern European immigration to the United States from the point of view of mice. Their belief that there “are no cats in America” reflects the often exaggerated sense of hope real immigrants possessed for their adopted country. The Fleischer cartoon short *Peace on Earth* (1939) is an antiwar story, made all the more startling since the story of “peace on Earth” is how all the humans killed one another and is delivered by a kindly, grandfatherly mouse on Christmas.

Insects have also served duty as surrogate humans. Aesop’s fable of the *Ant and the Grasshopper* is a strong argument for the work ethic. Dreamwork’s movie, *Antz* (1998), has a more ambiguous view of the same.

TONGUE IN CHEEK ADVENTURE

Most tales in print and in animation involving four-fingered talking mice are somewhat offbeat adventure stories, with Disney's *Great Mouse Detective* (1986) serving as a good example. A quick summary of the film's plot — a little girl enlists the help of an acerbic detective in finding her kidnapped father — does not sound particularly amusing, yet the movie is extremely funny. The villain is a hilarious send-up of every penny-dreadful megalomaniac who ever lived, and Basil's slow burns are a joy to behold. Disney/Pixar's *A Bug's Life* (1998) essentially has the same plot as Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1957), but is played for laughs.

Gamers are an irreverent lot, and often bend adventures into comedies. The average role-playing session feels much like a talking mouse film, with moments of drama interspersed with otherworldly comedy and slapstick. This approach permits the Game Master to bow to the inevitable.

USING THIS BOOK

Big Ears, Small Mouse is the first genre sourcebook for *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* that does not focus on Japanese animation. This book provides rules and guidelines for creating intelligent, small animal and insect characters, and for using them in role-playing campaigns. There have been two main types of talking mice in fiction. The first type parallels human life; Disney's Mickey Mouse lives in a suburban home, drives a gas-powered car, and interacts with ducks and dogs who live nearby. Steve Lafler's comic, *BugHouse*, (1998) has a cast of insects, but is really about human jazz musicians and drug abuse. The second approach allows small animals and insects to walk erect and speak languages. For some reason, the humans never notice the parallel civilization literally under their feet. This is the approach of *BESMouse*.

