

# on Rattus Rattus Incendius

The Doctor swirls his glass reflectively. "Ah, yes, Istanbul. I had travelled there with my Master in the Arts. The Sultan is renowned for his learning and generosity, and my master had hoped to take advantage. Ahem, of the former. He had sent me to the markets to experience the local culture, and it was as I stumbled from a coffee house that I heard, 'Hist!'

"'Hist, yourself,' I cried, 'And hist me no more!' I was somewhat the worse for the coffee that I had drunk, a most peculiar brew that I was assured that all of the locals drink, though to this day I've yet to encounter its like.

"'All is in readiness,' said the Hister, in an unmistakable Prussian accent, 'Why are you not already at the Sultan's palace? Quickly, take these rats to the palace, and the plans of I, Rafeal Von Mouchtenstein, shall be realised at last!'

"'Good Lord,' I said. 'Is that 'Mousy' Von Mouchtenstein, of the University of Munich? I have not seen you since Prague!'

"'Mein Gott,' said von Mouchtenstein, 'but it is my old chum 'Butters' van Barrow! My apologies, I had mistaken you for someone else!'

"'Mousy,' I said, 'do you remember that mad friend of ours who had the insane idea to breed rats for purposes of warfare? Complete loon, he was, what was his name?'

"'That loon,' he said, in darkening tones, 'was none other than myself! You all laughed and called me 'Mousy'! But you shall laugh no longer, for that rat you are holding is none other than my finest creation, Rattus rattus Incendius! I have spent many years in the Kaiser's husbandry yards perfecting the breed, but now, with the aid of a visionary Prussian nobleman who bears an unnatural resemblance to yourself, I shall prove my genius to the world by blowing up the Sultan and much of his palace! And the delightful Lady Katherine' (you see here, indeed, the source of my own mispronunciation, for which I apologise profusely) 'will finally see my obvious talents fall madly in love with me, and we shall raise many fine children and rodents together!'

"'Good Lord,' I said again, and threw the rat over my shoulder, where it landed in a watermelon vendor's cart, and, to my everlasting surprise, exploded." The Doctor takes a sip of wine. "Since the man was clearly mad, I raced off to warn the Sultan. However, when I arrived it was to see my villainous cousin presenting the Sultan with a large gift of cheese, compliments of the Kaiser! Even as he was carrying out the dastardly presentation, I could see an evil-looking rat (which also had, may I say, a rather queasy aspect), eying of that same said cheese! With no thought for my own safety, I threw myself at the rat, but it was quicker than I and raced around the corner!" The doctor is gesticulating wildly at this stage, his eyes flashing with remembered excitement. "Rounding the corner, I ran as fast as I could to intercept the rat, when I all but collided with a large pile of rat-filled cages. Crouched over the cages was von Mouchtenstein, who had a small explosive device wrapped in cheese in one hand and a large rat in the other. 'You fiend!' I cried, 'and, indeed, you fraud! You have not bred exploding rats, you have merely inserted small explosive devices into perfectly normal rats! The Royal Society shall hear of this!'

"Von Mouchtenstein stood as if too give a loud and bombastic speech, no doubt intending to denounce me for my lack of vision, when he saw the rat I had been chasing eying off the large supply of cheese he had about his person. He paled, and ran, the rat in hot pursuit. Thinking quickly, I released the remaining rats, and when last I saw 'Mousy' he was being pursued by a pack of Rattus rattus Incendius through the streets of Istanbul!"

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