

A Plague on Both Your Burrows

By

J. E. Clarke

Copyright
Janetgoodman@yahoo.com
917-328-5253

FADE IN ON:

INT. SEWER - DAY

A dark claustrophobic hub, where several pipes converge. Rust pockmarks walls. Trash and water on the floor.

Frantic little feet PATTERN overhead. Far away, a VOICE cries out.

VOICE

Heads up. It ran over there!

CLANG! Something heavy whacks metal. Vibrations dance through the sewer, rattle every wall.

A rush of WATER spews from a pipe in one corner. Metal BULGES as the tube spits out:

ROGER: a rat so coated in muck he looks like a mutated Raisinette that sprouted eyes and a tail.

Roger hits the floor, furry ass first.

ROGER

Ow!

GIBLET, an almost spherical rodent, nibbles a mini candy bar. Roger "splashes down". Giblest blinks, shocked.

GIBLET

Roger, back already? Wow, that's quick!

The water - petering out - dumps one last insult of goo on Roger's muddy ears and head.

ROGER

Blech!

He licks gunk off his whiskers. Tastes...

ROGER

(Brooklyn account)

Pringles Sour Cream. Classic!

GIBLET

Goodie! Did you bring more?

Giblest claps his paws. A SNORT echoes from the other side of the sewer "nook."

A tattered library copy of Sun Tzu's "Art of War" lies propped open against a wall.

Behind it, a rat paw reaches up, flips the page.

Another snort. Roger and Gibleet exchange looks. As...

BENJAMIN peeks an angular rat face over the cover. The opposite of Roger, Benjamin wears SPECTACLES fashioned from beer-bottle-bottoms and a bent paper clip. Not a hair out of place, this rat's OCD level clean.

Stepping away from his book, Ben gives Roger the once over: ears to toe.

BENJAMIN

Gibleet, I'm afraid it seems our trusty scout came back empty pawed.

(sniffs)

Inappropriately filthy, too.

Mortified, Roger gulps. He brushes mud from his fur. Some spatters poor Gibleet's face.

ROGER

Ben, ya gotta believe me. It's all the humans' fault. I tried to avoid 'em, but they're poppin' up everywhere these days. I swear, they're breeding like cockroaches...

A squeaky voice echoes from inside a nearby PEPSI CAN. An antennae'd head pops out: WATERBUG LILY.

LILY

Can it with the stereotypes, cheese eater!

GIBLEET

(giggles)

"Can". Lily, you're so funny!

Lily scowls. Roger's ears sag in shame.

ROGER

Sorry. No offense meant, OK?

LILY

Whatever. Specism sucks, dude.

Lily ducks back into the Pepsi. Operating it like a hamster wheel, she rolls it (and herself) away.

Leaving Roger and a scowling Benjamin nose to nose.

Giblet picks up a soggy popcorn kernel. Watching the confrontation, he chows down. Down deep in the "pipes", entertainment doesn't get more intense than this!

BENJAMIN

(to Roger)

You're blaming the humans for this... catastrophe?

ROGER

I was "this" close -

(Gestures with a paw pinch)

From half of a chicken wing, when bam!
Out of nowhere, a human swung a frikkin' bat at me!

BENJAMIN

A what?

ROGER

(panting)

Two leggers, as far as the eye can see. I had to bust through that clogged pipe, or I woulda gotten squished into 2D!

Benjamin sniffs Roger, gags. The scholarly rat steps back for fresher air.

BENJAMIN

A wise rat learns from his mistakes. Next round, utilize more brains and less-

He waves a paw at Roger.

BENJAMIN

Whatever you imagine THIS is. If you'd stop to think for once, you'd understand-

In one corner, a small DRAIN PIPE trickles clean water. A small ladder beside it leads upwards to sunlight, and a grass covered hole.

Benjamin strolls to the pipe, washes Roger's stench off his fur. Pontificating with each paw scrub:

BENJAMIN

What separates men from mice is SMARTS.

Ben glares at clueless Giblet: his insult clear.

BENJAMIN

Down here, some of us may need to rely on mere instinct. But up there on the surface...

(Ben points)
Survival requires smarts. And strategy.

ROGER
Strategy against a baseball bat? I almost
got Babe Ruthed up there!

BENJAMIN
Who?

Ben trots over to a MAGNIFYING GLASS and a moldy stack of
more books. Digging past one titled "Game Theory", he
finds another: "Dark Ages: History of Medieval Times."

Throwing it open, Benjamin points out a page to Roger.

BENJAMIN
I know it's not your forte, but please do
try and read this time.

A WOODCUTTING OF A RAT AND SICK PEASANT catch Roger's
eye. He tries to sound out unfamiliar words.

ROGER
Black deeeth?

BENJAMIN
That's "Death", a phenomenon ALL species
seek to avoid. Another word for this
variant - Plague: a disease which killed
quite a few "two leggers" in the 1300s.
And I give you a single guess who
accomplished this heroic deed?

ROGER
You're asking me?

BENJAMIN
Rhetorically.

ROGER
But... I dig sports, not history.

BENJAMIN
(snaps)
Guess anyway. Try at least!

Roger waffles; his eyes flit between the illustrations.

ROGER
I dunno. Peasants?

BENJAMIN
No, you flea carrying knob. Us!

Roger gawks at the picture. His eyes grow wide. So does Ben's Machiavellian grin.

ROGER
You're suggesting we -

GIBLET
(giggles)
Infect the humans? Oooh, neat! Can I help?

BENJAMIN
Hardly. That would be dirty. And way gauche. No, I think it far better to keep our dignity intact, and bluff.

Turning away, Ben digs behind the pipe and retrieves:

A USED TOOTHPASTE TUBE. He shows it to Roger.

BENJAMIN
Judging by your unkempt looks, I doubt you'd fathom what this is. Let alone be able to pronounce it right.

ROGER
(reads)
Creeeeeeeeeast?

BENJAMIN
Close enough. It's toothpaste, a mouth based cleaner which in the right innovative paws, has a myriad of uses. Not only does it keep one's teeth minty fresh, but it also produces a cornucopia of foam. Which is perfect to simulate -

Roger and Giblet gasp simultaneously.

ROGER AND GIBLET
Plague!

BENJAMIN
(laughs)
Ah, finally you catch up. Good.

Benjamin reaches for the ladder, starts to climb. Roger freaks.

ROGER
Wait. What are you doing?

BENJAMIN
Does your ignorance ever stop?

Roger cocks a muddy ear. Somewhere above, human feet STOMP. Human voices CHATTER, too. A very ominous sound.

ROGER

They call it a "party." They're still up there.

(shudders)

Waiting.

Benjamin's stomach GURGLES. Roger twitches at that, too.

BENJAMIN

That chicken wing is waiting, too. A buffet no wise rat would refuse. As long as I look like I have the Plague...

Ben flashes a bubbly smile, full of toothpaste foam.

BENJAMIN

Those pesky humans will keep their distance for sure!

ROGER

You don't know what you're doing. Stop!

BENJAMIN

(sniffs)

Don't second guess your intellectual superiors. Listen, Roger - and learn. I promise to bring back a *few* crumbs.

Benjamin daintily ascends the ladder.

BENJAMIN

In the meantime, stay down here and mind Gibleet.

ROGER

But...

BENJAMIN

I'll be back in a few shakes of my tail. No buts, Roger.

(laughs)

Except this one, of course!

A self-satisfied Ben swishes his tail in Roger's face. He darts up through the hole, and... disappears.

Roger and Gibleet hold their breath. What next?

Suddenly: the PATTER of rat feet. Ben yelps in joy.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
Kentucky Fried? Even better than my
wildest calculations!

A CRASH interrupts. A frightened SQUEAL. Then... silence.

Roger cringes. The human voice from before CHEERS.

VOICE
I *knew* that little fucker'd come back for
seconds!

Roger turns sad eyes to a shivering Giblet.

ROGER
You saw, I tried to warn him. But no,
Ben's too "intellectual". Sports was my
thing, not his. I should've told him what
a bat was, huh?

Giblet's jaw drops. As does his popcorn. SPLASH. The
round rat blinks up at the hole, cowers.

GIBLET
(whispers)
They'll come down and get us next.

Roger side eyes his little pal, then the hole.

ROGER
No they won't. Humans are too big. And
we're too insignificant. They've got lots
of other stuff to do up there.

GIBLET
But without Benjamin, we're doomed! We
need a leader. Don't we?

Roger trots over to the book on Game Theory. Picking up
the magnifying glass, he flips the book open. Squints.

ROGER
Welp, baseball season aside... time to
read. Rat scout's honor, Gib. I promise,
we'll work this out.

Giblet smiles. His child-like trust in Roger grows.

FINAL FADEOUT: