

A Plague Rats Tale

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2017 A Plague Rats Tale

My earliest memory as a young rat started on an average day in Londinium. I was in my nest in the thatched roof of a bakery. This nesting place made it easier to find food and smelled of fresh bread each morning. Horses pulled carriages in the streets below. The air was fresh with a cool spring breeze. In the distance I heard the sound of one of those bells that humans ring when other humans are putting one of their dead in a hole. Humans were selling things on the corner of the streets. Rats were being kicked when they came near them.

It was just normal, until...

Suddenly I heard a human screaming. I stuck my head out of the thatch to see what the commotion was. There were a lot of humans gathering around something in the street. They blocked my view so I couldn't quite see what had happened. Although soon afterward two big humans carried away a strange, unpleasant smelling human covered in black marks. After that day I saw similar things happening more and more often.

Then, other rats wouldn't come back from hunting. As well as that many sick, smelly rats were dying in their nests. It felt like the human's bells rang nonstop.

After a few months I didn't know many other rats and I was the only one left in the thatched roof. Some of the rats that went missing were lying down in the streets dead, covered in green slimy, stringy things. Although rats were not the only corpses on the street. There were dogs, mice, rabbits and cats too. However, I wasn't overly bothered about the cats.

Then, out of nowhere, I started to see strange cloaked figures a lot of the time. These things had the body of a normal human but the head of a bird! They smelled like lavender and other flowers. These bird-men were stealing dead humans! Well, only the ones with the black marks on their faces. They took them away with a human in a dress chanting and holding a strange hooked stick and wood object, like a cross, with beads hanging around its hand. I heard from other rats that they dig a big hole and throw all of the dead humans into it. Sometimes I can smell burning flesh on the wind for days afterwards. The smelly humans were calling themselves the "Black Death" or "Plague". Strange.

I could see clearly into the streets when jumping from roof to roof. There were carts everywhere, similar to the ones humans use to bring water from the river to the village. However piled on top of them were more dead humans with the black marks. The humans wheeling them around continuously shouted,

"Bring out 'ya dead, bring out 'ya dead!"

The shouting seemed to attract other humans that pile their dead with the black marks onto the already big pile of dead bodies!

There were also long lines that led to a small well where one human was shouting;

"Only clean water for miles! Lake water's full of them ghetto people!"

Some humans would casually walk along the streets, then out of nowhere they would drop dead to the ground. They used to get assisted by other humans when this happened, but now they are avoided like some type of... disease.

Then there were the humans that sold 'holy medals' to other humans. One day they would be attracting a lot of other humans, giving them shiny things on strings that they hung around their necks. The next day, that human was coughing, then it would have the black marks. The day after, it would be gone.

Some humans ran away from the humans with the black marks, screaming and shouting and protecting their young.

The smells were getting stronger every day; they were worse in the heat. It smelled of rotting and burning flesh all the time. Since all this had started, there had been a bigger food supply for us rats that were left. There were dead cats and once a horse just slowly rotting away.

The other rats said they were very tasty; they offered some to me, but I didn't like eating the new food. It smelled weird and was also covered in black marks. I just continued to snatch from the bakery, but even the bakery smelled foul. I started to take corn and water from a nearby grain warehouse. The corn was dry and brown and the water was musty but it was better than the smelly rotting corpses.

One night, I was taking some bread from the bakery. The floor started to make creaking noises. A big human crawled into the thatch with a big pan and yelled,

"Rat!"

I turned to run as the human threw pots and pans at me. I ran out the front door as the human continued to shout and throw spoons and plates at me. As it wasn't safe for me to go back to the bakery, I lived in the sewer drains with the other rats.

It started to get hotter and more humid as the days went by. The rotting smells were unbearable in this heat and filled the town. Sometimes I thought I could smell smoke as well.

"CRASH!"

I woke up one night next to a gutter to the sound of humans screaming. I looked up only to see houses burning. The red hot flames that spread from roof top to roof top had surrounded me. I saw a group of rats running away from the fire. I ran as fast as I could to join them, trying not to look back at the fire that was eating the village, but for a split second that I did look back, I remember seeing fire exploding out of the bakery windows. We ran and ran, dodging the flames and avoiding the humans. We raced across the road, under the horses that were running around, still attached to their carriages.

Suddenly everything went white for a moment. I felt agonising pain down my tail. Ignoring it, I kept running as fast as I could. We finally reached the river where the fire had not reached yet. We stopped for a bit near the edge. I started to feel this throbbing pain down my back. I turned around to see blood dripping down my tail. Then to my horror I realised I had no tail! I started to feel dizzy, but I ignored it, I had to. I was hardly bleeding anymore, but it still hurt. We jumped in and paddled to the other side. The water was cold and brown and there were dead, rotting bodies of humans, cats, dogs and pigs floating in it.

When I finally reached the edge, I climbed out and looked back at what was left of the town. The crackles of fire and screams of humans was the only sounds I could hear. The town crumbled bit-by-bit under the red and orange flames.

I turned to join the other rats, but to my despair they had gone. The fire was not far, so I ran away. However after a while I couldn't catch my breath. I slowed down to a steady pace. Wherever I ran there were no other rats. I walked for many days, starving. I bared the boiling days and the freezing nights. The dust swirled across my face like a rattlesnake on the hunt. Some days I would find a grub, or insect to eat; others I wasn't so lucky. There was nothing but brown grass as far as my eyes could see.

Just as I was about to give up I saw lights in the distance. It was another town. It was smaller than my old one, but there was nowhere else to go. There were humans here too. They were afraid of rats, but I stayed out of sight. I found a small farm that grew food, and was not too far away from a river. The rats allowed me to live with them and I've been there ever since.

"And that's how I lost my tail," I said to the young rat who had asked me the question.