

## **To Build a Better Mousetrap**

by Alexander Hollins

SNAP! SCHRIPPPP.

With a pop and wet ripping noise, the rat carcass nearly split in two from the metal bug emerging from it, wings out like blades. The corpse hung swinging from a rope, lower body barely held on by spine and shreds of muscle. The bug fell to the ground, where, glowing, it folded itself back up small. The glow faded, and Wilbur bent over, gingerly picking up the blood stained pyramic.

“What did I tell you Orville? No rat will survive that.”

Wilbur looked over at his brother, who looked on, unimpressed.

“Fine, you shove it down a dead rat’s throat, it slices it like roast beef. How you gonna get the rat to eat it?”

Wilbur looked down and away, a frown stealing the smile from his face. “Yeah, that is the problem. Apparently it tastes bad, and they spit it out.”

He looked up, smiling again. “That’s why I asked for your help. You’ve been working for Beadman’s on the beverage line. “

“Yeaah... And?”

“So you can help me make it taste good to rats.”

Orville snorted in disgust. “The shit I know about what a rat likes to taste? Cheese and dung?”

“Come on brother! Please? Imagine it now, The Better Mousetrap, from Orville and Wilbur, the wright brothers!”

Days later, Wilbur entered his brother’s private workshop. Tubes bubbled around him, a dozen rat tongues hung from a board, silvery wire connecting them to bells. “Orville? Are you in here?”

“One second.”

His voice range around the room, Wilbur turned his head this way and that, searching.

“Have you thought about my problem? The rat trap?”

“I said, one second!”

A loud bang echoed through the workshop, smoke raising from a corner. Wilbur jumped, shrieking, before seeing his brother at the center of the smoke, goggles over his eyes.

“You scream like a girl, brother! Quick, come here. “

Wilbur sheepishly walked around several columns of tall equipment filled with a variety of colored liquids. His brother was pouring a mixture from a still smoking flask through a filter of copper and gold wire. The liquid passing through turned a glowing golden, dripping thickly into a small vial.

“Concentrated oils, Wilbur. “ Orville answered his brother’s unspoken question. He put the flask down, and added a single drop of something to the liquid. The gold swirled with red and green, before settling down on a dark turquoise. “Good, good...”

Orville took the vial and gingerly walked to the macabre array of tongues. One wagging finger brought Wilbur trailing along.

“Each tongue has a different taste wired from it. If the taste center is stimulated...”

He dipped a wire loop into the vial, then dragged it along each grey-pink slab of meat in turn. The fine silver bells tinkled out at every touch.

“Ha! Perfect. Any rat gets a whiff of that will be starving. And if it touches their lips, it will be eaten. ”

Orville put a stopper on the vial, and handed it to his brother.

“Shall we test it, in the field?”

One hand fidgeted nervously with his collar, while the other hand held three mouse trap beetles, seasoned with his brother’s potion. A series of cages stood on the table, each holding a hungry rat. Wilbur looked at his brother, next to him, who nodded. He tossed the first beetle into a cage. It landed, then glowed briefly as it came to life, wings fluttering. Every rat at the table turned toward it, noses in the air, sniffing. intently. The one sharing a cage with the fluttering fake insect lunged, stuffing the doomed creation into its gullet. The brothers watched intently, five seconds, ten, thirty. Nothing happened.

“NEEEXT.”

Wilbur tossed the next one, which again, attracted every rat’s attention. It was eaten just as

quick. In seconds, the expected ticking filled the air. Wilbur counted in his head, but instead of the single beetle bursting from his stomach, the rat vanished in a cloud of steel razor wings and shards of beetle, propelling a fine mist of blood ahead of it. He held back a scream as a few small pieces of metal embedded into his arm, raised to shield his face.

“Okay, a little too much power there. Try the third.”

Wilbur nodded, ignoring the pinpricks of pain in his arm, and threw the third. Moments after it went down the rat’s mouth, the beast started quivering and shaking, and fell over, blood running from it’s mouth. Wilbur wanted to lean in to watch, but after the last fiasco, knew better. The rat burst into flames, reduced in moments to greasy ash.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

The brother’s attention was drawn to the first rat. SCHRIP. The beetle launched out of the rat, ripping it open with a spray of blood and gore, before landing on the table and tucking its wings back in.

“So, time delay but properly working, explosion of parts, burning.” Orville clapped his brother on the back. “My part works, just need to work on yours.”

Wilbur pushed his brother away. “They worked fine before. It must be an interaction of the oil with the pyramic. I’ll... see what I can do.”

A month later, Wilbur made a triumphant check mark on a sheet of paper as a rat twitched its final throes at his feet.

“Knock knock!” Orville’s voice carried across the field where Wilbur had set up his testing grounds. A large metal cage of rats teemed with them, shelves within where nearly a hundred rats fought for space.

“Orville, just in time for the final testing! This field has a few dozen of our traps through it. I’m going to release these babies, and see how many we get. “ With that, he tapped the side of the large metal cage, rousing many of the sleeping rats and bringing a collected noise of yowling and hissing from inside.

Orville stared at the throng of rodents for a moment in disgust, then looked back at his brother. “About that...”

Two large men appeared from behind Orville, sliding from behind him as if through a door in the air.

“Mr. Beadman wants to thank you for your work on his new mousetrap. It’ll be a best seller.”

“Orville...”

Orville wrung his hands, looking back and forth between the men and his brother. “You see, my boss caught wind of what I was doing with rats, and... well...”

“And here we are. We’ll take those, and maybe we’ll feed them to you. Or if you ask nice, we’ll just break your head open and let you die quick.”

“Hey, hey, that’s not the deal! I gave you the formula, he gives you the bugs, we go our merry way.”

The muscle grinned at Orville. “Naw, Mr. Beadman doesn’t like guys who think they can compete. Try and stop us, and we’ll feed you to the rats too. “

Wilbur stood stunned, unable to speak, fear taking his breath. Orville fought with himself for a moment, swallowed, and looked at his brother. “I am so sorry. I didn’t... I thought...”

“No, you didn’t think! That’s the problem. Well done... brother.”

“Hey guys, you think he’s at least entitled to a last drink?”

The killers looked at each other for a moment, then one nodded. “Yeah, yeah, make it quick. “

Orville walked over to his brother, pulling a glass bottle out of his pocket. “Here, take a sip.”

Wilbur looked quizzically at his brother, but popped the top on the bottle and drank. His eyes popped open, his face brightened. “What... what is that? It tastes like drinking sunshine!”

Orville took the bottle back, slugging it himself. “MMMM. Latest from Beadman’s labs, hits every taste bud in the most pleasing way.”

“That that new super drink?” The brothers turned. “I’d heard about that. Lemme taste.”

“Sure, sure. Let him get one more.” Orville handed the bottle to his brother, who involuntarily took a sip as Orville stuck his hand into Wilbur’s coat. Orville gave him a quick wink as he took the bottle, and the rats in the cage behind them seemed to take interest, crowding to one side of the cage, sniffing the air.

Orville capped the bottle and tossed it. “Here.”

With a quick motion the hired muscle caught the glittering flask, popped the top, and took a long drink before passing the bottle to his associate. “Man, that is good!” The other goon nodded as he drank. “Wait... that’s weird. There’s a backtaste. Like, cheese and straw, blech. “

The rats started chittering, pushing each other in the cage.

Orville smiled and held up a small vial of orange liquid. "Why, that would be the rat bait formula. You both just drank enough to coat a thousand bugs. The oil moves quick, even now it's in your sweat, your breath." He motioned towards the rat cage, all the rats quivering, sniffing towards the men. "They can smell it already."

The goon's eyes widened, as they started to push each other away from the cage, away from the brothers. Wilbur reach over, flicking the catch open, and the cage door swung violently away, a flood of rats streaming towards the doomed pair.

Orville and Wilbur both turned away as the screams filled the air, rats devouring flesh. The screams lasted almost a minute before silence fell, but the rats continued chewing.

"Now what?" Wilbur looked at his brother in anger.

"Now... we run. Screw the Beadmans, we'll go somewhere, change our names."

"Leave your sweet gig behind? You really ready to go on the run from them, for me?"

Orville reached out and scruffed his brother's hair. "Hey, money is money. But no one screws with my little brother except me. "