A RAT'S TALE (revised)

[Orchestral Introduction]

Chorus: Back and back the rivers run,
Back the moon and circling sun,
Turn the clocks to yesterday,
Slow the stars and Milky Way,
Stop the brain from hurtling on,
Search the heart for love long gone,
Turn the winter back to spring,
Listen to your memory sing.

[With German accent, the Narrator speaks as
Heinrich the Rat]

Heinrich: Quiet! Wunderbar, my children. Very sweet. But who do you think you are, the Vienna Boys Choir? You’re only the backup singers. So back up! Now comes the headliner! That’s me.

[To Audience] Guten Abend, ladies, gentlemen and children. Allow me to introduce myself ~ I make so few appearances. Heinrich Ratte is my name, vindication is my game. I come from a quaint German village on the river Weser. A tiny whistle-stop, a quiet borough, the place of my childhood - the town of Hamelin. Does that perhaps ring a bell?

[Pause] The river Weser? Maybe two bells?

[Pause] How about Rats? Maybe now comes the big Glockenspiel, hm?

[Pause] Ja, this is the story of the Pied Piper. But it will not be Herr Robert Browning’s cheap tabloid version. Nein! It will be the true story. That fateful day when the Pied Piper came to Hamelin, I call Pearl Harbor Day of 1376. A day that will live in infamy!

You must realize, this is very painful for me. We’re talking six hundred years ago. Fortunately, my great-great-greatgreat-great-great-great grandparents survived. Grandpa Ludwig left a written eye-witness record of that tragic day when the Piper led thirty thousand rodents to their watery grave. Talk about Helter Skelter! He survived because he was volunteering at the YRCA ~ the Young Rats’ Christian Association. Grandma Greta was sick in bed from rat poison. Thank God for the written account. Today it would be on TV within the hour.

[Confidentially]
The "Pie-eyed Piper" is what Grandpa Ludwig called him. He was hooked on something, that's for sure, with that cockamamie flute of his. All those high-frequency notes went zing! right to his brain. He came one July day to our little town of cobbled streets and whitewashed houses, and stuck his head inside the door of the Town Hall meeting. “I'll get rid of your Rats,” he said.

Mayor Dinckelhoff and the Town Council should’ve said, “Am-scray, Dummkopf!” But it was election year and they were, shall we say, in deep political doo-doo. The reason was, you see, a slight problem with the Rats of Hamelin. Over-population!

Chorus: Rats! Everywhere, Rats! They fought the dogs and killed the cats And bit the babies in the cradles.

Heinrich: Grandpa was not a baby biter!

Chorus: They ate the cheeses out of the vats, And licked the porridge from the ladles.

Heinrich: Grandma was not a moocher!

Chorus: Made nests in gentlemen's Sunday hats, And even spoiled the ladies' chats, By drowning their speaking With shrieking and squeaking In fifty different sharps and flats!

Heinrich: [To Chorus] Achtung! [To Audience] May I be frank? It's a deplorable fact that for centuries we Rats have borne the humiliating stigma of public scorn. We've become the symbol of all that's revolting. Cruel epithets abound. For example ~ [To Chorus] My choir of angels, please? Bitte?

Chorus: I smell a Rat!

Heinrich: Try it once more, meine Kinder, but TO-GETH-ER. Ignore the conductor.

Chorus: I smell a Rat!

Heinrich: [To Audience] Ah, ja! I smell a rat! But it's just an expression. You don't really smell a Rat. Who ever smelled a Rat? A Skunk, maybe, but
not a Rat! Not a Chipmunk, Squirrel, Woodchuck, Gopher or Hamster. Odorless. And the Bunny? Long silky ears, soft cuddly body, Easter festivities up the ying yang, pretty baskets, green excelsior, colored eggs, gumdrops and that yucky milk chocolate. Ach!

Need I remind you of the Academy Awards of 1996? Who was nominated for an Oscar? A PIG! You think Pigs don't smell? Have I got news for you! First it was Rin-Tin-Tin, then Bambi, then Dumbo, then Lassie and now a Pig named Babe. When is it going to be our turn? Can a Pig scale a building in a scurry?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Tunnel under grain elevators in a hurry?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Slither through sewers?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Of course, not! Can a pig leap from tree to tree?

Chorus: No!

Heinrich: Swim from wharf to wharf?

Chorus: Not on your lorf!

Heinrich: Yet nobody ever says, I smell a Pig. It’s always ~

Chorus: I smell a Rat!

Heinrich: Many intolerant slurs have crept into our language. And at which minority’s expense are most of these disparaging and politically incorrect remarks made?

[To Chorus]

Hands?

Chorus: [Hands up] Rats, mein Herr!

Heinrich: Precisely!

[Tearfully]

Why us? We have no agenda.
Chorus: [Chanting] Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc.

Heinrich: [Bette Davis] What a dump! Peter, Peter, Peter, when are you going to clean up this Rat Hole?

Chorus: Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc.

[Police siren]
Heinrich: [Godfather] Dino, lean close. I don't have much time. You'll be godfather now. Find out who Ratted on the Family. I think Salvatore is the Rat Fink.

Chorus: Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc.

Heinrich: [Mae West] Beulah, honey, when ya finish peelin' me that grape, I want you to Rat my hair. It's sittin' over there on the microwave.

Chorus: Rats, Rats, Rats . . . etc.

Heinrich: And last, but by no means least ~ the cruelest cut of all ~

Boy: [James Cagney] Ya dirty Rat!

Heinrich: [To Audience] It's the same hatred that played itself out on a summer day long ago in that teutonic hotbed of hidebound hostility, that hopeless haven of hypocrisy, that humble, hapless hamlet of ~ no, not Honolulu, not Hong Kong, not Hackensack ~ in Hartford, Hereford and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly happen ~ but in Hamelin in 1376, we had Hurricane Piper!

"Come in, Herr Piper!" said the Mayor, heaving his pendulous paunch toward the door. Not that Mayor Dinckelhoff was fat. No, no. Just a little broad-shouldered around the hips. So in he came ~ the Piper and his curséd Flöte. Flute, to you simple people.

Chorus: His queer long coat from heel to head Was half of yellow and half of red, And he himself was tall and thin, With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin, And light loose hair, and swarthy skin There was no guessing his kith and kin.

Heinrich: It'th true. There wath no gething hith kith and kin. Not to change the subject, but everytime it's a Year of the Rat, you put out a lousy postage stamp. But we don't sell like Elvis or Marilyn. There's no Rat Holiday
for postal workers. No Hallmark Hall of Fame Rat Special. No Rat Star placed on Hollywood Boulevard. No Andrew Lloyd Webber musical called *Rats.*

*Angrily*
Heinrich Ratte is my name! Vindication is my game! That's my bumper sticker ~ with my picture, of course. We Rats have been given a bum rap. Why isn't an informer called a Mouse Fink? Why can't you throw money down a Gopher Hole? Why isn't it Moles who abandon a sinking ship?

Tom and Jerry, Bugs Bunny, Garfield, Sylvester, T.S. Eliot, get lost! Let's hear it for the Rat Heroes who give their lives to biomedical research, who orbit the planet in space labs, who sacrifice personal happiness to be pets to grubby little brats! Puss 'n' Boots, go suck an egg!

*Sniffing*
Hold it. I smell something. Don't you smell it?

*To Conductor*
Maestro? Can't you smell it? An intoxicating aroma.

*Pause*
Aha. I smell a Swiss cheese sandwich in the viola section.

*Finding a paper bag containing a sandwich*
Look at this –

*To Violist*
Your mother never heard of Miracle Whip? And it's not even on pumpernickel.

*To Conductor*
I notice the writer gave you no lines. So let me say this, Maestro ~ you have to give us a Rat Theme.

**Conductor:** A Rat Theme?

**Heinrich:** I thought you had no lines. You have to come up with a Rat Theme, Maestro. We have Lara’s Theme. We have the Jedi Theme, the Titanic Theme, and let's not forget the Theme from *Exodus.* But we have no Rat Theme. This is not good!

**Chorus:** The Pied Piper, mein Herr ~

**Heinrich:** All right, back to the plot. Here's what happened. The Piper approached the Mayor and Council. "If I rid your town of Rats," he said, "will you give me a thousand in royal silver?"

“We'll give you that and more,” burbled Mayor Dinckelhoff.

**Chorus:** So into the street the Piper stepped,
And blew three notes upon his flute ~
Tootle-ee-toot!
Tootle-ee-toot!
Tootle-ee-toot!

Then all of a sudden was heard a grumbling,
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling!
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling!

Heinrich:  Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats!

Chorus:  Rats!

Heinrich:  Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats!

Chorus:  Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives
Followed the Piper for their lives.
His music, his piping, drove them wild,
Their brains entranced, their feet beguiled!
From street to street he piped advancing
And step by step they followed dancing ~

Heinrich:  Until the river's brink appeared ~

Chorus:  And in they plunged ~
And disappeared.

Heinrich:  [Deeply moved] And in they plunged ~
And disappeared.

Chorus:  Cold the river, black the night,
Vast the sky of splintered light,
Riverrun and thunderwall,
Brambleburn and shadowfall,
Eye of silver, heart of lead,
Hope is drowning, love is dead,
Sleep in winter, dream in flame,
From the ashes sing your name.

[Orchestra ends dreamily with a flute obligato]

Heinrich:  Maestro, schüppen der Musik! What is this, anyway, a flute concerto?

[Going to podium]
Let me see that score!

[Perusing it]
Who authorized this flute solo? Did not my agent specifically say, no Flötenspieler?

[To Flautist]
It’s cut. You’re dismissed! Take a hike!

[To bewildered Conductor, as Flautist exits]
Nein, nein! It’s too late to apologize.

[To Audience]
So unprofessional. Appalling.

[Yelling to Flautist]
And watch out for Peter and the Wolf!

[To Audience]
Flute-players! Always loitering around orchestras, looking for a handout!

[To Conductor]
You should thank me. I’ll save the orchestra money, or my name isn’t Heinrich T.W. Ratte.

Chorus: T.W.?

Heinrich: [To Audience] I suppose you’re wondering what T.W. stands for? Everyone does. I get so much e-mail. T.W. stands for “Twitching Whiskers.” It’s a family tradition ~ one pup in every litter is honored with that name. I was the lucky one in my litter. There I was, suckling between my fourteen brothers and sisters, when all of a sudden ~

Chorus: Mein Herr! The story!

Heinrich: Ja, ja, the story! Back to the story.

You should’ve heard the village people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple!
“Go!” cried the Mayor, “and get long poles!
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!”

And then, wouldn’t you know it, this Pied Piper, this contract killer from Hell ~ Anthony Hopkins, go home! ~ he marched up to Mayor Dinckelhoff and demanded his blood money! “A thousand pieces of royal silver you promised,” he said.

“A joke! It was a joke!” laughed the Mayor. “You flootled on your flute and the Rattties went bonkers. It was the piercing notes you played. A thousand in silver for that? We could’ve done it ourselves on a
sweet potato! Come now, we give you twenty-five pieces of silver and a stein of schnapps. Bottoms up!"

Chorus: So into the street the Piper stepped
And blew three notes upon his flute ~
Tootle-ee-toot!
Tootle-ee-toot!
Tootle-ee-toot!

And all of a sudden was heard a rustling
And the rustling grew to a mighty bustling!
And out of the houses the children came scattering,
Small feet were pattering,
Wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering!
All of the rosy boys and girls
With sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping ~

Heinrich: [Screaming] Schweige! Put a cork in it!
[To Audience]
Jabber, jabber, jabber. I’m the headliner! Let me tell this. Small feet pattering, wooden shoes clattering, rosy boys and girls following the Piper up High Street ~ past McDonald’s golden arches ~ across the bridge to Koppelberg Hill ~ and through a magic door in the mountain ~ never to be seen again. And the Mayor crying tears of remorse!
[Caustically]
Do we really need another Jackie Collins ending?
[As Mayor]
“I should’ve paid the Piper!” whimpered the Mayor. “I should’ve paid the Piper!”
[To Audience]
The Piper Must Be Paid? So that’s where that came from!
You should’ve saved the Rats, Dummkopf Mayor!

The moral of this story is not The Piper Must Be Paid. The moral is Take a Rat To Lunch. Rats never howl during thunder storms. We don’t whine for food. We don’t need embossed name tags or clump litter. We don’t shred rugs or curtains, and we don’t need rabies shots. We invented rabies!
[To Conductor]
Oh, Maestro, I haven’t had an easy life.
[Violins begin playing]
Ah, mood music. How beautiful. This is the Rat Theme you promised. Our own “Rat-sody in Blue.” I knew once we got rid of that flute, it would all be uphill.

[To Audience]
Would you believe these dull, lifeless eyes were once beautiful, beady pink eyes? I’ve battled cold and heat, hunger and mange, trauma, internal parasites, weak eyes. And I won’t even mention injuries from that wooden thing with the metal clamp that went Snap! when I reached for the Velveeta. Cheese. See this crippled paw? But do I complain? Nein. You might say, I’ve gnawed my way to the top, sometimes barely squeaking by ~ hoping beyond hope to be discovered by somebody big. I’m ready for my closeup, Mr. Spielberg!

[To Conductor]
Thank you for the beautiful Rat Theme.

[To Audience]
Mr. Spielberg could turn this into one helluva movie.

Chorus: Heinrich Ratte is his name!
Vindication is his game!
All he wants is a little fame!

Heinrich: Vindication sucks! I have bigger fish to fry! Ja, fame interests me. I can see it now: “Heinrich T.W. Ratte” on the marquee. Does anyone know Spielberg’s cell number?

Chorus: Ah! Heinrich – Heinrich – T.W. Ratte!

[Orchestra and Chorus hold penultimate chord]

Heinrich: Mickey Mouse! Eat your heart out!

[Orchestra, Chorus & Heinrich swell to finish]

The End