

# Rat Hunter

*by* Larry Strattnr

We came to the dump at dusk to shoot rats. Each carried an automatic .22 rifle with a flashlight taped to its barrel. This was before the days of weapons-grade LED tactical lights sought serial killers in dark houses on television. In these days a good rat-light used three D-cell batteries.

I was the sixth rat hunter. This was my first time joining the noble pursuit of ridding the dump of rats. I had 200 rounds of ammunition in my pockets. The sun set. Sporadic fire commenced as rats began emerging to forage.

It takes a good shot to hit a moving rat. They are small, elusive and smart. Always running to the next shadow they freeze and become invisible in the deeper dark. Rat shooting makes you calculating and accurate in poor conditions, two skills that earned my brother three tours in the jungle shooting elusive rats of a different variety. After three tours my brother became a fully developed rat hunter, calculating, cold, accurate and implacable. He is doing twenty five to life after shooting a few rats in his neighborhood who were, no doubt, hiding in the shadows.

As the newbie rat hunter, once darkness became total, I was directed to stand at the edge of the dump. My fellow hunters arranged their cars in line out near the dump entrance. On a count of three they turned on headlights and rats were caught in a crossfire. I was instructed to hold them in the middle, in the light, among the garbage piles.

It's an old joke. No one holds a mob of stampeding rats in the light. Furthermore, rats run to shadow as I mentioned. No shadow is more inviting than the one between your trouser cuff and your leg. As the newbie, when the headlights come on, you can experience at least one stampeding rat running up the inside of your trousers. I did.

The rat came up my pant leg so fast I froze. Maybe a medium-size rat. It settled down safely in my crotch. I could feel its heart beating.

I have to say, the whole thing felt pretty interesting. I began methodically shooting out headlights and windshields. Cruelty at the hands of idiots generally puts you on the side of those who previously you knew only as rats.

Shouting and cursing leapt at me as my bullets found their marks. I had hitched a ride to the dump so no headlight was mine. I made dump fodder of their cars.

After momentary shock my fellow hunters returned fire. Bullets clipped the night air about me.

I jumped over the edge of the garbage pile and slid to the bottom with the hitchhiker still in my pants. Among piles of putrid human refuse we carefully moved from shadow to shadow, on our way to join the rats.

