# The Rat, His Treadwheel

*by* strannikov

The rat had been informed, assured, cajoled in order to gain his assent—duly lied to, in other words, by the researchers with not one tear of remorse, with no smudge or smear of conscience, lulled by degrees into a lethally false sense of security. He had found their demeanor conscientious if not scrupulous but had failed to discover just where their loyalties resided.

They'd all told him, the lying shits, that his treadwheel would operate entirely under his own power: would he've signed up otherwise? Oh yes, they fed him, plumped him up in the weeks before the experiments began, supplemented his ample diet with ample injections, housed him in his very own cage, kept his water clean, cleaned his turd pellets out daily, moved him without incident from housing cage to treadwheel cage and back with hardly a squeak.

In the early days he'd been free to clamber away without any of the clips attached, with no measurements being taken or recorded. He'd gone along with the gag with naïve enthusiasm at first: his interest began to wane until they fed him two or three more food pellets each hour to keep him clambering in place.

Next came the small clips they attached, sometimes to his ears, sometimes to his legs, sometimes to his tail. According to them, the clips would send the signals they were eager to record to whatever machine recorded them. Clips attached, his task of clambering away on his treadwheel remained, the treadwheel they'd promised would operate only under his own power, the lying shits.

Looking back, some two weeks before he'd reached the end of his treadwheel, the rat never was able to ascertain exactly when things had begun going so dreadfully wrong. He'd overheard the staff mumbling about the new protocol one morning: was that it? How long ago was that? Two weeks, three weeks? An entire month already?

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The “new protocol”, once instituted, consisted of a bent glass tube that angled around the rim of his wire-mesh treadwheel. Once a gloved hand had guided him onto the wheel, the other hand or some other hand would nudge the tube's nozzle so that it was right in front of him, just out of reach. Through the rubber-and-plastic nozzle he was treated to a concoction of rat's milk laced redolently with female rat pheromones of some refined potency. With the new protocol the clips were always to be attached somewhere.

The rat's treadwheel tour commenced in earnest and stayed that way as long as his twitching snout and eager mouth were exposed to the new protocol's feeding tube. The rat's steady and vigorous but stationary pursuit suggested to the rat in due course, however, exposure to an increasingly foul, exasperating stimulus. For all his eager clambering he was never treated to a session with any female rat, and without the fulfillment or relief he naturally expected, the chore of spinning the treadwheel began to become objectionable, the incentive to pursue the proffered illusion began to repel him.

Somewhere in the course of his rodential ramblings, the female rat pheromone potency was further increased, following which, he only dimly perceived, the treadwheel was no longer simply measuring his somatic and cortical responses but began ever so modestly to acquire a velocity and rate of spin of which he was not the sole author.

Because he was hardly the first rat to test the new protocol, the lying shits were able to keep him alive through six entire sessions—two half-hour sessions, three forty-minute sessions, and the final session of just over an hour. Presumably from cumulative stress, fatigue, and exhaustion, he died some two hours after being returned to his housing cage (his autopsy results not conveniently available, so sensitive is this research to the scented candle industry).

**END**