

'Alright, you dirty rats, no more Ms. Nice Guy'

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The news about the invasion of rats into UCSB's San Miguel Hall, with interesting sidelines about the little rodents skittering around elevator shafts, into dresser drawers and across the roofs, reminded me of how impossible they are — no matter how hard we try to get along with creatures both great and small.

My first introduction to rats came in California's Mother Lode, where I spent some time diving for gold in Canyon Creek. My partner was a person of the great outdoors, which was fortunate, because I wouldn't have known how to deal with the rat we encountered the way we did.

We were asleep in a cabin when my bedsprings began to rattle as violently as if Godzilla were arising

from a long winter's nap underneath me. My poodle-terrier dog, Igor, disappeared underneath the bed and after that, I heard absolutely nothing.

I shrieked, whereupon my gold-diving partner came alive and got a kerosene lamp lit.

A rat, about the size of a chihuahua and a million times scarier looking, stared at us from the wall at the foot of my bed, remaining frozen and still as the light of the lamp illuminated its eyes.

My partner did what gold-diggers do: he reached for his gun, a .45 or whatever they are, aimed, and instantly, the rat was immortalized all over the wall with a loud bang.

As Igor the poodle-terrier jumped back on my bed, completely traumatized, my partner turned out the lamp and immediately went back to sleep.

I lay there for hours, staring wide-eyed into the dark, and in my insomnia, I decided to abandon gold diving forever.

I didn't run into rats again until recently, when a bunch of them took up residency in the attic of my house. There were enough of them that their scurrying feet racing across my redwood ceiling every night made it necessary for friends sitting in my living room to speak up.

Remembering the Canyon Creek incident, I thought I would handle the problem in a more peaceful way. No guns. I decided, too, against calling that white truck with the big black spider on it, because I didn't want poison around the house for my new dog Otto to find.

So, I fiddled with those nasty, spring-loaded traps that scare me to death, and I wasted a lot of perfect-

ly good cheese. I even thought I was making headway, because even though there were no squished rats showing up in my traps, the scurrying sounds on the roof had diminished.

This, I thought, was because the sight of the traps had just scared the rats away.

Therefore, I was as mad as I've ever been when one afternoon I came across some unforgiveable deeds the rats had done in my big storage closet just off the main hall.

Those rodents had eaten the stuffing out of one of my expensive ski boots — just gobbled up that plastic stuff that customizes boots to a skier's feet.

(Apparently, they seem to go for ski-boot linings. Later on, when I was at Mammoth Mountain buying a new pair of boots, a guy rushed into the store where I was trying on

different styles, complaining that one of his boots was hurting his foot. When his boot came off, there was a little dead rat in the toe of the boot. It was no wonder the boot didn't feel too good on the guy's foot, but we all wondered about his sense of smell.)

Back in my hall closet, the rats had done worse damage than eating my ski boot. I also discovered that they had eaten a big hole in one of my papier-mache Nativity figurines.

This bit of sacrilege was the last straw, the immediate end of the nice cheese-and-trap routine, and within two hours one of those white trucks with a spider on it arrived. As the rat patrolmen crawled around under my house setting out the stuff that would usher those beasts toward their final destiny, I found myself smiling very happily.

I am now convinced that rats are

as tough as they are said to be.

According to a National Wildlife Federation press release, which crossed my desk Thursday on the heels of the San Miguel dorm story, rats can plummet five stories and scurry off unharmed.

(Coeds, this means it won't do any good to throw the rodents out your windows).

Rats can also swim half a mile and tread water for three days (which means it won't do any good to flood one's room), and can also wiggle through a hole no larger than a quarter.

I think if I were out at San Miguel Hall right now, I would be running around the corridors with a two-by-four in hot pursuit of the little rodents, just for spite. And who knows, the guy who skied half a day with the dead rat in the toe of his boot would probably join me.