trained on their nests captured what had to be seen to be believed. Gangs of mice were rushing from out of the dark to attack birds three hundred times their size. The mice were chewing holes in the rumps of seventeen-pound albatross chicks as they sat, eating the living birds from the inside out.

And no modern chronicle of rodent overachievement would be complete without the saga of Razza the rat. Razza was a wild brown rat captured, named, and released in November 2004 under intensive watch by a team of biologists led by the University of Auckland's James Russell. Attempting to measure the difficulties of capturing or even detecting a single invading rat, Russell's team radio-collared Razza, turned him loose on a twenty-three-acre island in northern New Zealand's Hauraki Gulf, then set about tracking him down.

Razza had other ideas. For weeks he repeatedly refused all invitations to plastic tunnels and snap traps and turned down all sensory enticements from fish oil to chocolate. Then his radio signal vanished. To the embarrassment of his watchmen, Razza had escaped.

Following a tip from villagers on a neighboring island, Russell and crew went looking. And there, to their astonishment, they found a rat scat, identified by DNA fingerprinting as Razza's. The roving rat had swum a quarter mile of open water.

Again the scientists gave chase, this time siccing trained dogs on Razza's scent. And for another six weeks, the rat continued to run rings around them all, until finally—four and a half months into the chase—with a momentary lapse of caution and a meat-baited trap—the odyssey of Razza came to its dead end.

Russell and colleagues concluded their part of the scientific adventure with a newfound sense of respect and a healthy serving of understatement: "Our findings confirm that eliminating a single invading rat is disproportionately difficult."