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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"It threw itself over the jagged cliff of the mountainside."

# The White Rat

By EARL PEIRCE, JR., and BRUCE BRYAN

*An eery tale of strange surgery, and a revolting monstrosity that was created by the daring attempts of an imaginative surgeon to modify nature's laws of heredity*

**T**WO strangely contrasted men sat facing each other across an oak table in the Svabord Inn, high in the mountains that split the rugged length of Norway. A trained psycholo-

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gist might have observed an air of electric tension as, during a lull in the conversation, their eyes locked in mutual covert appraisal.

Arnesson, who despite the comfort-

able warmth of the room was bundled up to the ears in a heavy coat and muffler, was the first to drop his gaze behind his dark glasses. Peter Driscoll was the less shifty of the two, yet there was an appropriate furtiveness in his manner. For the reputation behind these men stretched across the world and might have spelled bloodshed and riot had anyone recognized them. Both had more than once been burned in effigy.

Sigurd Arnesson wet his thin lips nervously and spoke in his high, squeaky voice.

"Now that I'm convinced you are really the man I sent for, we can speak freely. It is doubtful if anyone will know us here. And the fact that I am just recovering from a touch of the flu provides me with an excellent excuse for keeping my features well swathed. Besides which, the falsetto hoarseness imparted to my voice by swollen bronchial tubes is an additional disguise."

Driscoll nodded shortly.

"I understand that, doctor. But I'm more curious to learn just why you wanted me to meet you here. Familiar as I am with your standing in the world of research, I'm at a loss to conceive of any way in which I could be of value to you."

Arnesson waved his mittened hand deprecatingly.

"The less said about our—ah—standing in scientific circles, the better," he coughed. "Let us speak frankly and entertain no false modesties. We have both made certain invaluable contributions to knowledge. That cannot be denied. It is our methods alone that, to borrow from your American slang, have relegated us to the dog house. A few hundred years ago we'd have been burned at the stake. Indeed," he added with a distasteful sort of chuckle, "if certain self-

righteous persons could lay hands on us we might still be roasted over a slow fire."

He paused, his head turning about the room with odd, jerky movements. A queer noise came from behind his muffler, as if he were sniffing at the atmosphere, and his little eyes peered sharply through the smoked lenses of his glasses. Driscoll waited patiently, though consumed with curiosity.

"You are quite wrong in assuming that you have nothing of value to me," resumed Arnesson, after a moment. "No matter what his attainments, one man can never learn all there is to know of any given subject. Generations of scientists in pursuing all the ramifications of medicine and surgery have barely scratched at an inexhaustible source of knowledge. One person, in concentrating on a certain phase, must of necessity rely on a superficial understanding of another closely associated phase. That, Driscoll, is where you come in."

The younger man ran his fingers through his sparse, prematurely whitened hair.

"I still don't understand——" he began.

Arnesson lifted his shapeless mitten jerkily, interrupting.

"You will! You will! But first—I must tell you a story. You have the patience to listen?"

Driscoll nodded, and settled back in his chair.

"How about another glass of ale in the meantime?" he asked.

Arnesson acquiesced and thumped on the table to attract attention. It was not long in forthcoming. The season was late winter, and there were few guests in the inn. Looking out of the window, Driscoll could see over the low roof of the village the open fjord, winding down to the sea. Sundhjem nestled at the foot of snow-capped mountains, and at this

time of year there were few tourist ships stopping at its icy harbor.

The door opened and the innkeeper's daughter, a plump, red-faced girl of seventeen, smiled in at them. In her arms she cuddled a large gray cat, purring with a contented somnolence. But suddenly its back arched and the hair stood out on its body like the quills of a porcupine. Spitting and hissing, its eyes fastened on Driscoll's companion. It squirmed and twisted in the girl's arms.

**D**RISCOLL turned his gaze back to Arnesson in some surprize. He was astonished to see that the man had pushed back his chair and, half standing, was regarding the animal with something like terror in his attitude. And yet there was an almost predatory malevolence glaring out of the small eyes behind those smoked glasses. It was only a momentary tableau, but Driscoll felt an odd chill settle over him. Then the cat drove its claws into the girl, forcing her to release it. It dropped to the floor, still spitting, its lips drawn back in a fanged snarl, turned tail and fled.

The girl was weeping softly, nursing the red scratches on her arms. But Driscoll paid no attention to her; he had crossed quickly to Arnesson's side. The man had slumped back in his chair, breathing heavily, like a sleeper just aroused from a horrible nightmare. He waved the American away.

"It's—nothing," he said quietly. "I'm all right. Just an attack of asthma. I've been subject to them at intervals ever since that damned influenza. But I—I wonder what was wrong with that—that cat."

Driscoll said nothing as he returned to his seat.

"Bring us more ale," he ordered the girl. "Put some iodine on those scratches and you'll be all right."

But when the ale was set before him he didn't touch it. Arnesson had plunged into his story, and if Driscoll hadn't known of the man's reputation and achievements, he would have thought himself listening to a lunatic. Was this what he had come all the way from New York for? To hear the ravings of an apparently unbalanced mind? To listen to pure fantasy from the lips of a man who had wrought unbelievable miracles in experimental surgery?

Fascinated, he listened despite the instinctive warnings of his own subconscious mind.

"Surgery," Arnesson was saying, "is the greatest gift accorded to mankind. It is the most wonderful tool of science. But, like any other tool, it is limited to the craftsmanship of the artizan. To me, therapeutic surgery is only an incidental use, beneficial to the immediate patient alone. In this respect I agree with your talented Bainbridge that the knife cures the patient but not the disease. He was alluding to cancer, of course, but the same applies to the whole of pathology.

"I wasted thirty years of my life curing patients, most of whom were killed later by motor vehicles or bullets. A thankless job, but not without its illuminating lessons. I've learned a great deal from my patients, the essence of which is that they aren't worth saving. Man has become too far submerged in sentimentalities and idiotic conventions, much to the detriment of pure science. Pure science, utterly indifferent to weakness and suffering, is the only science, Driscoll!"

The younger man said nothing, acutely aware that his companion was leading up to a definite point.

"Take your own work, for example," went on Arnesson in his queer treble tones. "Men have dreamed of revivification ever since the earth's first burial. Witness the funereal preparations of the

ancient Egyptians. You can't persuade me that the months they spent in mummifying a body were dictated solely by religious ritual. Not by a long shot! They believed they were preserving the dead against the time when some one of their wise men would discover the means to bring them back to life. Religion preaches resurrection, but not by human means. It has taken ten thousand years for the enlightened among humanity to accept revivification as a material possibility. That, Driscoll, is due to your researches."

"Yes," broke in the younger man bitterly, "and look what it's done for me! Hunted across the continent, from city to city, and forced to give up my work and live in New York under an assumed name. Sometimes I——"

Again Arnesson threw up a shapelessly gloved hand in that curious jerky movement of his.

"I know, I know. But never mind that now. Even your experiments have only scratched the surface. You have resurrected animals—not human beings. And only by freezing them to death beforehand."

"Where's the difference?" objected the American. "What I have done with a dog, I could do with a man. Both have similar circulatory systems, a similar network of nerves. Each has a brain developed to his needs. If the law, actuated by a lot of sentimental nitwits, hadn't stepped in——"

"Exactly!" agreed Arnesson, jerking his head emphatically. His squeaky voice lent intensity to his words. "That's my point. What you have done with beasts can also be done with men. I repeat, surgery is a tool, and there is no limit to the wonders it can shape—in the proper hands."

He hesitated, as if taking a deep breath. Driscoll squirmed uncomfortably. He thought he could detect a reddish

gleam in the piercing little eyes behind those dark glasses. Arnesson leaned across the table, and his voice sank.

"I'm going to tell you something, Driscoll—something that I could tell to no lesser man. Perhaps I'm a fool to do so, but—did you ever hear of the Russian surgeon, Igor Seminoff?"

"Never," replied Driscoll.

Arnesson nodded his bundled head.

"Apparently there is no one alive who remembers him. It is just as well. Seminoff was the most revolutionary surgeon who ever lived. He performed a series of experiments of such a ghastly nature that to the ignorant peasants of the region his name became almost synonymous with Satan. Fortunately, his work was not made generally public. He didn't care a damn for science or the acclaim of his colleagues. He worked for himself alone. Igor Seminoff was at once a madman and a genius."

Arnesson hesitated a moment, as if seeking courage to go on. He looked about apprehensively, as if afraid the walls might have ears, then hissed almost malefically:

"Seminoff spent fifteen years trying to develop a man-sized white rat endowed with human intelligence!"

**D**RISCOLL stared at Arnesson with an almost vacant expression. Yes, he decided wearily to himself, the man is mad.

"Tell me about it," he said placatingly, wondering how he could break away. Nothing, he knew, is more dangerous than an insane person who realizes his wild ravings are not believed.

A squeaky, unpleasant laugh came from the bundled-up figure across the table.

"I'll tell you about it, all right," he whispered grimly. "Then if you still think I'm crazy, perhaps you'll go to the

asylum with me—because *I'll show you that rat!* Now pay close attention:

"Seminoff was the illegitimate son of a Georgian landowner and a Russian peasant girl. The father took him to live on the farm where, at an early age, his curious talents exhibited themselves. A cow had broken its leg. Because it was a valuable milker, the farmer was reluctant to shoot the animal. Young Seminoff astounded the old man by setting the fractured limb in expert fashion and rigging up a harness to confine the creature to its stall until the bones knit.

"Much impressed, the father provided the money for his son to study medicine. And the peasants were only too happy to see him go away, for their slumbers had been interrupted many a night by the frightful squealing of some poor beast strapped down to a wooden table while the boy experimented with his crude, home-made scalpels.

"The youth studied in Paris under Claude Barnard, but in 1870 he was driven out because of his ruthless vivisection of dogs and cats. He moved to Vienna, and finally to Russia. But in those days surgical research was frowned upon and vivisection was a capital crime. Hounded by outraged populaces, persecuted by the law, Seminoff eventually sought out an isolated region in the Scandinavian mountains. Here, in northern Norway, he found an ideal place in which to carry on his work.

"Building himself a crude log laboratory, he set traps and gathered together as many animals as possible. He had a definite conception of what he wanted to do, and at first he worked with dogs, lemmings, and even wolves. But when, owing to their physiological peculiarities, his efforts produced no great results, he turned to white rats. He found them ideal for his purpose.

"As the scope of his researches widened, he found it necessary to have help. Several thick-headed Norwegian hunters were hired as job-workers. And at the end of the third year he married a strong, capable woman of the same nationality. Perhaps she was a little mad, too, for she became not only a helpmeet but a disciple. The two worked side by side for nearly fifteen years, and at the end of that time had bred rats to the size of dogs and to even greater intelligence. There was no necromancy involved in the work—it was purely a surgical procedure. Whether he employed human secretions is not known, but in some way he must have duplicated the endocrinal system of man.

"I'll spare you the details, which even to a doctor would seem brutal, for it was like heathen butchery. Except on the skull, the hair ceased to grow. Certain rat-like appendages were removed with the knife, until the creatures became remarkably anthropoid in structure and could be taught a rudimentary discipline. But Seminoff wanted a rat with the ability to *reason*. So he worked on, utilizing the elementary laws of mechanics and making use of Hooke's principles of stress and strain.

"How it was possible to create that final rat is probably a secret no man will ever know. Perhaps Seminoff stooped to mating human and animal cells. You can imagine the cool, horribly detached enthusiasm with which the later stages of the work must have been carried on. It is one thing to vivisect an ordinary white rat, but to cut into one that can sense your motives is something else again. At any rate, when he was finished he had a creature that was a perfect example of synthetic anthropomorphic structure. It was more than five feet tall and had a mental age comparable to that of a human moron."

ARNESON paused to sip from his glass of ale. Driscoll had ceased to think of escape. This man talked like one positive of his facts.

"I agree that it was a remarkable achievement, horrible as it must seem," Driscoll pondered slowly. "But apparently it was foredoomed to failure. Obviously, man cannot——"

Arnesson thumped the table with his glass.

"Doomed to failure, eh?" he cried, almost bitterly. "Does this sound like failure to you? Seminoff completed the rat's education with long years of study and training, both mental and physical. As the—the thing learned to wear clothes, to walk and talk and *think* like a man, the assistants Seminoff had engaged disappeared mysteriously. But for several years the surgeon and his wife lived on in that place with the awful hybrid. It became, in a depraved sense, their child, absorbing all the knowledge they could impart to it. However degenerate its mind, it was possessed of a remarkably imitative nature.

"But Seminoff's madness crept upon him during these final years, to cheat him of his victory—a victory that was truly Pyrrhic. In recurrent fits of melancholic brooding he actually became jealous of the creature's place in his wife's affections. He took a morbid delight in torturing his own inhuman creation. And then one day it turned on him and battered him into insensibility. Fired with blood-lust, it carried him into the dissecting-room, strapped him to a table and hacked him to pieces with a scalpel. The surgeon's wife tried to intervene, but the rat-man attacked her with an unbridled fury.

"When she recovered consciousness, it was gone, leaving its tracks in the snow. She managed to harness a horse to a sleigh and escape to the nearest village.

Poised between life and death, she lingered for nearly a year before dying. It was from her lips that the village doctor learned this story. And except for one thing he would never have believed it. The rest of the wild tale must of necessity be hypothesis, as we have only the charred remains of Seminoff's laboratory to guide us.

"The white rat had returned and, after destroying the Russian's body, obliterated all traces of the murder. It was human enough to realize the blasphemy of the experiment and was resolved that nothing like it should ever occur again. With the destruction of the surgeon's scientific notes and the remaining animals, there was only one thing left to do away with—*itself!* Reflect for a moment, Driscoll, on the contradictory mentality of a synthetic creature that could reason with such selflessness. Realizing that its own brain contained the abysmal formulæ that enabled Seminoff to carry out his work, the rat was determined to wipe the slate clean.

"It committed suicide by throwing itself over the jagged cliff of the mountainside."

Sigurd Arnesson relaxed in his chair and toyed with his glass. The younger man said nothing. He was convinced now that the man across from him was not mad, despite the insanity of his unbelievable story. But he felt that there was more to come. The narrative was incomplete. He was both curious and afraid.

Though he couldn't see Arnesson's features through the winding muffler, he sensed that the man was smiling at his hesitation to comment.

"Yes," said the Norwegian, "there is a sequel—a sequel that involves us both. I am determined to carry on the work of Igor Seminoff—carry it to a climax his mad intellect never could have dreamed!"

Driscoll uttered an incredulous exclamation.

"Impossible! You said the formulæ were destroyed. And the rat—dead."

A squeak of satiric amusement came from behind the Norwegian scientist's muffler.

"Quite true. And that, my dear Driscoll, is where you come in! Fifty years ago—the winter of 1886, to be exact—Norway suffered in the grip of an almost unprecedented cold wave. I don't know just how deep the snow was, but at the foot of the cliff it broke the rat's suicidal plunge. In the blizzard that followed, its body was enveloped, frozen into a state of perfect preservation."

The American wet his lips.

"You—have the body?" he whispered.

Arnesson nodded jerkily.

"That's why I summoned you here. You, Driscoll, are the only man in the world who understands the intricate technique of revivification. We are going to bring that rat back to life!"

Driscoll half rose to his feet.

"B-but fifty years!" he protested.

A shapeless, mittened hand waved him back in his chair.

"Imprisoned in a block of ice—what difference between fifty years and fifty seconds?"

**B**ELLS jingling merrily, two spirited horses breathed heavy steam from their wide nostrils as they drew the open sleigh swiftly over a rolling white waste. Grotesque in his heavy greatcoat and concealing muffler, Arnesson drove. Driscoll huddled beside him, finding little in the way of conversation to while away the journey. Thirty miles back they had left the tourists' road, and the loneliness in which they found themselves was made more appalling by the bleak grandeur of the encircling mountains. All day they

drove steadily onward into a naked, unpopulated country.

An endless glacier bounded one side of the trail; the other skirted a snow-choked abyss. Trees grew in dwarfish clusters and far apart. A biting wind keened over stark, white-mantled rocks. And as the sun began to wane, Arnesson urged the horses to a faster gait.

"You may be sure we won't be disturbed up here," he confided to his companion. "This road is a frozen hell at night."

Driscoll said nothing. What strange hypnotism had caused him to accompany the Norwegian surgeon on this trip? No doubt it provided a wonderful opportunity to complete the last link in his unfinished work. By revivifying this hybrid creature he would prove his theory of artificial resurrection. Still, apprehension tormented him. It was a mad quest, an unhallowed business he was engaged upon.

"My place is built right over the ruins of Seminoff's laboratory," Arnesson was telling him. "It is an exhilarating location; you can work seventeen hours out of twenty-four without fatigue in such atmosphere."

Blackness had settled down when they reached their destination. There was no light save the Norwegian's flashlight. He stabled the team in a large barn, and after seeing to it that they had plenty of oats led the way through deep snow to the living-quarters. In the beam of the flashlight Driscoll could see that there were several buildings constructed of unhewn, unbarked logs chinked with cement.

Ushering his guest into a roomy living-room, Arnesson switched on the lights, apologizing because there were no servants.

"I manufacture my own electric power," he added. "Inasmuch as I expected



to return tonight, I left the generator going."

A huge log fire was started, and Driscoll began to shed his outer garments. But the Norwegian kept himself bundled up, explaining that he was taking no chance of a recurrence of his influenza. They ate their supper in a compact little kitchen, complete down to modern refrigeration. Immediately after the meal the American asked to be shown the laboratories. He was somewhat excited now that he was about to see the preserved corpse of the white rat.

Arnesson seemed to hesitate a moment; Driscoll raised his eyebrows expectantly. Shrugging his high, narrow shoulders, the Norwegian led the way through a maze of corridors. But there was a queer reluctance in his manner, and insidiously it worked on his guest's sense of well-being.

At the end of the main hall was the animal house, teeming with experimental material. There were dogs, cats, lemmings, a few snakes, and even a lean, slaving gray wolf. But mostly there were rats—small white rats that chattered and squeaked incessantly. As Arnesson passed, these dainty little creatures came close to the front of their cages, thrusting their pointed little heads eagerly through the wire. But the surgeon paid no attention. His dark glasses were turned furtively toward the cats, who cowered back in wild agitation, spitting and arching their sleek backs.

Passing through a clinical anteroom, the two entered the main surgical chamber. Here, to his amazement, Driscoll found himself in what might have been a miniature of some great New York operating-theater. Overhead hung a huge spot-lamp. Flanking an enameled operating-table were cabinets filled with gleaming instruments, great cylinders of ether, nitrous oxide and oxygen. And in

one corner reared a massive X-ray apparatus.

As if he wished to avoid being drawn into a technical discussion, Arnesson led the way through another door into what he termed his chemical and biological laboratory. Still another door, and finally they stood before the enormous electric refrigerator in which the surgeon kept the body of the white rat.

A little giddy, the younger man watched him wheel open a circular metal door. Grasping a handle, Arnesson drew out a long tray that moved easily on well-oiled rollers. A heavy white tarpaulin shrouded something stiff and bent. Grimacing, the Norwegian pulled the canvas away, exposing a contorted mound of bluish-white flesh.

Driscoll gasped and retreated a step. The creature lay on its back, naked, the immense head facing him in a frozen stare. It was long—as long as a man—and the American's first impression was that it was indeed a human cadaver. But the horror of the thing struck him like a physical blow. Its limbs were short and grotesquely twisted. The back was oddly bent, stiffened into a crippled arch. From the pale flesh sprouted white hairs that belied its human appearance. Two rows of long, discolored teeth seemed bared in a vicious snarl. The eyes were open, like windows of hell; small, pinkish little orbs glazed in death.

"Grisly, eh?" whispered Arnesson.

Driscoll shuddered.

"God! How could any man do this?"

The Norwegian grunted, squeakily. Driscoll couldn't see through the muffler, but he sensed a sneer on the older man's lips.

**I**N THE room his host assigned to him, Driscoll unpacked his suitcase. The silence of the place was emphasized by the wind that clawed at the window. He

shivered. A sense of loneliness had come over him. He felt like a man alone in an alien world. There was no sense of companionship in the presence of Arnesson. The surgeon had lost his friendly demeanor; here in his secluded laboratory he was alternately harsh and polite, but never cordial.

A nerve-shattering scream, shrill and pain-racked, echoed through the walls. It rose to a sharp crescendo, then choked off into a cough that rasped with agony. Driscoll whirled, stared at the closed door. That was no animal's cry! It was a man—a human being in horrible torture!

His eyes narrowed. Slowly, the door was opening. Driscoll glanced toward his bag. There was a gun there. He started toward it. Then Arnesson's muffled head showed in the opening.

"Just wanted to see if you are comfortable here," said the Norwegian, his treble tones failing to conceal a hint of agitation.

"Who was that screaming?" demanded Driscoll, ignoring the man's words.

Arnesson stared at him for a moment, but the American could make nothing of the expression of eyes veiled by smoked glasses.

"Why, that's one of my animals, coming out of a drug," explained the surgeon. "Endocrinal case. Has interesting complications. I'll discuss it with you some other time. No doubt you're quite tired. Good night!"

Driscoll gazed at the door slowly closing behind Arnesson's angular shape. Vague doubts, incoherent fears, were churning about in his brain.

He gnawed at his lip, angered by the man's obvious lie. That voice was human! What manner of charnel house had he come to?

Suddenly the door swung open again. The surgeon's muffled head reappeared.

"Oh, yes," he said. "A word of warning, Driscoll. Keep to your room at night. Don't wander in the halls. It might be—extremely dangerous. I have private interests here that don't concern you. This is an order!"

Driscoll stiffened. He didn't like the man's tone.

"You are my superior," he admitted, "but only up to a certain point, and in a consultatory way. I don't know what you are doing here, but frankly it smells bad to me. What have you got locked up in the animal room?"

A snarl came from behind Arnesson's muffler.

"None of your damned business! I didn't say the room was locked. See that you stay in your room. I'm sorry if you don't like my methods, but you're here now and you can't get back till I take you. I might even tell you that you won't ever leave—until the white rat has been brought back to life!"

The door closed behind him. Driscoll stood with an unspoken curse on his lips, half expecting to hear a key turn in the lock. But it didn't; evidently Arnesson considered his warning sufficient.

The American took his pistol from the suitcase and slipped it into his pocket. Replacing his shoes with felt slippers, he opened the door and peered up and down the corridor. At one end was the generator, but aside from its low-keyed hum there was no sound. Driscoll walked silently toward the living-room, pausing at a door that opened into the library. He looked in and his glance fell on a littered desk. Beyond was a door that led into the surgery.

The desk was covered with an untidy scramble of books and papers, all surgical references. Pinned to the stage of a microscope was a glass slide. Driscoll peered into the instrument and recognized what he saw as a microsection of the brain of a

white rat. A strange odor, penetrating the iodoformic smell with which the whole building reeked, came to his attention. Looking down, he saw a huge, half-eaten cheese.

Cheese! For a moment his senses reeled. The top of the desk was crumbly with the stuff. Incredulously, he bent over and rubbed his finger across the blotter. It was sprinkled with long white hairs. . . .

His mind conjured up a mad vision of that cadaverous, sparse-haired rat-creature sitting at the desk and nibbling cheese, while its scrawny finger traced out the directions printed in Fougerei's *Cranial Surgery*. Great God! could the thing translate from the French? He laughed at the absurdity.

With an effort, he pulled himself away from the desk and walked toward the surgery. What was he muttering to himself about? The rat was dead, wasn't it? Frozen solid for half a century or more. Rats aren't the only animals that eat cheese. Man is an animal; he likes cheese, and—he has white hairs.

The surgery door swung open and pungent antiseptic fumes swept into his face. The room was unoccupied, save for the inanimate dissecting-material that hung like horrible pink fruit in jars of formaldehyde. Ether tainted the air, and red-stained towels and aprons lay across the operating-table. The table itself was still warm, as if recently used. In a shallow basin were wads of cotton, dissecting-instruments clotted with blood and several bits of flesh from which the white hairs still sprouted. Soiled rubber gloves lay carelessly on the floor.

**R**EPRESSING an exclamation of repugnance, Driscoll flung open the opposite door and ran down the corridor to the animal room.

As he approached it, the squeals of ex-

cited animals sounded a demoniac symphony in the vapor-laden air. But there was also a human voice—Arnesson's. It rapped out, high-pitched and querulous, but carrying a note of authority. Driscoll's hair stirred as he heard other sounds, uttered apparently in answer to the Norwegian—shrill, complaining, gibbering noises. The words—if such they could be called by some wild flight of imagination—were strange, guttural, non-understandable.

Driscoll hesitated. Arnesson had said he had private interests. The American shuddered a little. He could well imagine what they consisted of if they concerned Arnesson, the vivisectionist. He was about to turn back to his room, when again he heard that wild scream. He lunged against the door, fell into the room between a tier of cages.

"What's going on h——" he began, only to bring up short with a gasp of revolted horror. He stumbled back, eyes bulging, jaw slack. "I—I thought I heard Doctor Arnesson in here," he whispered unsteadily.

A tall, thin form stood before him, slaving with rage. It was clothed in white. The head was enormous, the face sharp and predatory. Scrubby white hairs grew from the pinkish flesh; the shoulders were high and narrow, hunched together grotesquely. Red little eyes glittered angrily.

The creature stood for a moment, glaring at the intruder. There was mixed fear and fury in its bestial expression. Then a shrill squeal came from its lips. A clawing arm swept viciously at the air. It whirled suddenly and sped to an open door at the other end of the room. The door closed, a lock clicked, and from behind it came another burst of beast-like wrath.

Driscoll shook himself.

"Arnesson!" he roared. "Arnesson!"

Down the long room he stalked, caught the knob of the door and rattled it fiercely. It didn't budge. Like a madman, Driscoll strode back up the length of the room, between the cages. An insane rage tore at his brain.

"Arnesson!" he bellowed again, frightening the creatures back in their cages.

The door by which he had entered was flung open. Arnesson's muffled figure was framed against the dim light of the corridor.

"I thought I told you to keep to your room!" he snapped. "I ought to kill you for this!"

Sight of the other man's anger calmed Driscoll to something approaching normal. He wiped a hand across his brow.

"What in God's name was that—that *thing*?" he whispered. "What are you doing to it?"

Arnesson started toward him, a low snarl emanating from behind his muffler. His mittened hands balled into great fists.

This was something Driscoll could understand. His hand slipped into his pocket, emerged with the pistol. Unwaveringly, it centered on the Norwegian's breast.

Arnesson stopped. A shudder went through his tall frame.

"I—I'm sorry, Driscoll," he muttered. "There are things here it's best even you do not know—or see. What you saw just now is not an experiment. It's a—a patient."

"A monster, you mean!" Driscoll returned the gun to his pocket. "For a moment I thought it was the white rat come to life. I'm sick of this place, Arnesson. I'm going back—tomorrow."

Arnesson's small eyes blinked rapidly behind his dark glasses.

"How can you understand?" he said slowly. "How can anyone understand? I didn't want you to see what you have seen—but that can't be helped now. No,

I assure you the white rat is dead. Its body is still in the refrigerator, if you wish to make sure."

The American shook his head impatiently.

"Then what—what was it I saw?"

Arnesson shifted his weight from one foot to the other. A sickly laugh came from his muffled lips.

"I didn't tell you all the story, Driscoll. I hoped you wouldn't have to know. I thought I could get you up here, have you perform your part of the operation, and then send you back ignorant of the true state of things. But I was a fool. What you saw in this room just now was not the white rat—it *is his son!*"

Driscoll staggered back a pace.

"Impossible!" he cried. "The white rat died—it had no mate!"

The Norwegian was silent for a moment. Then he sighed, a gusty, dry exhalation of air.

"No *animal* mate," he corrected gently. "You remember Seminoff's wife? I told you how the rat turned from Seminoff to his wife. . . ."

Driscoll's eyes widened in horror; his lips moved soundlessly.

"It was merciful that she died," continued Arnesson desperately. "The creature you saw—he hasn't always been like that. He was born a natural babe, grew into normal manhood. In fact, the physician who attended the mother considered the infant as Seminoff's own son. It wasn't until six years ago that the—the paternal heritage began to assert itself. Can you wonder why it has been concealed—why I have sworn myself to secrecy? My God, Driscoll! Imagine the man's sensations as day by day his body changed—changed physically and mentally."

Driscoll shook his head vaguely, his tongue paralyzed with loathing. Arnesson was rambling on.

"He came to me. I was the only living man who could help him. But the transformation had already begun. The jaw was long and attenuated. The body was thin to emaciation, the skull flat beyond all normal cephalic indices. Hair, that silky white hair, was growing out of his pinkish flesh. His posture became stooped, his voice shrill and squealing. It was a horrible degeneration, swift and violent. Almost overnight the metamorphosis cleft him into two personalities, the rat dominating. He began to assume the appearance of his hybrid father.

"I brought him here, Driscoll, giving up my own researches. There was no one to bother me, no anti-vivisectionists to interfere with my treatment. It had to be vivisection in its fullest sense. I had to cut out the rat flesh piece by piece. But it was too fast for me, the rapidity of growth and regrowth. And as if that were not problem enough, there was the gradual atavism of the brain.

"As far as was possible, I kept my patient under the influence of drugs. The pain accompanying my operations was frightful; it was even worse than Semionoff's original work. Yet what could I do? He wanted to live, and under the Hippocratic oath I was bound to make every effort to save his life; forced to keep him alive when every day the rat influence became stronger, and day by day he degenerated from man to beast.

"Then one day I found the frozen body of his father. The summer thaws had released it from the bondage of the ice, and thrilled with a sudden inspiration I had it conveyed up here to my laboratory. Then, Driscoll, I sent for you. For inside the father's brain, impressed over a period of many tortured years, are the formulæ with which Semionoff combated the rat poison in his initial creations. All other records were destroyed by fire. But by bringing the white rat back to life, I can

discover the nature of the secret drugs the Russian scientist employed. Once I have learned this I shall destroy the rat for all time.

"You, Driscoll, with your knowledge of revivification, are the only living person who can make this possible!"

**D**RISCOLL slept very little that night, and even those scant moments were haunted by nightmare shapes that pursued him. The figure of Arnesson's patient. The still form of the white rat in the refrigerator. Father and son! Father and son! His mind echoed the impossible words in a dirge of horror.

In the morning he found the Norwegian had already prepared breakfast. As they were eating, he told Driscoll that the operation would take place that evening. His examination, he said, had shown that the white rat had fractured its skull in the leap from the precipice. Bits of bone had to be removed from the brain. Until this was done Driscoll could not attempt the revivification.

Refusing to enter into a discussion of technicalities, Arnesson gave the American a pamphlet describing the method they would follow. It was typewritten, and obviously but recently prepared. Driscoll spent the entire day in familiarizing himself with the directions, confined to his room.

As the hour for the operation drew closer a curious tension hovered over the place. The animals were unusually silent. Even the wind, which had howled mournfully all day, quieted to a mere whisper. The atmosphere was one of—waiting.

At dinner Arnesson seemed agitated and nervous, speaking in squeaky monosyllables, and then only when directly addressed. He had a book on the table beside him. At first Driscoll supposed it was a surgical tome. But as the Norwegian arose at the end of the meal he was

surprized to see that it was a copy of the Bible.

Precisely at nine o'clock the surgeon tapped at Driscoll's door. Under his arm was a white bundle which he tossed onto the bed.

"Your operating-gown," he said, eyeing the American keenly from behind his dark glasses. "Put it on and be in the surgery at exactly nine-thirty. Don't come in a minute before."

"Can't I help you with the preparations?" asked Driscoll.

"No. You do as you're told." Arnesson's voice was falsetto with harshness. "I've a lot on my mind and can't be bothered with inanities. My methods may seem strange to you, but they're *my* methods! Don't ask any questions during the operation. Above all, stay on your own side of the table and keep your hands away from mine. More than you know depends upon your following my orders implicitly."

Without another word, he left the room.

*More than you know depends upon it!* Driscoll could not forget those words as he dressed himself for the ordeal. Nor could he get out of his mind the picture of Arnesson's patient. *Its* life depended on their skill—on the Norwegian's genius as a surgeon and on Driscoll's ability to resurrect from death. No doubt the creature was in its room now, consumed in an agony of waiting. . . .

Before leaving his room Driscoll drank a stiff tot of whisky to strengthen his nerve. There must be no indecision—no fainting like a nurse at her first appendectomy. He must enter the operating-room as a machine, not a man.

As he walked down the hall he drew on his rubber gloves, tightened the gauze mask about his face. Drawing a deep breath, he entered the surgery. It was exactly nine-thirty.

THE weirdness of the spectacle almost unnerved him at once. The room was in total blackness save only for a spotlight that shone from the ceiling, its concentrated white ray focussed on the white flesh that lay rigidly on the table. The frozen rat was covered by a sheet that left only its head visible. In the brilliant light the features seemed to writhe in a sardonic smile, the wide-open but sightless eyes staring upward in a grotesque simulation of life.

On the other side of the operating-table, dim in the darkness except when his white tunic came under the cone of illumination, stood Arnesson. A white cap covered his head, the inevitable gauze mask swathed his lower features, and a pair of thick-lensed spectacles had supplanted the usual smoked glasses. His hands were rubber-sheathed talons as they rested on the enameled edge of the table. He looked like something from another dimension, and yet an air of confidence had replaced his late agitation.

Driscoll stepped across the floor, a little sickened by the carbolic vapors that seeped through his own mask. Sweat started out on his face. The tall figure opposite waved a gloved hand. A long finger indicated a wad of iodized cotton. Mechanically, Driscoll reached toward a basin. The operation was under way.

For several moments the strange ritual proceeded without words. Distantly, came the hushed squealing of rats. Even more remote was the throb of the generator. Within the room the silence was broken only by the biting crunch of Arnesson's trephine. Driscoll's eyes dwelt with fascination on the Norwegian's fingers. They moved like streaks of light, cutting, probing, sewing. He was awed by this masterful display of surgery.

An hour passed swiftly, and still the silence was unbroken by a human voice.

Arnesson was breathing heavily, and there was a faint, charnel odor that usurped the ever-present smell of iodoform. Driscoll glanced hastily at the recumbent form on the table. That beast-smell! Was the warmth of the room——?

Shaking with fatigue, Arnesson emitted a sharp, rasping grunt. The younger man looked up swiftly, his eyes blurred by the alternate light and shadow as the surgeon moved about his task. There was something . . .

"Pay attention!" snapped the voice, hysterically sharp. "Sponge!"

Driscoll handed the sponge over in a sort of daze. He could not tear his eyes from the man opposite him. He stared at the extraordinary length of the body. He noticed suddenly how thin it was, how seemingly emaciated. Then his eyes fixed in the masked head—so much larger than the average head. He felt a little nauseated. That smell, as of an unclean animal, lingered in his nostrils.

"Ar—Arnesson!" he muttered.

"Scalpel!" snapped the voice. "Quick, you fool!" The tones were even more shrill than before.

Driscoll had a scalpel in his hand. But, his mind in a chaos, he was slow in extending it. The surgeon leaned over the table, reaching for it impatiently. His head came directly under the light. Driscoll gasped and stared hypnotically.

"*Look out!*" Arnesson's long arm shot out with his despairing scream.

Too late! Overcome by the sudden understanding of what he saw, Driscoll

fell against the table. The knife in his nerveless hand slid like a plow into the white rat's naked brain.

For what seemed an eternity, both men stood stupefied. Then a low wail of frustration came from Arnesson. Tearing off the mask from his face, he picked up a heavy dissecting-knife. He raised it above his head in a claw-like hand and started for the American with deadly intent.

"You clumsy fool!" he squeaked shrilly. "I'll kill you for this!"

Driscoll backed away, retching violently. His hand tore frantically at his white tunic, found his coat pocket. The gun came up drunkenly, steadied. It spoke a single, concise syllable. The shot shattered Arnesson's glasses, tore through the bridge of his snout-like nose. He crashed heavily down across the body of the operating-table. The knife clattered to the floor.

Driscoll didn't faint. He was a man to whom work came first, and there was necessary work to be done. He put the gun in his pocket and walked out of the surgery. In the animal room, he opened all the cages. Very calmly, he shut off the generator, and by the aid of the flashlight got his suitcase. He found some kerosene in the laboratory.

As the horses pulled him away over the road that was "a frozen hell at night" a red glare lit the sky behind him. But it could not burn away the picture etched indelibly on his mind: the picture of a rat-like face staring with red-unseeing eyes at the hopeless ruin of its father.

