



Rats: Observations on the History & Habitat of the City's Most Unwanted Inhabitants

By Robert Sullivan

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• A New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age • A New York Public Library Book to Remember from 2004 • A PSLA Young Adult Top 40 (or so) non-fiction title 2004

Love them or loathe them, rats are here to stay—they are city dwellers as much as (or more than) we are, surviving on the effluvia of our society. In *Rats*, the critically acclaimed bestseller, Robert Sullivan spends a year investigating a rat-infested alley just a few blocks away from Wall Street. Sullivan gets to know not just the beast but its friends and foes: the exterminators, the sanitation workers, the agitators and activists who have played their part in the centuries-old war between human city dweller and wild city rat. Sullivan looks deep into the largely unrecorded history of the city and its masses—its herds-of-rats-like mob. Funny, wise, sometimes disgusting but always compulsively readable, *Rats* earns its unlikely place alongside the great classics of nature writing.

Robert Sullivan is the author of *The Meadowlands* and *A Whale Hunt*, both *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year. He is a contributing editor to *Vogue* and a longtime contributor to the *New Yorker*. He lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

With an all-new Afterword by the author

A New York Times bestseller A Book Sense selection in hardcover A Book Sense bestseller A San Francisco Chronicle bestseller A NEBA, NCIBA, and PNBA bestseller

"Engaging...a lively, informative compendium of facts, theories, and musings."- Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*

"Immensely lively, enjoyable, learned, witty and yes, appealing."-Philip Lopate, *Washington Post*

"Sullivan's book is a rollicking, richly drawn history...[he] offers up a parade of eccentric characters who deserve to be in the movies."-*Boston Globe*

"Fascinating."-*Vanity Fair*

"Sullivan persuasively associates the 'truth' he learns about rats with a deeper understanding

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #342678 in Books
- Brand: Bloomsbury USA
- Published on: 2005-04-11
- Released on: 2005-03-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.27" h x .85" w x 5.53" l, .56 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In his third book, Robert Sullivan leaves the wilds of the (*Meadowlands* and the rough whaling waters of the Pacific Northwest to take up rat-watching in the alleys of New York City. Sullivan learned to appreciate the rodents during nocturnal stakeouts; a night-vision scope helped him observe rats without scaring them. As in his previous books, Sullivan uses pointillist details rather than broad portraiture to paint his subject, and the details in *Rats* are devilish. There are plenty of facts in the book to make your skin crawl, such as a description of the greasy skids rats leave on the paths they frequent, and a list of garbage items they prefer to eat. But Sullivan's style is often less that of a nature writer than a historian. In personable, essayish chapters, New York's history is revealed to be particularly ratty, with tall tales about the rodents' disgusting accomplishments going back to the city's founding. Although many people have never seen a rat outside a pet store, Sullivan reminds us that they are our constant neighbors, staring out from dim corners and messy crevices with beady eyes and twitching whiskers. --*Adam Fisher*

From Publishers Weekly

In this excellent narrative, Sullivan uses the brown rat as the vehicle for a labyrinthine history of the Big Apple. After pointing out a host of facts about rats that are sure to make you start itching ("if you are in New York... you are within close proximity to one or more rats having sex"), Sullivan quickly focuses in on the rat's seemingly inexhaustible number of connections to mankind. Observing a group of rats in a New York City alley, just blocks from a pre-September 11 World Trade Center, leads Sullivan into a timeless world that has more twists than Manhattan's rat-friendly underbelly. Conversations and field studies with "pest control technicians" spirit him back to 1960s Harlem, when rat infestations played a part in the Civil Rights movement and the creation of tenants' organizations. Researching the names of the streets and landmarks near the rats' homes, Sullivan is led even deeper into the city's history till he is back to the 19th century, when the real gangs of New York were the packs of rats that overran the city's bustling docks. Like any true New Yorker, Sullivan is able to convey simultaneously the feelings of disgust and awe that most city dwellers have for the scurrying masses that live among them. These feelings, coupled with his ability to literally and figuratively insert himself into the company of his hairy neighbors, help to personalize the myriad of topics—urban renewal, labor strikes, congressional bills, disease control, September 11—that rats have nosed their way into over the years. This book is a must pickup for every city dweller, even if you'll feel like you need to wash your hands when you put it down.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Sullivan's narration reads like a monologue by a charming and witty party guest, albeit his topic is the city rat. No fact is too minute or detail too obscure. In his research, the author consulted many "rat experts," including a New York exterminator who shared the lower Manhattan alley that became the location for his observations. Tales of rats' run-ins with humans include a particularly disturbing one about a woman who was "attacked" by the rodents near his observation place. One chapter is dedicated to the Irish immigrant who hosted rat fights in his bar in the 1840s. Each of these tales is filled with digressions—the history of some of the buildings in the alley, the founding of the SPCA. The greatest digression occurs with regard to the World Trade Center catastrophe. Because Sullivan's alley was so close to the scene, his observations were necessarily interrupted, and when he returned, of course things had changed. But so singular is his vision that even this disaster is put into a rat context—how exterminators were on the job, how the subject of rats was unmentionable in discussions about disaster cleanup, even though his observations

showed that rats were plentiful. This creative writer has taken on a seemingly unappealing subject and turned it into a top-notch page-turner.—*Jamie Watson, Harford County Public Library, MD*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Graciela Cook:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information currently can get by anyone from everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even an issue. What people must be consider while those information which is within the former life are challenging to be find than now could be taking seriously which one works to believe or which one the actual resource are convinced. If you receive the unstable resource then you understand it as your main information you will have huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen throughout you if you take *Rats: Observations on the History & Habitat of the City's Most Unwanted Inhabitants* as the daily resource information.

Mary Fleming:

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Vincent Cartagena:

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Linda Bryant:

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