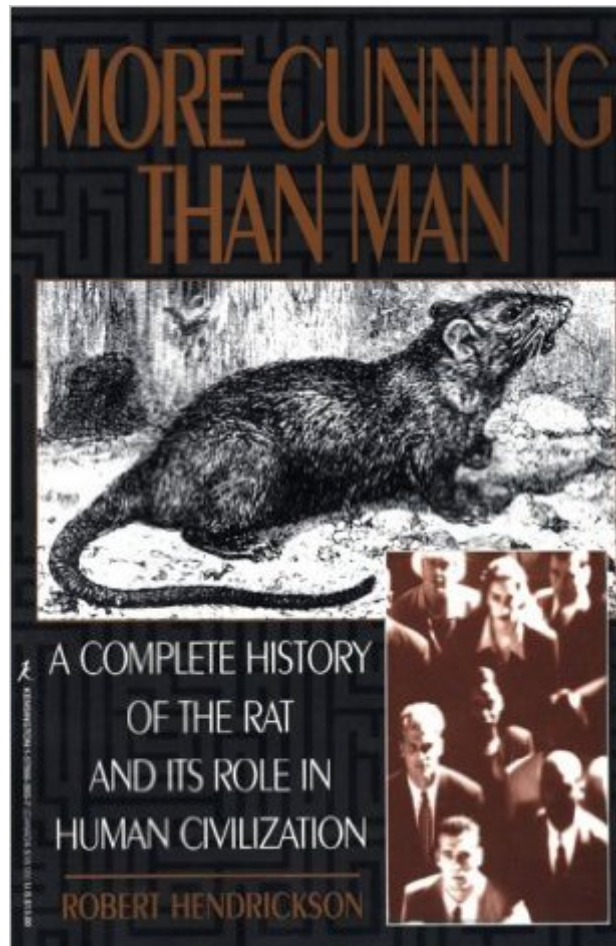


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More Cunning Than Man: A Social History Of Rats And Man



Synopsis

This eye-opening, well-researched examination of mankind's oldest competitor is filled with weirdly fascinating information about the history of the rat and the way it consistently outsmarts man.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (8 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

The most inclusive book on this rodent I've ever read. It includes the origin and natural history of the rat, rat behaviour, man's attempts to eradicate them, rats' links to disease, rat folklore, rats in art and literature, rats in the lab, rats as pets, rat attacks, even recipes for cooked rats (:-P). Don't think I'll be trying any of those. The book has many facts about rats I've seen nowhere else, including this: scientists were able to impregnate a female *Mus musculus* with the semen of a Norway Rat. Attempts to cross *Rattus norvegicus* with *Rattus rattus* have failed. That means that the common house mouse is basically a tiny rat...or that the Norway rat is a huge mouse, however you want to look at it. Of course, all this information in a book of less than 300 pages means the book reads like some rivers out west...a mile wide and only 6 inches deep. Furthermore, Mr. Hendrickson uses neither endnotes or footnotes, so if the reader wants to verify the info by consulting the original sources, s/he is SOL. This is most irritating when one is reading the horrific attacks of rats 'swarming' human victims and eating them alive. Behaviour that unusual in an animal that prefers to avoid people begs for better verification, rats being one of the animals that inspires Urban Legends. (At least one story RH repeats was identified as such by Jan Harold Brunvand; the one where two people check into a hotel room, one leaves, when she returns, the second person has

vanished, and no one remembers her ...) The author does include an index and a bibliography. And while I do understand that most people would read this book for the horrific elements, I wish the role of the rat as pet had been covered better.

A lot of the reviews have focused on how well-researched this book is and while some of the elements are, a lot of them are obviously urban legends or horribly over-exaggerated anecdotes given by people who obviously are not aware of much about rats and are speaking only from fear or cultural stereotypes. I spent a great deal of time examining the points he made about how rats are ferocious, disease-ridden, gluttonous and tend to over-populate their environment and I couldn't help but draw a parallel with humankind and wonder if that is why humans have always held them in such horror - because they hold up a very unflattering mirror to us. Nonetheless, he tends to open up each chapter with horrifying, sensationalistic stories about rats lurking in corners preparing to jump out and eat babies or some other such nonsense whereas anyone who knows anything about rats will tell you that rats much prefer to avoid humans and will not tend to bite unless they are provoked (or you smell like food, because they are remarkably short-sighted) - and being at heart lazy animals, prefer much easier to attain meals than humans, which are much larger than they are. His hysterical listing of the diseases that rats carry is outdated; many of the diseases listed have since been determined to actually be much more frequently carried by other animals, including other rodents that humans find "cute," such as prairie dogs and squirrels (but we don't find mass extermination campaigns against them, do we?). Zoonosis from rodents, in any case, is extremely rare in industrialized countries in the modern era. Overall I was very disappointed in this book - I was hoping for some cold, hard facts and instead I got all the same sort of hysteria and sensationalism I could get reading the Star.

This is a fascinating book which details how rats impact our lives and have changed human history. Their impact is enormous, as they destroy enough food that hunger otherwise could be eliminated. The book notes that it is our ways that entice the rats. The author provides lots of interesting facts about rats. The following are notes from the book that may be of use to student of History, especially social history: Rats do not appear to have any genetic changes from exposure to radiation. Rats have very sensitive taste sensitivity. They may detect as little as two parts per million of poison. Rats will not eat refined flour. Rat teeth can cut through concrete and steel. Rats can fall 60 feet and land on their feet. Rats will feed helpless rats and help guide blind rats. During flooding, rats stay in narrow passages in their burrows where they survive as long as their oxygen lasts. Rats often do not eat

unfamiliar food which makes them difficult to poison. Knowledge of poisoned bait appears to be handed down from generation to generation. Rats cause many fires of "undetermined origin" from their gnawing electric wire insulation. Rats will bite and eat people. Tens of thousands are injured or killed annually. Some authorities believe that if crops destroyed by rats could be cut in half, world hunger would end. It is not true that lemmings kill themselves by running into the sea. When the lemmings population gets too large in an area, thousands will migrate in a straight line. They will swim across water always swimming to reach the other side. Those that drown do not intentionally drown. Along the way, pregnant females remain behind in new areas.

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