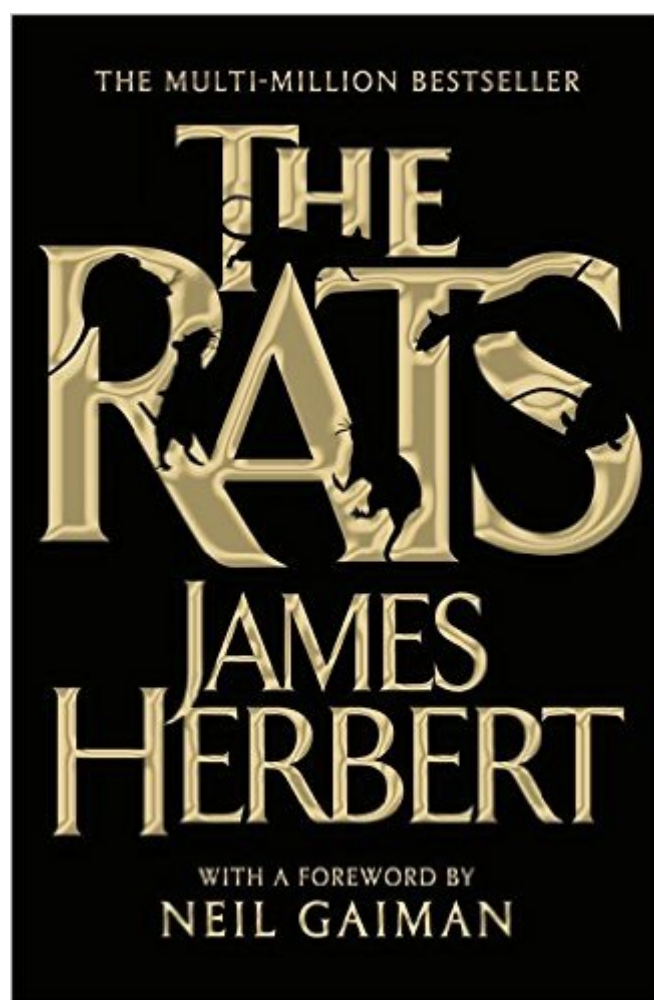


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The Rats



Synopsis

Out of the sewers and streets comes the biggest threat London has ever faced—rats, hungry for human flesh—in this 40th anniversary edition of the classic bestseller. It was only when the bones of the first devoured victims were discovered that the true nature and power of these swarming black creatures with their razor sharp teeth and the taste for human blood began to be realized by a panic-stricken city. For millions of years, man and rats had been natural enemies. But now, for the first time—suddenly, shockingly, horribly—the balance of power had shifted. . . This is a special 40th anniversary edition of the classic bestseller that launched horror writer James Herbert's career.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is Herbert's first novel and what an achievement. You can read in one try. It's about mutant, giant rats attacking London. Very graphic and gory, full of non-stop action and great characters. This is one scary novel, although *Domain* (the third and last sequel) is the most scary of all of them.

A friend of mine (and fellow reviewer) recommended this book to me. I'd read a few of Herbert's books before; 'The Fog', written shortly after this one, is another take on 'modern-day England' falling apart due to inexplicable events, while 'Once', 'Others', and '48' veered into fantasy and sci-fi territory. So this was a chance to get reacquainted with Herbert as the young, inspired horror writer. 'The Rats' holds up well after more than 30 years. It's interesting to contrast this book, coming in at just under 200 pages, with the more verbose (not to mention gory) thrillers of recent years. Had 'The Rats' been written today, it would almost certainly be at least three times longer, with tons of

added 'sex and violence' for the taste of modern audiences. But it's the simplicity of 'The Rats' that makes it a refreshing change for readers like me, who have come to find a lot of today's horror literature to be almost interchangeable. Sure, an author like King, Koontz, or even Herbert of 30 years later, could have added a lot more to this story...and maybe it would have been just as good. But most likely, it would have been a 600 page 'epic', that ended up having about one-third of the book being worth reading. Here, Herbert managed to make the whole story worth reading, with no extraneous material (with the possible exception of one character early on who gets a separate chapter that reads more like a stand-alone short story). The final chapter contains a nice additional 'scary as hell' moment that prevents the story from the kind of anticlimactic letdown ending common of more recent horror novels. The next chapter in the trilogy is set up nicely...and I look forward to finding the other two volumes to see where else this idea can go!

THE RATS is the third James Herbert novel I have read. I started out with his second novel, THE FOG, after reading a synopsis I found intriguing (I reviewed that one on this forum earlier). I then happened upon THE SURVIVOR at a used bookshop, and once again enjoyed the horrific ride that Herbert takes the reader on. His first novel, however, eluded me for some time; it was out of print for a while and then I forgot about it. Fortunately I finally got round to it. All I can say is WOW. First novels are tricky things; the author's future success relies heavily on the impact they have on the reading public, and if the author should stumble, (s)he may not get a second chance. Some first novels are legendary; Stephen King's CARRIE and Margaret Mitchell's GONE WITH THE WIND come immediately to mind. It matters little that CARRIE was just the beginning of a brilliant career while Mitchell was a flash in the pan; they both achieved a legendary status that will probably remain always. With THE RATS, Herbert really hit the ground running. Most writers, regardless of genre, usually spend a little time setting the scene and providing the reader with a sense of place, and also takes some time to introduce the characters. Not Herbert. As Stephen King once put it, Herbert "grabs you by the lapels and starts screaming in your face." By page ten, the first horror has already been visited on the reader, the roller coaster is in motion, out of control and picking up speed, and heading for one unbelievably horrific crash after another. I really don't need to reveal anything about the plot; if you can't figure out the basic premise from the title, then horror is clearly not for you. And even horror fans may find Herbert a bit much: his books are not for the squeamish; he seldom pulls back from the crunch, and seems at times to revel in the blood and gore he spills. And he does all this in that cool, calm, rational prose so typical of English writers; somehow this makes the endless horrors in THE RATS all the more dreadful. If it is decadent to enjoy a novel

like this, I plead guilty. The man was a genius.

A suburban ratpocalypse. *The Rats* is a direct and simple horror book, but with great descriptions and surprisingly deep characters. Specially for a story about mutant rats gone mad! This is a short book with a to-the-point narrative. Stephen King has described this story as Mike Tyson on his prime: "No finesse and raw power." We are introduced to Harris, an art teacher from the poor London suburbs. His neighborhood is soon taken by tales of deadly attacks by rats the size of dogs and he becomes one of the main agents against the plague. The book has similarities with zombie stories, in particular because the rats' bites are deadly, but there is no total Apocalypse. The strong points are the extremely graphic descriptions of the attacks, that may turn into a total massacre involving a lot of people. Like in a crowded train and another one in a movie theater. When the lights are turned on, the floor is completely taken by the rats. It is very interesting how the author builds multi-layered characters with complex stories just to have them brutally torn by a mass of killer rodents in a few paragraphs. We have a man in a midlife crisis that is revealed to be a true hero, a nymphomaniac street dweller that lost to the war the only man who satisfied her, a former salesman that had an affair with a fellow worker and now has surrendered to alcoholism. A great read.

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