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Juvenile Fiction

Three Green Rats: An Eco Tale
Linda Mason Hunter
Suzanne Summersgill
Suzanne Summersgill, illustrator
Ink Pinn Press
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The town of Tintown is in trouble, even though the hurrying and scurrying rats who live there don't seem to notice. For years they have consumed and polluted without thought, and now Tintown, as authors Linda Mason Hunter and Suzanne Summersgill so aptly put it, is under "a cloud of bad gravy." Can a misfit trio of brothers, with their simple way of life and eco-smart ways, help save the town?

Oliver, Wilbur, and Tom know all about reducing, reusing, and recycling. With a bit of effort, they make everything they need, grow everything they eat in their organic garden, and reuse everything they can—even rain and dishwater! While most townsfolk steer clear of the brothers, Maybelline, the grandniece of the richest, greediest rat in town, can't help but be fascinated by them.

The trio and their story will impart numerous messages to readers, with a focus on the benefits of being earth conscious and living simply. The endless pollution, trash, and noise have made Tintown a dirty, unhealthy place, but in the brothers' greener patch, Maybelline can actually catch her breath. Though the residents of Tintown buy every possible gadget and gizmo, they are "perpetually dissatisfied." Readers will easily see the advantages of living a bit more simply, like the three brothers.

The reality is, Tintown is a reflection of what the earth could become, and in some cases already is, if people don't attempt to care for and live in harmony with nature. The great thing about *Three Green Rats* is how the authors deal with this idea. The story is comedic, with playful language and pure silliness. It avoids becoming moralistic, and is a smart, fun chapter book intended for seven-to-eleven-year-olds. While stronger readers could get through the text independently, it would also make a great read-aloud for younger children as well.

Most importantly, the story has hope. When the brothers save the town from a massive fire with their recycled greywater and a garden hose made from reused bits of plastic, they highlight the damage the townspeople have done over the years. With their eyes opened, the citizens come together as a community to learn from the brothers and start to make the changes that help ensure Tintown will be a happy, healthy place in the future.

The authors leave readers with the empowering message that "Those crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do," and with the understanding that individuals can live in a way that brings about a better world for all.

The highly stylized illustrations add a quirky touch that is the perfect accompaniment to the text. A glossary at the end helps explain some unfamiliar ecological words and phrases as well as some additional vocabulary. The book is also appropriately printed on recycled FSC paper with vegetable and soy inks, which is a wonderful, concrete example to give to young readers about making green choices.

Alicia Sondhi