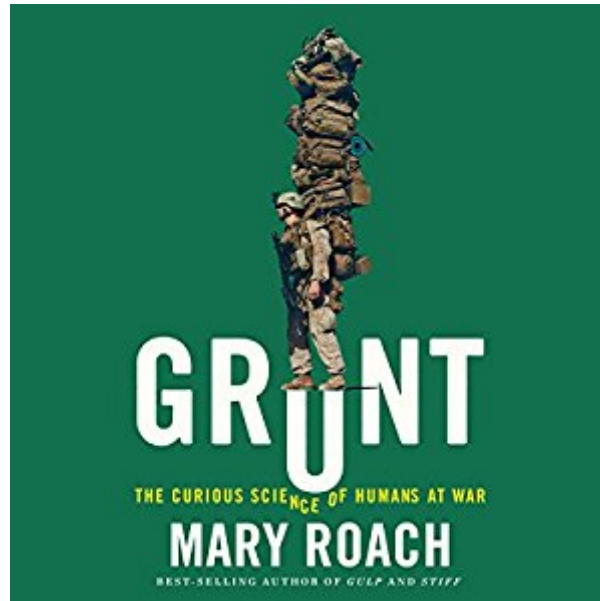




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# Grunt: The Curious Science Of Humans At War



## Synopsis

Bestselling author Mary Roach explores the science of keeping human beings intact, awake, sane, uninfected, and uninfested in the bizarre and extreme circumstances of war. *Grunt* tackles the science behind some of a soldier's most challenging adversaries - panic, exhaustion, heat, noise - and introduces us to the scientists who seek to conquer them. Mary Roach dodges hostile fire with the U.S. Marine Corps Paintball Team as part of a study on hearing loss and survivability in combat. She visits the fashion design studio of U.S. Army Natick Labs and learns why a zipper is a problem for a sniper. She visits a repurposed movie studio where amputee actors help prepare Marine Corps medics for the shock and gore of combat wounds. At Camp Lemmonier, Djibouti, in east Africa, we learn how diarrhea can be a threat to national security. Roach samples caffeinated meat, sniffs an archival sample of a World War II stink bomb, and stays up all night with the crew tending the missiles on the nuclear submarine USS Tennessee. She answers questions not found in any other book on the military: Why is DARPA interested in ducks? How is a wedding gown like a bomb suit? Why are shrimp more dangerous to sailors than sharks? Take a tour of duty with Roach, and you'll never see our nation's defenders in the same way again.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There's something seriously wrong with Mary Roach. Conjure up any vile, disgusting, or taboo subject that anyone in her right mind would shun and you'll find Mary Roach has written a book about it (or is probably planning to do so). Her books to date have dealt with cadavers, the afterlife, surviving interplanetary flight, the physics and chemistry of sex, and the

human digestive (and excretive) tract. And she is not inclined to use circumlocutions. She calls crap crap. I love this woman!

**Military science under the microscope**

Now, in *Grunt*, her latest book, Roach has turned her attention to military science, specifically the science-based efforts by the U.S. defense establishment to clothe, train, armor, and heal our soldiers, sailors, and airmen and protect them from every manner of wound and loss of function. Unfamiliar and uncomfortable topics such as battlefield hearing loss, shark repellent, bird strikes on airplanes, diarrhea, and penis implantation figure in the story. (The only major topic she avoids is PTSD, because, she writes, “it has had so much [coverage], and so much of it is so very good.”) Roach tells her tale with brutal honesty “and leavens it with an abundance of humor. Some passages are laugh-out-loud funny. Maybe what’s wrong with Mary Roach is that her sense of humor is so much better developed than it is in the rest of us. In any case, I love what she writes.

**Surprises galore**

Unless you are remarkably knowledgeable about the U.S. military, you’re likely to learn a great deal about how it actually works by reading *Grunt*.\*\*\* Consider, for example, the years-long investigation carried out by the Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) team of the United States Air Force. You’ll learn why shooting chickens out of a sixty-foot chicken gun at 400 miles per hour to test their impact on aircraft in flight was eventually deemed unsuitable. The scientists shifted to turkey vultures. As Roach informs us, “Though implicated in only 1 percent of Air Force birdstrikes, the weighty raptors are, by one accounting, responsible for 40 percent of the damage.” Serious people actually spent years figuring all this out!\*\*\*

You’ll learn why the Army’s clothing designers crafted custom-designed tops for snipers, with pockets on the sleeves for easy access, a zipper on the side instead of the front, and no buttons, so that when lying on the ground or crawling across it their buttons won’t catch or the zipper make noise that might give away their position. (FYI, “US government button specifications run to twenty-two pages. This fact on its own yields a sense of what it is like to design garments for the Army.”) Can you imagine any army, anywhere else in the world, that would go to such lengths to outfit its troops? “In a place like Afghanistan,” Roach writes, “sweat keeps more people alive than corpsmen do.” The explanation (in Chapter 7) is fascinating. You get the point. Military science can be fun “at least, reading about it can.

About the author

Mary Roach has written eight books of science journalism. Her work has garnered several awards and been shortlisted for many more. Her books have been bestsellers from the start, beginning with her first effort, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*.

I have to assume that what she reports is accurate. I see from a disappointed reader that she got

the manufacturer of a car wrong. However, I can't believe that the science she reports on is inaccurate. Assuming that, which I think is credible to do, this is a remarkable book. I feel we all owe it to those serving in the military or veterans to read this. It reveals details about injury and trauma that we all should know about. It's easy to read and her humor helps cut through the difficult information to digest, while at the same time, she maintains the respect that is proper for some of the grave revelations.

If Mary Roach writes it, I want to read it. Mary covers quite a bit of serious ground in this book while managing to keep the tone lighthearted, and it's a fun read. There's a section in the book about how diarrhea affects war, which is very insightful - who else would have thought to tackle that issue?? - and actually pretty fascinating. The book definitely gives a much different perspective of the military than other media outlets - we all know we'll never see a piece in the paper on Diarrhea in the Military - and brings it down to a civilian level that you'll understand, and enjoy learning from. Well worth the cost of the book - and the time you'll spend immersed in it.

Typical Mary Roach book - and a return to the one-word titles, after "Packing for Mars," one of her weakest books. Humorous, intelligent, thoroughly researched, it is her typical layperson's guide to the science behind today's military. An absolute must for people who've been wondering about what happens to soldiers whose penises are blown off by IEDs - in fact, very informative about the way military medicine has had to adapt to some of the particular weaponry used in the Middle East.

It's a good read, if you like hearing about the random things military funding goes towards researching. It's a lighthearted informational piece, taking its title and subject matter from the odd stuff the line soldier ponders in his downtime: What idiot decided ACU's were a universal pattern? If I get my junk blown off, what are my options? Just how 'mine resistant' is this truck I'm in? These sorts of deep thoughts seem to drive the narrative, but the topics extend beyond research that benefits the average soldier. Some oddball 'black' projects from the WWII era are covered as well, like shark-repellant life jackets and a foul-smelling spray to make Japanese officers frown at one another and ask the age old question: Who farted? This is not a book describing the history of the infantry, the making of a combat soldier, etc. so don't let the title fool you.

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