

Mary Roach explores the odd science of war in her latest book

Tuesday, June 7, 2016 by Sarah Johnson in
Arts & Leisure



Not many authors are told that the subject of their next book should be the Antichrist. Mary Roach, the New York Times best-selling author of *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* and *Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex*, often receives suggestions from readers on future topics they'd like to see covered.

MARY ROACH

([HTTP://WWW.CITYPAGES.COM/CALENDAR/MARY-ROACH-7991321](http://www.citypages.com/calendar/mary-roach-7991321))

Fitzgerald Theater

\$25-\$50

“One guy told me I should write about the Antichrist,” she tells City Pages. “At first I thought, ‘Where would I go to do research on that?’ and then it occurred to me that maybe he thought

I

was the Antichrist.”

With her new book,

Grunt: The Curious Science of Humans at War

, Roach uses her quirky humor to explore the esoteric side of battle, including a captain at the Army Medical Research Laboratory injecting himself with cobra venom to test the possibility of building immunity, and how Velcro can be problematic for a sniper (it’s noisy, and puts them in danger by revealing their position). Another oddity in the 258-page ode to inquisitiveness includes an entire chapter that tackles Stench Soup, a stink bomb designed to clear buildings or disperse violent mobs.

“My dad instilled in me an innate curiosity,” she says. “Being a journalist gives you an excuse to be nosy, and allows you to explore worlds you don’t know where everything is fresh.”

Access issues while researching

Grunt

were virtually nonexistent, says the New England native. “Everyone I talked to was surprisingly transparent. NASA was actually more difficult when I was working on

Packing for Mars

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Reader suggestions aside, she said her book topics develop organically. The idea for *Grunt*

, for example, came to her while she was in India working on a piece for Smithsonian Magazine on the world's hottest chili pepper. There, she discovered military research going on to weaponize the pepper into a powder that could simulate tear gas.

With previous work on human digestion and cadavers, are any subjects off-limits? "I don't think I would tackle religion," she muses. "People are pretty sensitive about their beliefs, and humor and religion don't seem to go together."

Mary Roach will be live at the Fitzgerald Theater, sharing fun facts and deep thoughts in St. Paul this Friday, June 10 at 7 p.m. as part MPR's The Thread author series hosted by Kerri Miller. For tickets and more information,

[click here](#)

(<http://fitzgeraldtheater.publicradio.org/event/the-thread-live-with-mary-roach-hosted-by-kerri-miller/>)

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