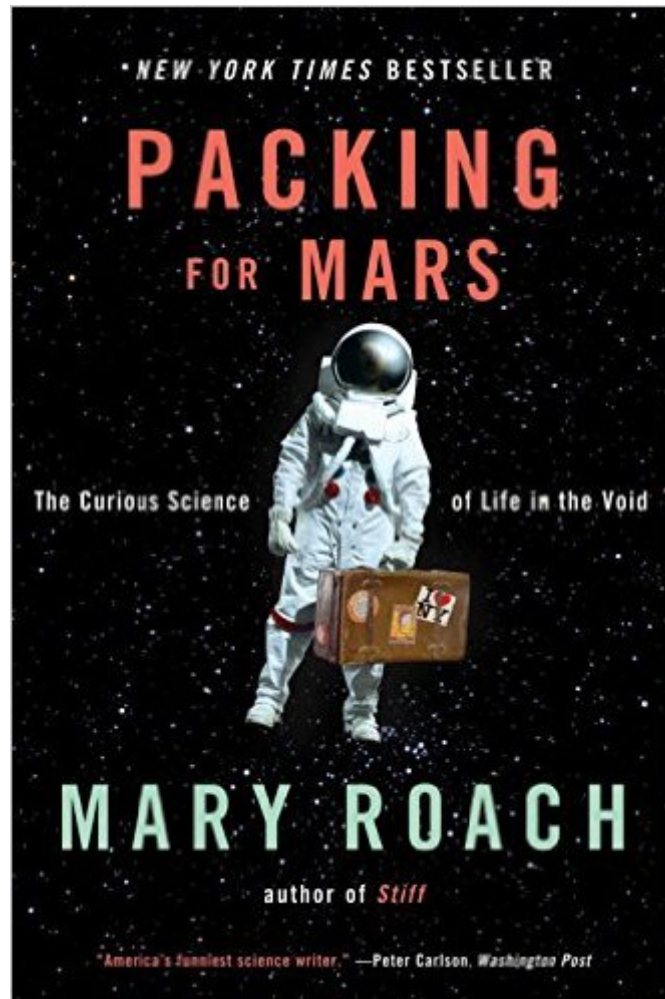


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Packing For Mars: The Curious Science Of Life In The Void



Synopsis

“America’s funniest science writer” (Washington Post) returns to explore the irresistibly strange universe of life without gravity in this New York Times bestseller. Space is a world devoid of the things we need to live and thrive: air, gravity, hot showers, fresh produce, privacy, beer. Space exploration is in some ways an exploration of what it means to be human. How much can a person give up? How much weirdness can they take? What happens to you when you can’t walk for a year? have sex? smell flowers? What happens if you vomit in your helmet during a space walk? Is it possible for the human body to survive a bailout at 17,000 miles per hour? To answer these questions, space agencies set up all manner of quizzical and startlingly bizarre space simulations. As Mary Roach discovers, it’s possible to preview space without ever leaving Earth. From the space shuttle training toilet to a crash test of NASA’s new space capsule (cadaver filling in for astronaut), Roach takes us on a surreally entertaining trip into the science of life in space and space on Earth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It seems like a previous life: the mid-1980s and NASA’s program to send the first American “civilian” into space. I was interested, then sidelined when applications were restricted to teachers, then stunned by Challenger’s launch disaster. But now I’m delighted to get a sort of ride-along with the clever and uber-curious Mary Roach in *PACKING FOR MARS*. She begins: “To the rocket scientist, you are a problem. You are the most irritating piece of machinery he or she will ever have to deal

with." And then she dives in to explore that human machinery in space and how everything -- procedures, equipment and supplies -- is designed to best serve it. Through examples from animal simulations and crash-test cadavers, the race-for-space/ shuttle/ space-station projects, and planning Mars-length missions, she examines astronaut selection; the effects of isolation, inactivity and cramped spaces; the spectrum from weightlessness to multiple g-forces; eating, eliminating, and hygiene; and ... well, enough with the listmaking; it hints at dull and anyone who's read Roach knows she doesn't do dull. Instead, she mines excellent and surprising facts about physics and biology -- and what most captures me is her practicality, for example this from a passage about religious observations aboard the international space station: "Zero gravity and a ninety-minute orbital day created so many questions for Muslim astronauts that a [guideline] was drafted. Rather than require [them] to pray five times during each ninety-minute orbit of Earth, they were allowed to go by the twenty-four-hour cycle of the launch location." How to stay oriented toward Mecca at such speed and prostrate oneself in weightlessness are also addressed.

Combine equal parts of Sylvia Branzei's 'Grossology' and the Bathroom Readers' Institute's 'Uncle John's Bathroom Reader' series, make mention of something coming out of (or going into) the anus in nearly every chapter, add a thin pretext of future Mars expeditions, then glaze it over with stories of Astro-chimp masturbation and prehensile dolphin penises - Voila! - You now have an idea of what to expect from Mary Roach's 'Packing for Mars.' (Be sure to wash it all down with a nice chilled glass of charcoal filtered urine - Ms. Roach describes this beverage as "sweet...restorative and surprisingly drinkable" - Yum). Okay...perhaps the aforementioned description of 'Packing for Mars' is hyperbolic and a little bit unfair. To her credit, Ms. Roach seems to have put forth painstaking efforts in her research (she also includes long, ancillary foot notes on almost every page of her book). Moreover, through her emails and interviews with cosmonauts, astronauts, NASA personnel, etc., she manages to coax some rather candid information about seldom discussed issues/problems associated with space travel (e.g., personal hygiene, lavatory practices, sexual activity, etc.) Parts of this book were truly insightful, and from that perspective, I say "kudos" to Ms. Roach for her efforts. That being said, I have to honestly admit that I was relieved to finally finish the book.

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