



Eat the Apple: A Memoir

Matt Young

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Eat the Apple is a twisted, and darkly hilarious story of American youth and masculinity in an age of continuous war. Matt Young joined the Marine Corps at age eighteen after a drunken night culminating in wrapping his car around a fire hydrant. The teenage wasteland he fled followed him to the training bases charged with making him a Marine. Matt survived the training and then not one, not two, but three deployments to Iraq, where the testosterone, danger, and stakes for him and his fellow grunts were dialed up a dozen decibels. Young's story drops us unarmed into Marine Corps culture and lays bare the absurdism of 21st-century war, the manned-up vulnerability of those on the front lines, and the true, if often misguided, motivations that drove a young man to a life at war.

Eat the Apple: A Memoir Details

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Ashvin says

(Proof Copy Review) Eat the Apple by Matt Young

Disclaimer: I received this proof copy published by Bloomsbury Publishing courtesy of Pansing Distributors in exchange for my honest review.

Eat the Apple is a beautiful and honest memoir that explores masculinity and the consequences of war on one impressionable young soldier, the author himself, Matt Young.

At the age of eighteen, after crashing his car into a fire hydrant (don't drink and drive kids), Matt Young decided to join the Marine Corps. Fleeing his teenage life, he survived the training bases of California and then three deployments to Iraq. This book is the searing and truthful response to those years in service, and is a tell-all on military culture and the vulnerability of those on the front line, aside from the misguided motivations that drove a young man to war.

I was slightly confused with this one. 50 pages in, I was unsure if I'd be able to finish this at all and it's not because it's a bad read, it's just not a solid attempt at what I thought this book might be about (at first). However, things did change from then on, and putting down this book, I am able to see it in a new light and respect the author for sharing his account of literally everything he wanted to share with his readers from his time in deployment. There are several doodles throughout the book that add up to it being more interesting.

What I enjoyed very much from this memoir is that it is very honest, and there is humour in it too. It also has its sweet moments, and I could take the author's words and use it in my life as well. In a sense, I understand where the author is coming from, and Eat the Apple does good in connecting its readers to the war world, without it being too much.

All in all, Eat the Apple is a solid memoir on war and the marines, and does good at being a role model for individuals who might seem unsure of what they are doing with their lives. It might not be everyone's cup of tea but I encourage readers to take a sip and see if they want more.

(This post was originally shared and posted in the KL Book Appreciation Club Page).

Peter says

This is yet another warrior's memoir. In style *Eat the Apple* is somewhere on the spectrum between James Jones's *The Thin Red Line* of WWII and Stanley Kubrick's gritty and cynical *Full Metal Jacket* of Vietnam. The title comes from a Marine Corps saying, "Eat the Apple, Fuck the Corps." In a sense, there is nothing new in it—in February, 2005, a lost young man enlists in the U.S. Marine Corps, goes to boot camp and meets crazy people called Drill Instructors, is sent to a war zone (Iraq, 2005) where he is constantly battling fear, is exposed to traumatic events, and returns home truly screwed up with a long life filled with bad memories ahead of him. He will return to Iraq two more times before he goes civilian again in 2009.

So what makes this memoir and exposé of war different? It's not the content—this is the story of every young man in war, and of many in peacetime. The difference is *style*. Each chapter is short and punchy with an entirely different message and a different internal voice: some chapters are funny, some are grisly and

gross, some are reportorial, many are self-loathing, and some are just painful. And Young doesn't gild the lily—he doesn't hesitate to show his warts and worse. This short but powerful book is a painful self-diagnosis.

Consider a humorous vignette. Young is posted as a lookout on the roof of a building in Fallujah. He is alone and standing at a parapet looking outward. To pass the time he begins to masturbate. As he is going at it, his Sergeant comes to the roof, sits behind him, and starts talking. Soon the captain arrives and begins talking with the Sergeant. Then others arrive and the rooftop becomes a community club. Throughout this *kaffeklatsch* Young continues to stare out over the city with his back to the crowd, still holding his “gun.” Nobody notices.

Perhaps the most common theme in the first half of this book is dissociation. Boot camp is designed to separate a boy's actions from his reasoning self—the recruit is to do as he is ordered and when he is ordered. Moral qualms are suppressed in the pursuit of the ultimate goal—defeating the enemy. Life, even one's own life, is expendable. Young entered recruit training as a lost young man looking for direction.

What he found is that the Corps is perfect at giving direction, and its first step is to take the human out of the boy, to remove the social veneer that society has created. It knows that there is no “I” in “Corps,” and that to prepare young men for war it must substitute the “T”—the Team—for the “I.” It must disconnect their minds from their brains so that they can operate in the insanity and confusion of war.

This separation of man from self reaches its pinnacle in Young's early chapters. There he tells his story of boot camp as if it were a DVD and “this recruit”—a standard term for oneself at boot camp—is merely an observer. This is an unusual and very powerful way to describe recruit training, though I wonder if it isn't a bit hyperbolic. I went through the Corps' boot camp in the early 60's and though there are distinct similarities between Young's experience and this recruit's, I did not find it as dehumanizing or as insane as did Young. It was weird, though.

As the book proceeds we follow Young through unpleasanties in Iraq during his first tour until his Humvee is blown up by an IED in his second tour. A fellow Marine is killed but Young suffers only broken bones—adding survivor's guilt to the heavy baggage he already carries. He is transferred back to the States where, between bouts of extremely heavy drinking and bizarre behavior, he undergoes training in urban warfare even though he need not return to Iraq—a third tour must be requested. We read his description of his life back in California and are afraid for him: he is a mental basket case consumed by drink, sex, and self-loathing.

After urban warfare training Young volunteers to return to Iraq and is given a cushy behind-the-lines job. This is the essence of military logic—train a man for terror and put him in a protected assignment; or the reverse—train him to be a clerk and put him in the trenches. It makes no sense. (I was one of the very few high school graduates in my recruit platoon, but I was assigned to a job that required absolutely no education beyond an ability to read at eighth grade level; a fellow recruit had been in an Army artillery unit before enlisting in the Corps—he was not assigned to an artillery unit in the Corps. Perhaps this is part of the Corps's training philosophy of eradicating your past.)

Young's often-repeated regret is that in his first tour he never got to kill anyone. But after his second tour it's too late—when he volunteers for a third tour and returns to Iraq in 2008 he has a different role. No longer on the front lines, he is assigned to a regimental commander's security team and lives in relative luxury with regular hot chow, access to a swimming pool, and other amenities.

Young breaks up with his longtime fiancé just before his four-year contract is completed; he tells her that he is “just not a nice person.” We suspect that he is too nice for the role he has chosen, but it's all semantics. Eventually he gets his life together: he stops drinking, he marries and has children, he goes to graduate

school. We wish him the best, and cringe at what he has experienced even though he never got to kill anyone.

Matt Young can write with imagination and candor, and we can expect another book soon. I'll buy it.

Four Stars.

Hai Quan says

A slave of ancient time who was chained into his post under the dark belly of a ship, to ensure an uninterrupted rowing would constantly seek an opportunity to escape from his horrible fate.

But as incredible and unfathomable as it is, the modern slaves of today, hundred thousands if not millions of them, voluntarily chain themselves to servitude that is comparable if not more horrible than the frightening life-time hard labor of their distant cousins in centuries past.

The author of this memoir is just but one example in point, among the modern serfs, dimwits, robot-like brainless dummies who can be found in most armed forces in the U S A and many other predatory nations who use them, or rather their sweat and blood for the rob and kill enterprise or to be more polite, to subjugate third world countries.

For what purpose? Some might ask.

Gold, diamond, and as society progresses and industrialized, petroleum, metal ore and uranium.

But the most profitable is selling weapon of thousand kinds to all sides, reaping a colossal profit that is far surpasses profit from all industries put together. USA is indisputably the greatest MERCHANT OF DEAD.

Amigo, that dollar bill you are holding, is soaked wet with human blood and tear, and sadly most of the blood and tear is from people of color courtesy of the foreign policy of almost all US RULING GANGS.

The emperors of ancient time had to resort to kidnap or purchase strong bodies to chain them into the rowing posts. But today emperors are more clever

They don't need to round up healthy and strong men (some time they do, but rarely) to ship them off to training centers, they use something that is stronger than iron chain:

THE FEW, THE PROUD, THE MARINES

HIGH SALARY, BONUSES, "GI BILL", and the prospect of local gourmet meals, exquisite spirits, dopes and young girls

I am not making this up. It comes straight from their confession (Please be referred to my review of CHARLIE RANGER in my 'read' book shelf)

YAH, doves after doves of all -muscle-but-tiny-brain dumb, penniless, jobless desperado have been lured by the foregoing phony romanticism, the prospect of high living, and a chance to satisfy a man lust from his groin, fell into this appealing trap, just like the author of this recounting had been. Of course he won't admit it publicly in his memoir.

.Countless had lost their lives, limbs and sanity. Many survived and struggle to recover from the past trauma

resulting from fighting a war that was not only illegal but immoral ., extremely wicked .

Babies killers , as they were known!

And the whole Western world ignore all this evilness, all this wickedness, all this terrible injustice, all this stinky smell of decomposed corpses of people of colors that everybody in the whole world can see, aware and smell EXCEPT the majority of people in the Western world , it seems

Am I exaggerating ?

Just read all of the book reviews for this memoir. Then the answer is clear.

We people of color are not oppressed, exploited, murdered, exterminated by just evil EMPERORS & QUEENS (Elizabeth among others) but by the whole well fed, well clothed, well housed zombies who are living in "another" world completely isolated not so much geographically but mentally from the rest of us "apes" , " sub-human", 'dinks" , "gooks" ., dipshit,to borrow some of the inventions the late Cmd ,Adm JAMES BOND STOCKDALE (IN LOVE AND WAR) and Cherokee Paul MacDonald (INTO THE GREEN) and other memoirs from other war criminals for which I have written book reviews

It is unbelievable and incredible ! They calmly discussing the carnage carrying out several decades ago as some natural occurrences like earthquakes or floods .

The author of this memoir are telling us about his stint in Vietnam as though one of his travel abroad despite the fact that he went there to kill people who had done nothing wrong , unless defending their country from invading foreign barbarians is consider as evil act .

Too bad, he regrets he didn't have a change to murder any!

He, and the rest of the walking, breathing, eating, and screwing DEAD Westerners are reading his recount while popping into their mouth handful of snack , acting as though. nothing abnormal was happening, as though BOMBING, leveling villages, towns and cities ; killing several millions human being is the most natural thing in this world.

May be it is. Just look at the carnage that is carried out by the wicked Jews and their gangster brothers.

I for one will devote the remaining of my life to voice up my indignant, regardless how feeble it is

I just cannot behave as if nothing terribly wrong , terribly wicked, terribly evil was happened in my country in that 1960 , 1970 decades on account of a tiny number of white devils while the rest of their people pretending ignorant of the darkest (but also the most glorious, later) moment in the heroic struggle of Vietnamese people to regain their sacred , unalienable national independence

Beth says

A funny, sad, honest memoir of a Marine's life before, during and after deployments in Iraq. Told alternately through detached, speaking-of-myself-in-the-third-person prose, comics and drawings, bullet-point lists, and even a short play, Eat the Apple is a really unique take on the soldier memoir. But despite the humor Young sprinkles throughout the book, the underlying current of fear, anger and despair shines through, gnawing away at our narrator as he, and we the readers, contemplate the questions: What's the point of war, anyway? Is it worth the cost? And what happens when a young man, trained to kill, comes home?

*Thanks to NetGalley for the ARC, provided by the author and/or the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Jonathan Maas says

One of the best memoirs I've read in recent memory - and one of the most unique

I've read a few great, unique memoirs in the past year - the incredible Am I Alone Here?: Notes on Living to Read and Reading to Live, in which Peter Orner recounts the books he has read over the years. I read Hourglass: Time, Memory, Marriage in which Dani Shapiro reflects on - not that many things honestly - but still finds a way to make it gripping. I read How to Murder Your Life in which Cat Marnell talks about her insane life, in an insane way.

Eat the Apple by Matt Young takes its place among these.

It tells the tale of his deployment to Iraq, but it is not your typical memoir of such a thing. This is not Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin.

What is this? Possibly the strongest anti-war non-fiction book since On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society by Dave Grossman

This memoir takes every layer of the military experience and turns it on its head.

Heroism, drill instructors, war, comrades, and himself.

Matt Young spares nothing, and definitely not himself. One of the strongest chapters is about how he, as a senior officer, picks on a young recruit and drives the recruit into his own psychoses, and his own bad end.

This book is beyond cynical, and yet Young's tone pushes it back.

Every chapter is different - some are drawn even.

In conclusion, this book should be required reading for everyone, including civilians

This book is great - and beyond unique. I highly recommend it to anyone and everyone!

Roxane says

There is a lot to admire here stylistically. There is a range of narrative styles, lists, images. The first person plural point of view works well. The prose is sharp and fast and often unfocused but I suppose that is also the experience of war. This is an interesting military memoir, very original. But I was distracted by the narrative distance. I wanted to feel closer to the narrator even though that is probably besides the point. Well worth checking out.

Ken says

Called a memoir, this is a choppy collection of vignettes about Young's three tours of duty in Iraq. Some episodes are State-side, some are in the war zone, but all provide insight into the fragile mind of a hardened Marine. If that all sounds oxymoronic, then Matt has made his point.

As usual with the vignette approach, some work better than others and the narrative line gets chop suey-ed along the way, but certain parts were nicely done in a thrifty, Hemingway-styled kind of way. Nevertheless, as a whole, slightly disappointing. Maybe because my expectations were so high after hearing Young on a *New York Times Book Review* podcast.

Liz says

My brother was a marine for five years, busted down in rank five times- and came home from Iraq and Japan with stories for days. We assumed most of them were maybe 10% true.

My husband has been an active duty army, armor officer for almost 17 years and has been deployed five times. Six?

So the stories in this collection didn't surprise me.

But the self awareness did. The beauty of recognizing how very fucked up the military can be in general, and deployments specifically are, was refreshing.

In this book, you feel the angst, the insecurity, the boredom, and the coping mechanisms young marines are known for and pride themselves on exploiting. It's raw and sometimes funny. But mostly, it's real. And that may be too much for some readers.

Elyse says

Audiobook... narrated be Charlie Thurston

...Gritty...graphic...

and a little too 'gross' for me...(I'm choosing 'nice' words).

I wasn't trained in this type of specialized 'sense-of-humor'. If this book was suppose to have laughing parts... I failed to manifest even the tiniest chuckle.

I took away a couple of things though:

I don't want to fault any man who served in the military for writing a memoir. Bad writers - talented writers ...let them all take a turn if they feel the need or desire.

If a few people or more got value from this book...
it's absolutely terrific.

I hate rating memoirs. The author is sharing his story his way.... and 'that' I do respect!!!

War is vicious...

War is war is war is war is war is war!!!!

But honesty - This particular style book was not for me.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

What I learned from this honest post-modernistic Marine memoir:

Serving your country during a military conflict as an enlisted soldier looks better in war movies probably because war movies usually have a bird's-eye plot and a heroic morality and a conclusive ending, often involving self-discovery. The reality is being an actual real-life soldier is less clear in retrospect because in actuality most soldiers are only 18-22 years old (and they often revert backwards mentally to age 13 by the intense drama of soldiering). On their tours they are either afraid of everything or bored out of their minds, not having an actual clue about why their orders were given to do.

Based on Matt Young's memoir, military service in reality actually results in memories consisting of uncomfortable, and disconnected, and disassociated, if sometimes vivid, astonishing scenes in confusing montages, some of which you do not want to think about or acknowledge because you were either a bad person in the moment or an utter f*ckup, or someone in your military brotherhood whom you learned to love died.

If you signed up to find yourself, what you found may not be as inspiring or meaningful as you hoped. If you signed up to test yourself, well, it seems the questions you had might turn out to have been the wrong ones. If you signed up because you were bored, you might realize there are worse things than boredom, like losing your sense of any human life consisting of eternal verities. However, being physically fit is the one Truth of being a Marine. Oorah.

kelly says

"It's important to understand bullets don't stop just because they hit something."

Matt Young enlists in the Marines in the early 00's and eventually lives through three deployments to Iraq. It's a very dark war story with all of the typical 'no atheists in foxholes' kind of nihilism, but this is definitely not your typical memoir. There are medical diagnosis charts, screenplay scripts, second person narration, drawings, letters, and other formats that made this book darkly funny, and at times, extremely serious.

I don't know, though. Even though I liked this memoir, the variety of formats presented weren't enough to keep me from skimming through multiple sections that held little interest to me. Perhaps because I am not well-schooled in the ways of combat, deployment, the Marines, or any branch of the Armed Services, for that matter.

I give this book 3.5 stars for originality.

Note: A free digital copy of this book was provided to me by the publisher and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Susan says

This is an interesting look at what it means to be a soldier today by a man who joined the Marines and served three tours in Iraq. It is an honest look at what serving really looks like as well as what our soldiers actually do and think while fighting for our country. It was an eye opening look but not in an expected way as the author describes a great deal of time spent doing nothing of value - watching TV, smoking, drinking, masturbating and shooting stray dogs. From reading many other versions of life at war, I have read tales that differed a great deal from this one, but the honesty was definitely here. Fortunately, our author also describes how he changed and grew from these experiences, making this a valuable resource for anyone thinking of serving.

Scott says

Young's writing style (first-person, third-person, mock interview, sketches resembling something from a junior high notebook) was all over the map in this vignette collection about his four years as a grunt in the U.S. Marines. I'm not sure that mood whiplash always worked in the book's favor.

His take on his USMC experiences seemed unique. Some subjects / chapters (like 'Trajectory,' about shooting and wounds) were outstanding, while others ('Mt. Marine Corps') heavily depend on individual sense of humor. In 'Soapbox' there were some striking moments of insight and truth.

So while it was good, it also seemed like the author was intent on keeping things (or the reader) at arm's length. Because of that it may be off-putting compared to other memoirs / autobiographies.

J. Miller says

I was in the Marine Corps at the same time as Matt Young and although the Marine Corps is a very small place, I don't believe we ever met. We were in Iraq at the same time, had the same feelings about deploying and wanting to kill and being okay with not talking to people back home. What I mean to say is, Eat the Apple is a brutally honest and relevant take on the late-aughts Marine. His style is so absolutely close to the sounds that echo and reverberate through my brain after years of being yelled at and issued commands and spoken to in a lingo so unlike any normal human speech patterns.

A quick read chock full of emotion and intelligence and style and absolutely worth picking up.

Kusaimamekirai says

"Eat the Apple" is quite unlike anything I've read before. It is the story of the author's three deployments in Iraq during the Gulf War, but told through a variety of narrative device. Some of the story is told like a conventional memoir. There are other parts however told in the third person where it feels like the author has separated from himself and lost all of his own agency as he narrates what happens around him. These sections are often some of the more absorbing and disturbing parts of the book. In addition to first and third person narratives, the author plays with form using questionnaires, drawings, or even writing some chapters in the form of a movie script. While this style does take a little while to adjust to, once the adjustment is made it is devastatingly effective.

I can't say that I "enjoyed" this book simply because it deals with such difficult subject matter. I wouldn't call this an anti-war book necessarily as the author readily acknowledges the value of the friendships made in

wartime. However, the things he does and sees in Iraq are not things human beings are meant to see or do. For this reason I give him a pass for a lot of the vulgarity that peppers the narrative that while funny at times, is still difficult to digest (the less you know about the 'portable partner' the better). In the end, this is the story of a messed up person going to a messed up war with a lot of other messed up people who see a lot of messed up things and end up returning home even more messed up than before.
