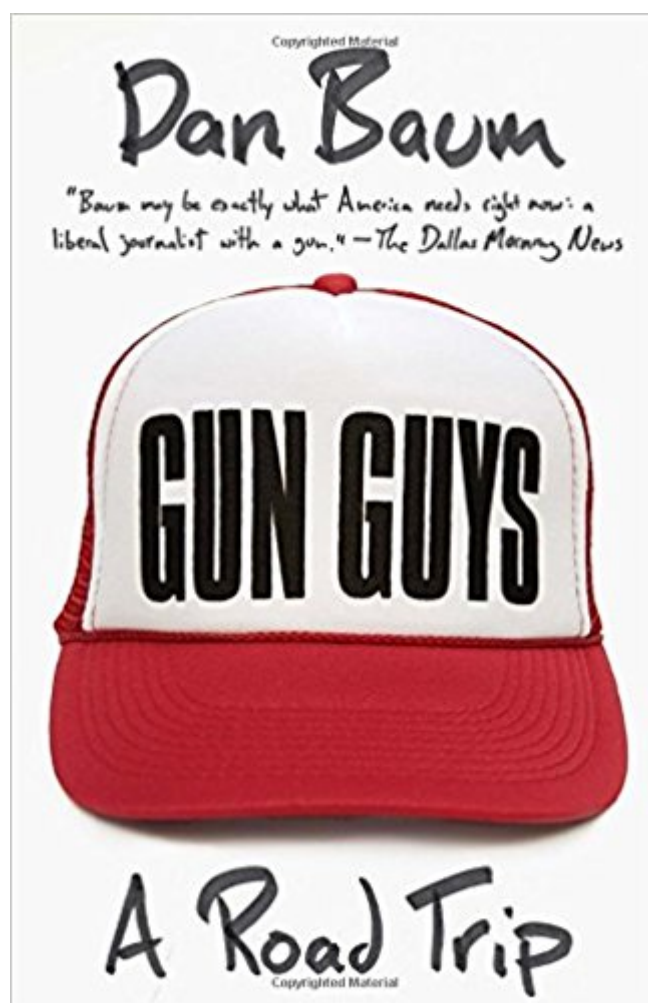


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Gun Guys: A Road Trip (Vintage Departures)



Synopsis

Dan Baum is a gun fanatic. He is also Jewish Democrat who grew up in suburban New Jersey. In *Gun Guys*, he takes us on a guided tour of gun stores and gun shows, shooting ranges and festivals, contests and auctions, trying to figure out what draws so many of us to guns in the first place. Is it just part of being American? Introducing a wide cast of characters, Baum shows both sides of the gun culture in America, bringing an entire world vividly to life, and in doing so helping to find a middle ground in the gun debate, where actual conversation can take place.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review You don't hear about a lot of preteen gun nuts, but Baum was one of them, discovering when he was five years old that he was a crack shot. He's always known why he loved guns (natural skill in using them and their beauty and efficiency as mechanical devices), but as an adult, he began to wonder why other people loved them. So he decided to do something he'd never done: join the gun culture, meet its people, and find out what made them tick. Along the way, he encounters a 24-year-old young man who lives with his mother and became interested in real guns by playing with simulated guns in video games; a gunmaker who's upset to the point of distraction about the passing of President Obama's health-care bill; a Hollywood armorer; and an expert in the history and manufacture of machine guns. He also deals with the murder of a friend, a victim of exactly the sort of gun violence that sparks the politically polarizing debate that Baum has been witnessing nearly everywhere he goes.

Baum is careful not to take a political stance; he's reporting the story, and he's also, as a gun enthusiast, a part of it, but he's not writing an apologia. If you come into the book convinced of the need for tighter gun control, you'll probably leave the same way, although you will leave with a deeper understanding of the many reasons, political and personal, why people love their weaponry. --David Pitt --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The most intriguing of a new crop of books about America and guns. •Jeff Sharlet --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Baum's a good conversational journalist. He captures people really well, to the point where I had "I *know* that guy!" moments. Interesting, even-handed, respectful treatment of all parties. I enjoyed the gotcha moments with the NRA and Brady Center coming so close together. I think he's right about gun folks: they are some seriously sore winners. He manages to show how unsympathetic and unreasoning they can be, even though he agrees with them. He sorted through the BS stats on defensive gun use and settled the question for me. Even at the low end, using stats preferred by gun control advocates, defensive gun use offsets "bad" gun violence. He also raises the interesting question of why all the gun control efforts are in directions that will do no good at all. (The scary assault weapons are used in less than 3% of the crimes committed with firearms). And how attacking the supply is not going to have much of an impact, since the supply has tripled during a time of drastically lower crime. And how pursuing this has turned off generations of working class voters. His call for understanding on the part of liberals resonated. It's hard to bridge gulfs that wide. Look at the reviews...

Even though I don't own a gun I thoroughly enjoyed Baum's book. A Jewish Democrat from suburban New Jersey and lifelong gun guy he grabs his concealed-carry handgun permit and hits the road to explore the American love affair with guns. "It's like Barbie for men," suggests one gun shop owner. Baum's attraction to firearms is visceral. "I came to love the snap of the rifle, the rich aroma of burned cordite, the magical geometry of the bullet's razor-straight trajectory connection to a tiny, distant point." My favorite part of the book is when Baum gets to train with a Prism machine where active shooter scenarios are projected on a rubber screen. His bullet holes are cauterized then scored by a computer. Scenarios involved a high school, a city council meeting, and a patrol in Afghanistan.

After dying several times he finally learns how to take out the bad guy. By the end, writes Baum, “I was soaked in sweat and needed to sit down and eat something with sugar in it.” Baum lists three laws that could make us safer: Universal background checks, making gun owners responsible for crimes committed by their stolen firearms and requiring more rigid gun training because, he writes, “a well-trained armed citizen is more effective in a crisis.” His advice to the anti-gun crowd borrows a phrase from the pro-choice movement. “Don’t like guns? Don’t have one.”

I love Baum’s style as a writer. I first encountered his work in *Popular Science*, and I’ll read anything he writes. His work is vivid, lyrical, and solidly grounded in fact, concrete details, compelling ideas and memorable characters. So when I heard that *Gun Guys* was coming out, I snapped it up. I was not disappointed. *Gun Guys* is a wild ride, addressing a serious topic with a healthy dose of humor, as in this, my favorite line, about a guy stuffing a loaded gun down his pants: “It seemed to me that clawing that thing out during the panic of a gun fight would be a good way for Bill to shoot off his wedding tackle.” Besides providing a read that is as enjoyable as any work of fiction, *Gun Guys* makes some very strong arguments in favor of both extreme sides of the gun-control issue taking it down a few notches. Yes, some regulation of guns is a good idea, but, no, outright bans aren’t going to significantly reduce violence and are therefore needlessly provoking to law-abiding citizens who happen to dig guns. Baum argues that more tolerance is in order, on both sides. My favorite character in the book, Janet Bewley, a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly, sums up this point of view nicely: “People want to be able to drive their ATVs through town to go ice fishing, and there’s a whole lot of people against it because they don’t like those people. Some people are just so antigun their brains explode when you try to talk about it. Same thing: it’s those people. My own husband, he’s a UCC minister and he says, ‘I don’t like guns.’ And I tell him, ‘It doesn’t matter what you like or don’t like. That’s not how we make law!’” *Gun Guys* is an enjoyable read about a polarizing topic. Whatever side of the issue you’re on, you’ll find something to think about here.

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