

Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine

By Stephen Braun

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Alcohol and caffeine are deeply woven into the fabric of life for most of the world's population, as close and as comfortable as a cup of coffee or a can of beer. Yet for most people they remain as mysterious and unpredictable as the spirits they were once thought to be. Now, in *Buzz*, Stephen Braun takes us on a myth-shattering tour of these two popular substances, one that blends fascinating science with colorful lore, and that includes cameo appearances by Shakespeare and Balzac, Buddhist monks and Arabian goat herders, even Mikhail Gorbachev and David Letterman (who once quipped, "If it weren't for the coffee, I'd have no identifiable personality whatsoever").

Much of what Braun reveals directly contradicts conventional wisdom about alcohol and caffeine. Braun shows, for instance, that alcohol is not simply a depressant as popularly believed, but is instead "a pharmacy in a bottle"--mimicking the action of drugs such as cocaine, amphetamine, valium, and opium. At low doses, it increases electrical activity in the same brain systems affected by stimulants, influences the same circuits targeted by valium, and causes the release of morphine-like compounds known as endorphins--all at the same time. This explains why alcohol can produce a range of reactions, from boisterous euphoria to dark, brooding hopelessness. Braun also shatters the myth that alcohol kills brain cells, reveals why wood alcohol or methanol causes blindness, and explains the biological reason behind the one-drink-per-hour sobriety rule (that's how long it takes the liver, working full tilt, to disable the 200 quintillion ethanol molecules found in a typical drink). The author then turns to caffeine and shows it to be no less remarkable. We discover that more than 100 plant species produce caffeine molecules in their seeds, leaves, or bark, a truly amazing distribution throughout nature (nicotine, in comparison, is found only in tobacco; opium only in the poppy). It's not surprising then that caffeine is far and away the most widely used mind altering substance on the planet, found in tea, coffee, cocoa, chocolate, soft drinks, and more than 2,000 non-prescription drugs. (Tea is the most popular drink on earth, with coffee a close second.) Braun also explores the role of caffeine in creativity: Johann Sebastian Bach, for one, loved coffee so much he wrote a Coffee Cantata (as Braun notes, no music captures the caffeinated experience better than one of Bach's frenetic fugues), Balzac would work for 12 hours non-stop, drinking coffee all the while, and Kant, Rousseau, and Voltaire all loved coffee. And throughout the book, Braun takes us on many

engaging factual sidetrips--we learn, for instance, that Theodore Roosevelt coined the phrase "Good to the last drop" used by Maxwell House ever since; that distances between Tibetan villages are sometimes reckoned by the number of cups of tea needed to sustain a person (three cups being roughly 8 kilometers); and that John Pemberton's original recipe for Coca-Cola included not only kola extract, but also cocaine.

Whether you are a sophisticated consumer of cabernet sauvignon and Kenya AA or just someone who needs a cup of joe in the morning and a cold one after work, you will find *Buzz* to be an eye-opening, informative, and often amusing look at two substances at once utterly familiar and deeply mysterious.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Whether they prefer scotch on the rocks or a double mocha latte, readers will enjoy Braun's dissection of caffeine, alcohol and the processes by which they work. For one thing, the presentation of complicated scientific concepts is understandable without being condescending. Braun makes analogies ("Drinking caffeine is thus like putting a block of wood under one of the brain's primary brake pedals") that help the reader to visualize what's going on. The book is also helped by the author's inclusion of stories and humorous moments. From David Letterman quotes ("If it weren't for the caffeine, I'd have no identifiable personality whatsoever") to personal anecdotes about the effects these two mood-altering substances had upon the formulation of his book, Braun manages to take abstract concepts and mold them into something highly readable. Science novices should find this book as enjoyable and well-written as those who have spent their lives working with biology or chemistry.

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From Library Journal

Now a producer at the New England Research Institutes, science writer Braun engagingly describes the chemistry, metabolism, physiological and behavioral effects, and reputed health benefits of the world's two most popular drugs: alcohol and caffeine. He seasons the book with references to history, folklore, and literature. (Did you know that Bach wrote a Coffee Cantata?) The treatment of controversial issues?such as the correlation between risk of heart disease and moderate wine consumption?is balanced, and the science is sound. Whether the subject is the cause of hangovers or the effects of caffeine consumption on PMS, Braun has a knack for interpreting the findings of medical researchers and applying them to daily life. He also includes a postscript on the two years he spent researching the book and how it moderated his own alcohol and caffeine consumption. Recommended for academic and public libraries.?Eris Weaver, Marin Inst. for the Prevention of Alcohol & Other Drug Problems, San Rafael, Cal.

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From [Booklist](#)

Boomers who recall the Disney and Bell Telephone science documentaries of the late 1950s and 1960s--remember *Hemo the Magnificent*?--will have no trouble following *Buzz*, which brings readers up-to-date on scientists' current understanding of "the world's most widely consumed mind altering drugs." Science writer and TV producer Braun draws on what he learned during a fellowship in neurobiology at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory to supply an accessible explanation of the effects of these familiar yet often misunderstood substances. Braun journeys with his readers from mouth to intestine along with the 50 quintillion ethanol molecules in a quarter shot of scotch, then wanders into the brain to examine how alcohol and caffeine molecules affect specific types of neurons. Recent brain research is the source of much of Braun's "new news," but he also offers fascinating information on how alcohol and caffeine are produced, their effects on sleep, sex, and bodily systems other than the brain, and the attitudes of historical figures on the "buzz" these substances afford. *Mary Carroll*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ian Coghlan:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important work, like looking for your favorite e-book and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your trouble; you can add your knowledge by the e-book entitled Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine. Try to face the book Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine as your buddy. It means that it can being your friend when you really feel alone and beside that course make you smarter than in the past. Yeah, it is very fortunated in your case. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know every little thing by the book. So , we need to make new experience as well as knowledge with this book.

James Furlow:

In this time globalization it is important to someone to find information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The health of the world makes the information simpler to share. You can find a lot of sources to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. The particular book that recommended for your requirements is Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine this book consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This specific book was represented how does the world has grown up. The vocabulary styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. The particular writer made some analysis when he makes this book. Here is why this book acceptable all of you.

Charles Powers:

This Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine is new way for you who has interest to look for some information given it relief your hunger of information. Getting deeper you onto it getting knowledge more you know otherwise you who still having bit of digest in reading this Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine can be the light food in your case because the information inside this specific book is easy to get by simply anyone. These books produce itself in the form and that is reachable by anyone, that's why I mean in the e-book form. People who think that in reserve form make them feel drowsy even dizzy this reserve is the answer. So there is not any in reading a e-book especially this one. You can find what you are looking for. It should be here for you. So , don't miss it! Just read this e-book style for your better life and also knowledge.

Dixie Jones:

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