



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:

Marina Rutt:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Might be reading a book can be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the e-book untitled Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine can be fine book to read. May be it might be best activity to you.

Florinda Redfern:

Do you have something that you prefer such as book? The reserve lovers usually prefer to select book like comic, limited story and the biggest some may be novel. Now, why not trying Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine that give your fun preference will be satisfied by reading this book. Reading habit all over the world can be said as the means for people to know world much better then how they react in the direction of the world. It can't be said constantly that reading behavior only for the geeky man or woman but for all of you who wants to possibly be success person. So , for all you who want to start looking at as your good habit, you can pick Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine become your current starter.

Judith Ellis:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got college students? We believe that that query was given by teacher for their students. Many kinds of hobby, Everybody has different hobby. And you also know that little person similar to reading or as looking at become their hobby. You must know that reading is very important in addition to book as to be the factor. Book is important thing to add you knowledge, except your own teacher or lecturer. You discover good news or update concerning something by book. A substantial number of sorts of books that can you take to be your object. One of them is Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine.

Richard Mendoza:

Reading a reserve make you to get more knowledge from this. You can take knowledge and information coming from a book. Book is written or printed or descriptive from each source in which filled update of news. In this modern era like now, many ways to get information are available for a person. From media social such as newspaper, magazines, science reserve, encyclopedia, reference book, book and comic. You can add your knowledge by that book. Ready to spend your spare time to open your book? Or just seeking the Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine when you needed it?

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