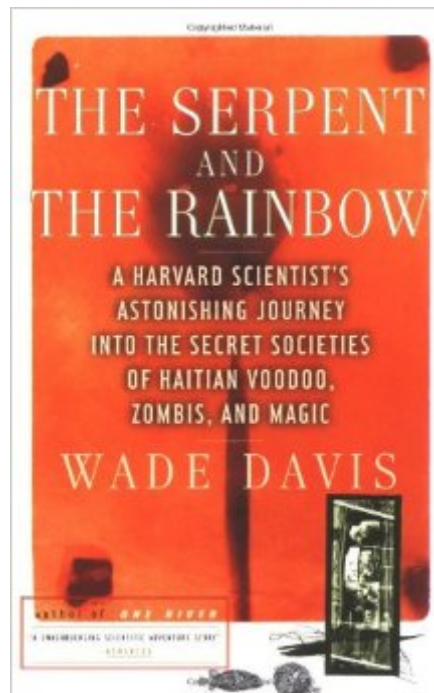


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The Serpent And The Rainbow: A Harvard Scientist's Astonishing Journey Into The Secret Societies Of Haitian Voodoo, Zombis, And Magic



Synopsis

A scientific investigation and personal adventure story about zombies and the voodoo culture of Haiti by a Harvard scientist. In April 1982, ethnobotanist Wade Davis arrived in Haiti to investigate two documented cases of zombies "people who had reappeared in Haitian society years after they had been officially declared dead and had been buried. Drawn into a netherworld of rituals and celebrations, Davis penetrated the voodoo mystique deeply enough to place zombification in its proper context within voodoo culture. In the course of his investigation, Davis came to realize that the story of voodoo is the history of Haiti "from the African origins of its people to the successful Haitian independence movement, down to the present day, where voodoo culture is, in effect, the government of Haiti's countryside. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* combines anthropological investigation with a remarkable personal adventure to illuminate and finally explain a phenomenon that has long fascinated Americans.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book years ago and put it down after I realized it was nothing like the movie. Man, I'm glad I wized up. The book saturates you in a country and culture where nothing is as it seems. Secret societies, Vodoun (as Davis refers to it in the book) and yes, Zombies are throughout it's pages. But what I thought was really interesting is when Davis talks about the history of Haiti. I could not get enough. Not only does he paint an amazing portrait of a remarkable people, but he masterfully takes you step by step on how the brutal origins of the country reflects it's modern day society and religion. When he does talk about the Zombie poison, Davis makes it easy to understand

how without giving specifics but revealing the major components. Beginning with a sound hypothesis when starting on his adventure and unraveling the mystery scientifically as the book progresses. He loves is terminology, but never does it frustrate the reader. Also, where he excels again is when he uses historical reference to provide many examples how similar or the same poisons have accidentally given the appearance of death in different parts and times of the world. Furthermore Davis explains that the poison is just a component to religious and social conditioning that reinforce the definition of "Zombi". After reading "The Serpent and the Rainbow" it will compel you to look up figures such as Macandal, Dr. Francois Devalier and especially Zore Neale Hurston, in which he names a chapter from the works of this remarkable woman. My only complaint about the book is that I wish the author had provided a map. As descriptive as he is, it's hard to get a point of reference. One would say go on the net, but that's hard to do when your reading on a bus.

Davis guides us through a fantastic world in this superb account of his investigation into Haitian "secret societies." Although outlandish at first glance, Haitian social justice and how it's administered is revealed in its deep cultural framework. The terms "voodoo" and "zombie," so ignorantly applied in our culture over the years, are clarified by this serious scholar. Davis offers much more than simply a redefinition of what media has distorted. He examines the origins and use of various toxins that are applied to put a living person in a death-like trance. This seemingly "evil" practice has deep and positive social roots. It's the social milieu that ultimately gives this book its real value. As Davis pursues botanical sources used in rendering people comatose, he is caught up in an investigation of why the drugs are used on particular individuals. Davis' quest began with a commission to investigate anesthetic drugs from plants and animals. His mentor, Richard Schultes, was considered the founder of ethnobotany, the study of plant chemistry as a cultural artifact. Davis is sent to Haiti in 1982, a time of growing awareness of the numbers of natural products overlooked for medicinal use. Davis is sent to Haiti to investigate the zombi myths. He learns of the use of "magic powders" to bring about a catatonic state. People are declared dead, buried, but are exhumed and led away, often to a life of near slavery. Davis, using Schultes' work as background, investigates the Datura genus of plants. Datura in various species, ranges across the Western Hemisphere and is widely used by Amerindian and other peoples for various rituals. So, too, are the excretions of Bufo marinus, the Central American "cane toad," that today is the scourge of vast reaches of Australia.

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