



Where the Gods Reign: Plants and Peoples of the Colombian Amazon

Richard Evans Schultes

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While the core of *VINE OF THE SOUL* (the companion book to *WHERE THE GODS REIGN*), is the Amazonian plant life and the indigenous people's uses for it, *WHERE THE GODS REIGN* focuses primarily on the people themselves though of course, Schultz (who was dubbed the father of ethnobotany by Prince Philip himself) is first and foremost a botanist and plants do figure into the mix: Schultes describes devil's gardens empty patches in the otherwise thick forests where, for no apparent (or scientific) reason, nothing will grow with the same precision and wonderment with which he discusses the many plants that grow upon other plants in their effort to get their share of the sun...and much more. But in this fine volume he begins with information about the histories of the various tribes and the lay of the lands on which they live; savannahs, dense forests, quartzite cliffs, sandstone mountains and caves and thunderous waterfalls are all accounted for; and all of his lyrical essays are accompanied by stunning black and white photographs. (There are over 140 photos in the book.) Schultes is often poetic here as well, describing not only the geography but, often, the exquisite emotions one experiences observing it in different seasons or different times of the day. Likewise, Schultes describes the people lovingly. He delights in their ability to be happy in spite of poverty, sickness, and, particularly in the case of the women, very hard work. He marvels at their relationships with animals, many of which they tame, so that their homes are surrounded by birds, monkeys, deer, and even boa constrictors (which live in the rafters and keep the mice and rat populations at bay). He marvels that while the children are almost never punished and enjoy a high degree of freedom (especially the boys), they show great respect for their elders as well as a great curiosity and appreciation for their surroundings. Schultes' pleasure in the land and its people is our pleasure. He is a remarkable scientist and a most eloquent guide. Reading *WHERE THE GODS REIGN* is probably as close as most of us will ever get to the kind of experience Schultes had staying in Amazon basin and learning about the many very different alternatives to living a life. But one can't help but long for that experience too. The book threatens to make explorers out of all of us and a reader can't help but be disheartened upon remembering that there is not much left to explore. *WHERE THE GODS REIGN* is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the extraordinary history of the people of the Amazon rainforests.

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