



Sinister Yogis

David Gordon White

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Since the 1960s, yoga has become a billion-dollar industry in the West, attracting housewives and hipsters, New Agers and the old-aged. But our modern conception of yoga derives much from nineteenth-century European spirituality, and the true story of yoga's origins in South Asia is far richer, stranger, and more entertaining than most of us realize.

To uncover this history, David Gordon White focuses on yoga's practitioners. Combing through millennia of South Asia's vast and diverse literature, he discovers that yogis are usually portrayed as wonder-workers or sorcerers who use their dangerous supernatural abilities—which can include raising the dead, possession, and levitation—to acquire power, wealth, and sexual gratification. As White shows, even those yogis who aren't downright villainous bear little resemblance to Western assumptions about them. At turns rollicking and sophisticated, *Sinister Yogis* tears down the image of yogis as detached, contemplative teachers, finally placing them in their proper context.

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