



## The Fruit Palace

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The jacket announces that THE FRUIT PALACE is “a true story,” and even though parts of the book read like a detective novel, there are so many loose ends and pointless characters that the story must be true. The narrative begins with author Charles Nicholl’s assignment to a book project tentatively called “Inside the Cocaine Underworld.” Nicholl receives the assignment because of his familiarity with the subject and previous involvement with peripheral characters in the Colombian drug business.

He begins his search for the inner workings of the cocaine network by looking up a former friend, Gus McGregor. Gus turns out to be on the run from some vindictive dealers and is living a secretive existence on the outskirts of Bogota. Through Gus, Nicholl meets the workers in the drug business, and, in turn, we learn how cocaine is made and how it is smuggled through customs. Gus also introduces the author to a new kind of cocaine, “Snow White,” and in return for all the information, asks Nicholl to accompany him into the jungle on his escape route out of Colombia. Gus suddenly disappears, and without him the story loses some of its spark, although there is still plenty of action and some self-conscious travel writing. Nicholl becomes involved in a drug deal himself, unravels the “Snow White” story, is caught in an earthquake, and is stopped by British Customs, at which point the story ends.

THE FRUIT PALACE passes muster as beach reading; it is a belated example of the “New Journalism,” according to which the author’s feelings are as important as the story covered. Some readers may hesitate to spend money on a book that treats in benign fashion such a loathsome business.

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