


222 BB1

bncdoc.id	APC
bncdoc.author	Pow, Tom
bncdoc.year	1992
bncdoc.title	In the palace of serpents.
bncdoc.info	In the palace of serpents. Sample containing about 36724 words from a book (domain: leisure)
Text availability	Worldwide rights cleared
Publication date	1985-1993
Text type	Written books and periodicals
David Lee's classification	W_misc

<222/c>	comfortable talking about stealing. But whaddayaknow? ‘Same thing happened to me in Arequipa. In a café. Someone picks up a bill from the floor, opens it. ‘Is it yours?’ they ask. Then I look. My camera, months of film - gone. And this happens to me after spending five months in Brazil - in Rio, Salvador, f’chrissake. Crazy.’ ‘So?’ ‘So, I run out the café. A woman points one way but I see a man with a bulge in his coat and I leap on him. O-o-o-h, man, do I feel the adrenalin! He just gave right up without a struggle. They do if you can catch them. No, Peru’s just not the place to be at the moment.’ And why was he in La Paz? He had been in advertising. This was how it happened. ‘I was doing a lay-out of a woman in a mink coat and I’m trying to get the flesh tones right and I’m asking myself: hey, how is it every time I do this it comes out wrong? Then it dawns on me: the model is a Barbie doll, f’chrissake! Yea, a real Barbie doll. I gave up the job there and then and headed for Brazil. I’m not ambitious now. I just want to keep travelling. I go home and people are either getting divorced or remarried and they have n’t seen through it all yet. But I just arrive in La Paz and I think, whew, here I am.’ ‘For what?’ ‘Well, I was five months in Brazil and I thought then, if I want to get further into South America I need Spanish. I came here briefly last year and found it the most comfortable of cities to walk about in, so I’m here for two months to learn Spanish.’ ‘And then?’ ‘Who knows?’ The line, thrown away with a toss of the hand, was a familiar blend of contrived ease and arrogance. The status of Top Traveller is one that is self-appointed and only has currency among the knots of those tacking their way through the continent with varying degrees of frustration and ill luck. My American ‘friend’ basked in this small lonely pool and appeared to revel in the uncertainties of the traveller’s life. Not this traveller. Oh no, not this traveller. Not that there had been anything problematical about the journey to La Paz - just the normal anxieties. My gut, after a period of glorious dependability on
 <p>Key: Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p>	<p>a diet of potatoes</p> <p>, was bailing everything out again, spurred on by a meal of Lomo (pork) a la Gordon Blyed from Puno International Restaurant. A diet of imodium with imodium chasers had meant my moneybelt sat more comfortably around my shrinking waist. In fact, with my spartan diet and my gentleman’s bag which could accommodate only the tiniest of souvenirs (a freedom I thought, compared to others’ great domed rucksacks), I began to feel like some travelling ascetic, roaming through ‘the vast cinema of sensation.’ It was an often spectacular bus ride on which the waters of Lake Titicaca were rarely out of sight. The lake has no drainage system - excess water flows south to the marshes of Lake Poopo then evaporates into sand - so the last of Peru was a sodden plain fringed by snow-capped</p>

	<p>mountains. Here colourless villages and mud houses, seemingly built at random, scraped a tired sustenance from the soil and the scrappy flocks of sheep and isolated, tethered cattle. With Amantani fresh in my mind it seemed to me that more than the cattle were tethered here. It was some relief to come to the Bolivian town of Copacabana with its huge white cathedral. From there, after a change of buses and yet another lunch-time fast, the road climbed up into a bare landscape of mountains sweeping into each other, before it settled into the endless vistas of the high altiplano, a treeless puna 3,962 metres above sea level; home for llamas, alpacas and the Aymara Indians. It was a strange, discomfiting and disorientating landscape. I thought about the early Scottish settlers of the Great Plains of America who endured terrible confusions because of the pure space they had never experienced before, except perhaps at sea. Many hallucinated that they were shrinking or else expanding to fill it. Here houses looked to me like Monopoly chips: seeing a man cycling over the pathless tundra I scanned hopelessly for a possible point of reference he might have. Then the shanty-towns began to thicken till suspiciously flimsy concrete blocks announced La Paz which sat cradled deep in the mountains, a crush of modest skyscrapers and stone churches, glowing red in the late sunshine. After the stasis of Amantani, the joys of travel: movement, new sights, a new country, a new capital, fellow-travellers with whom to swop notes about other countries, other capitals. And La Paz was a very attractive capital, the highest in the world, built on hills, walkable. I thought of cold nights in Edinburgh and went everywhere with a relaxation I had rarely felt in Peru. ‘Our position as an extension of the working class is to</p>
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