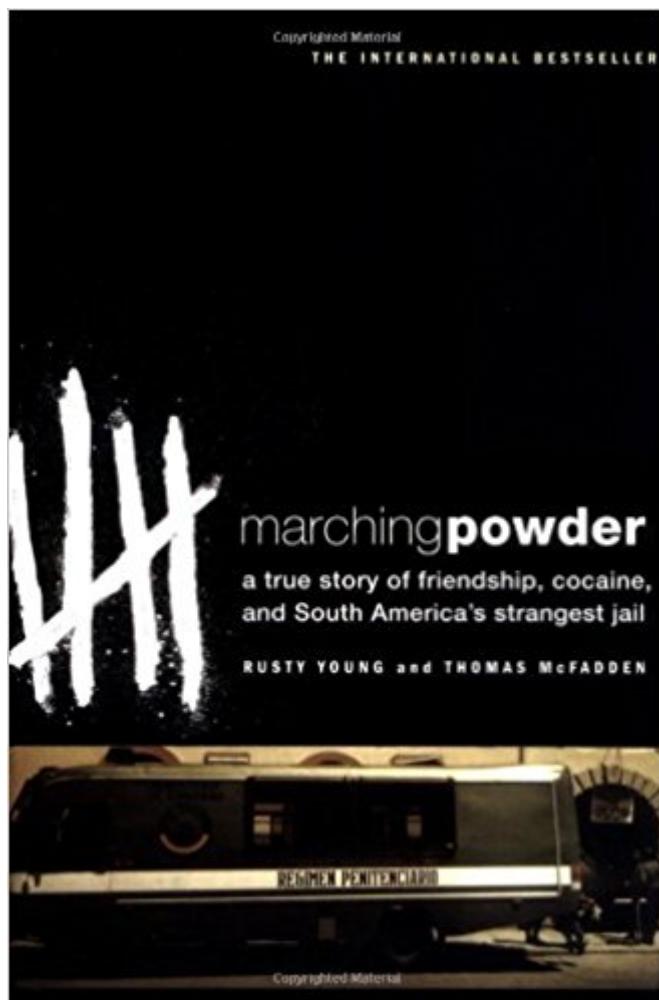


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# Marching Powder: A True Story Of Friendship, Cocaine, And South America's Strangest Jail



## Synopsis

Rusty Young was backpacking in South America when he heard about Thomas McFadden, a convicted English drug trafficker who ran tours inside Bolivia's notorious San Pedro prison. Intrigued, the young Australian journalist went to La Paz and joined one of Thomas's illegal tours. They formed an instant friendship and then became partners in an attempt to record Thomas's experiences in the jail. Rusty bribed the guards to allow him to stay and for the next three months he lived inside the prison, sharing a cell with Thomas and recording one of the strangest and most compelling prison stories of all time. The result is *Marching Powder*. This book establishes that San Pedro is not your average prison. Inmates are expected to buy their cells from real estate agents. Others run shops and restaurants. Women and children live with imprisoned family members. It is a place where corrupt politicians and drug lords live in luxury apartments, while the poorest prisoners are subjected to squalor and deprivation. Violence is a constant threat, and sections of San Pedro that echo with the sound of children by day house some of Bolivia's busiest cocaine laboratories by night. In San Pedro, cocaine--"Bolivian marching powder"--makes life bearable. Even the prison cat is addicted. Yet *Marching Powder* is also the tale of friendship, a place where horror is countered by humor and cruelty and compassion can inhabit the same cell. This is cutting-edge travel-writing and a fascinating account of infiltration into the South American drug culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This memoir of a British drug dealer's nearly five years inside a Bolivian prison provides a unique window on a bizarre and corrupt world. McFadden, a young black man from Liverpool arrested for

smuggling cocaine, finds himself forced to pay for his accommodations in La Paz's San Pedro Prison, the first of many oddities in a place where some inmates keep pets and rich criminals can sustain a lavish lifestyle. The charismatic McFadden soon learns how to survive, and even thrive, in an atmosphere where crooked prison officials turn up at his private cell to snort lines of coke. By chance, he stumbles on an additional source of income when he begins giving tours of the prison to foreign tourists, a trade that leads to the mention in a Lonely Planet guidebook that attracts the attention of his coauthor, Young, who was backpacking in South America at the time. McFadden's unapologetic self-serving story will attract little pity as he freely admits to countless cocaine sales for which he was never held accountable. Once the authors chronicle the novel aspects of life in San Pedro, from which McFadden was released in 2000, the narrative loses momentum. The book would have benefited from some judicious editing and some objective perspective on the veracity of McFadden's story. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

On a whim, Young decided it might be interesting to visit notorious San Pedro Prison in La Paz, Bolivia, so he signed up for an illegal tour. The tour guide was Thomas McFadden, an inmate who had been imprisoned for drug smuggling. They struck up a friendship, and Young bribed the guards to let him stay "inside" for three months, where he recorded the particulars of life in one of the world's most peculiar prisons. San Pedro is like a city: inmates must "buy" their cells from real estate agents, drug lords live in the high style to which they are accustomed, and the destitute, as always, live a hand-to-mouth existence. Like most cities, San Pedro is a lively if decidedly cutthroat place, and Young, who teaches English in Colombia, writes about it as if he were Joseph Mitchell prowling Greenwich Village. The book is filled with characters ranging from outrageous to inspiring, and Young layers on the texture--sights, sounds, smells--until we feel as though we have visited the place. Travel literature of a very special and captivating kind. David PittCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

The book is well written so it is a good page turner. Did I say that 100 pages could have been cut? It is really just a series of incidents. It is a morality tale however. Don't get busted for drugs in a Third World country. The dealer (hero?) does and what ensues is kinda crazy. I don't doubt that some of it is fiction but in all a fast paced read. There is way too much recreated dialogue however and the ghost writer puts a clean veneer on even the most insidious things. But still a good read. I hope the dealer has kept his nose clean. He sounds in the book like a decent enough fellow but his previous

life as a dealer warranted a much longer sentence than he in fact ever served. I doubt the book will do much for Bolivia's tourist industry but considering the events that transpire that is just plain warranted. Books like this require you to suspend critical thinking and moral but...a good read nonetheless.

Amazing read. Unbelievable at times to hear the way these people survive. Highly recommended for anyone interested in interesting subject matter

I liked this book, its very interesting and a very good read. If you are interested in prison life here is an example of how American prisons are different from others.

I heard about Marching Powder via a friend who had recently met its author, Rusty Young. The tales of his own brief time drinking with Rusty were enough to whet my appetite, despite my having no foreknowledge of, or interest in, Bolivia or its San Pedro prison. This is a book I would probably never have otherwise found, and that would have been a terrible tragedy. Everyone should read Marching Powder, if only for a glimpse of a world that the average westerner (such as I) could simply not imagine. Well-structured, well-written and phenomenally interesting, this book did not change my life, but is still a read I will be recommending to anyone that will listen from now on. Such as you.

This was one of the first non-fiction books I'd read in years and I was pleasantly surprised. I'd previously had 3 friends tell me that this book was awesome, but I was still sceptical. Thankfully, I took a chance on it and it paid off. *Marching Powder* is an amazing story and unlike anything you've ever read before. It blows you away to think that a place like this actually exists in today's world. It is captivating, intriguing and shocking, all at the same time. I give it a high 4 stars and recommend it to anyone who appreciates a little realism, without any sugar coating.

Great Book. The criminal activity that goes on in San Pedro Prison is a known secret among La Paz people. A secret no one had been brave enough to reveal before. At least not formally. This book

describes how the most corrupt police force in the world is involved in crime world. Prision tours are real, drug dealing is real...What I liked the most about the book, is how it doesn't slow down. It traps you right from the beginning to its last Word.

An interesting book but the writing lacked some sophistication. This was ok initially but tended to become irritating after a while. The story felt a little drawn out and I found myself becoming bored about half to two thirds of the way through. Never the less I am glad that I read Marching Powder and it certainly gave me some insight into the prison and the Bolivian justice system at the time of Thomas's incarceration.

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