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Oranges



JOHN
McPHEE

Oranges



Synopsis

A classic of reportage, *Oranges* was first conceived as a short magazine article about oranges and orange juice, but the author kept encountering so much irresistible information that he eventually found that he had in fact written a book. It contains sketches of orange growers, orange botanists, orange pickers, orange packers, early settlers on Florida's Indian River, the first orange barons, modern concentrate makers, and a fascinating profile of Ben Hill Griffin of Frostproof, Florida who may be the last of the individual orange barons. McPhee's astonishing book has an almost narrative progression, is immensely readable, and is frequently amusing. Louis XIV hung tapestries of oranges in the halls of Versailles, because oranges and orange trees were the symbols of his nature and his reign. This book, in a sense, is a tapestry of oranges, too, with elements in it that range from the great orangeries of European monarchs to a custom of people in the modern Caribbean who split oranges and clean floors with them, one half in each hand.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Oranges" (1967) was Pulitzer-prize-winning author John McPhee's third book and it begins simply 'in medias res' -- as a pungent celebration of oranges and orange juice. This is a mouth-watering introduction to the different types of oranges, and how various humans consume them. Then, in the following chapter the author takes us to the geographical heart of his story in a Florida orange grove. All is not sweetness and orange juice in this book, which was written when LBJ was President. Frozen orange juice concentrate was making large inroads into the fresh orange market,

much to McPhee's dismay. He stopped at a Florida Welcome Station on his way into the state, and was given "a three-ounce cup of reconstituted concentrate." The motel where he stayed also served reconstituted orange juice so McPhee finally had to buy himself a plastic orange reamer and a knife, and pick his own oranges from a nearby grove. We meet the 'Orange Men' in the following chapter and learn the details of the citrus-growing industry. You might think this is the boring bit, but nothing McPhee writes is ever boring. Pomologists are an eccentric lot, most of them migrants to Florida from cold places like Kansas, Minnesota, and Great Britain. At the time this book was written, Englishman William Grierson, Ph.D, a former officer in the Royal Air Force, was "trying to keep growers and shippers interested in fresh fruit...despite the tidal rise of concentrate." He considered himself "the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition." We also learn from Grierson that, "a citrus fruit is, botanically, a berry" and "The sex life of citrus is something fantastic." (Citrus is so genetically perverse that oranges can grow from lime seeds.

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