

A missing-person case leads a nameless inspector into a shady underworld of corrupt corporations, random disappearances and duplicitous men in suits. So far, so noir. But as the narrator-inspector of Martin MacInnes's genre-bending debut starts to disintegrate, both physically and psychologically, the book takes a sweeping diversion into the inspector's own identification with the missing individual – a man who seems to have existed only as a cipher within an amorphous corporate enterprise that has no name, no central office and no traceable records. All of which makes *Infinite Ground* both peculiar and genuinely creepy, as it confidently fuses the sterile horror of the corporate world with the sensuous menace of the South American rainforest.

The book brims with strong, startling ideas: the plot thread involving an agency that provides the mysterious corporation with actors, including fake office workers carefully distributed to motivate genuine employees and even a woman to play the grieving mother of the missing man, is particularly inspired. A scene viewed through the fog of the inspector's crum-

LIAM HESS

Jungle Fever

Infinite Ground

By Martin MacInnes

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bling memory, involving an eerily unflappable murderer and severed body parts in a kitchen, is authentically chilling. With the tone so unrelentingly disorientating and claustrophobic, however, it's at times a little exhausting to string the significance of these moments together as the inspector attempts to dig further into the man's disappearance.

In the final third, he follows one lead that takes him to a small settlement deep in the jungle. The book shifts into a new and expressive register, with a striking attention to the details of this savage landscape. This is where MacInnes's writing really starts to sing, and you can tell it is a world with which he is intimately acquainted. His prose beautifully captures the texture of the forest's perpetuity. Here the inspector enlists a team of nature documentary-

makers, using their cameras to hunt down his man, with unsettling results. Even if it's occasionally a little meandering, MacInnes's deft blurring of reality and artifice is a pleasure to read.

Where the book really hits the mark is in its engagement with the narrator's loneliness and insignificance, both in the city and in the jungle. Seeing a glimmer of sunlight hitting the edge of the forest is the catalyst for his final odyssey. The promise of redemption in the primitive landscape, the ineffable urge of the city dweller to get back in touch with nature, is particularly potent. The corporation as a metaphor for the daily grind set against nature's utopian promise: this might sound clunky but MacInnes achieves his aim with surprising facility.

The sum of all these disparate parts is deliberately ambiguous. At times it seems that the inspector is really onto something as he descends deeper into the corporation's underworld, at others that his sufferings are self-inflicted. If at points a little too perplexing for its own good, *Infinite Ground* is a curious and often remarkable book.

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