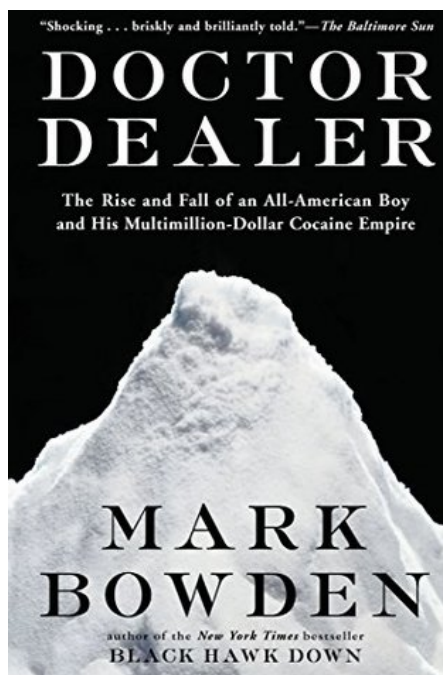




Doctor Dealer: The Rise and Fall of an All-American Boy and His Multimillion-Dollar Cocaine Empire

Mark Bowden

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From the # 1 *New York Times*–bestselling author of *Black Hawk Down: The “shocking” story of the country’s unlikeliest drug kingpin* (*The Baltimore Sun*).

By the early 1980s, Larry Lavin seemed to have everything going for him. He was a bright, charismatic young man who rose from working-class upbringings in a Massachusetts mill town to become a dentist with an Ivy League education and a thriving practice—a beloved father with a well-respected family in one of Philadelphia’s most exclusive suburbs.

But behind the façade of his success was a dark secret: Lavin was also the mastermind behind a cocaine empire that spread from Miami to Boston to New Mexico, catering to lawyers, stockbrokers, and other professionals, and generating an annual income of 60 million for the good doctor.

Now, Mark Bowden, a “master of narrative journalism” (*The New York Times Book Review*) tells the harrowing saga of Lavin’s rise and fall in “a shocking American tragedy . . . [that] shoots straight from the hip” (*The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*).

“An engrossing crime story and a compelling morality tale.” —*The Arizona Republic*

“Has all the elements of a chilling suspense thriller . . . A smoothly crafted, exciting, can’t-put-it-down book.” —*The New Voice* (Louisville)

“Bowden has emerged as one of our best writers of muscular nonfiction.” —*The Denver Post*

Doctor Dealer: The Rise and Fall of an All-American Boy and His Multimillion-Dollar Cocaine Empire Details

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From Reader Review Doctor Dealer: The Rise and Fall of an All-American Boy and His Multimillion-Dollar Cocaine Empire for online ebook

John Lyman says

Super interesting story of Larry Lavin's rise and fall. Much better read than Bowden's Killing Pablo, more straightforward and smooth. A great read for anyone who ever purchased marijuana or cocaine illegally and an even better read for those who dipped their toes into sales.

Jon Moeller says

During the summers of 1987 & 1988, I read two books that shaped my future employment. One was "Wiseguy"- the FBI story of Henry Hill & Italian mob prosecutions in NYC. The other was "Dr. Snow"- the FBI story of Dr. Larry Lavin DDS & the Philly cocaine prosecutions of the early 1980s. Doctor Dealer is the Mark Bowden/Larry Lavin version of Dr. Snow. This book really paints Lavin and cocaine prosecutions as victims. Stick with the Dr. Snow version of the Lavin story.

Koren says

Doctor Dealer by Mark Bowden
4 stars

This guy was a going to school to be a dentist and got involved with dealing marijuana, which eventually led to cocaine. He was into it big time and lots of people were involved. This is an intricate story that for me at times was kind of hard to keep all the people straight. It started to drag a bit in the middle but otherwise a well-written, interesting crime. This took place in the 80's so I think this guy must be out of prison by now. Will have to google to see.

Sam Klemens says

I love most things Thompson in nature. But I didn't like this book. I thought it was rubbish. I didn't think the writing was good. So predictable. Here is a new character, paragraph description, here is what he does. Repeated over, and over, and over. Larry Lavin was obviously smart as hell but his greed matched that. He didn't know when the hell to get out of the cocaine trade.

On the bright side, it seems like he is happy in jail. Which begs the question, he could have probably been plenty happy enough earning 100k a year as a dentist, without being behind bars. Too bad he couldn't realize it. Both the author and the protagonist, neither do I want to emulate.

Carrie says

Mark Bowden is among my favorite authors, and I really enjoyed this book. Bowden tells the story of Larry Lavin, a student-turned-drug dealer-turned dentist-turned fugitive. Bowden portrays Lavin in a fairly unbiased light, showing him as charming to some, annoying to others, greedy, generous, ambitious, and arrogant. The reader sees all sides of Larry Lavin, and we are ultimately left with a complex impression of Lavin. I found myself alternately liking him and finding him annoying.

The story of Lavin's youth and his gradual rise to become a drug kingpin in Philadelphia is detailed and filled with any number of anecdotes about brushes with the law, hard-partying, dental school, and family life. The section on his flight to Virginia Beach, his capture, and his prosecution felt a little bit rushed compared with the level of detail we got before that point, which is one of the reasons I am giving this book four stars instead of five.

The other reason I am giving this book four stars instead of five is because I didn't like the way the author presented some of the anecdotes regarding Lavin's run-ins with the criminal underworld of Philadelphia in the late 70s. He routinely used the word "whores" for prostitutes, and while I think that this was Lavin's term, it seemed that the author picked it up as well. I also felt that he portrayed the few black dealers in the book as dangerous thugs, while the "thug" image was not as readily attributed to two of the white dealers who did use violence or intimidation. (Lavin himself was largely able to stay away from the use of intimidation in his dealings, and he regularly wrote off 'bad debts' rather than use force to collect them.) Part of this portrayal may be due to the fact that Lavin did have violent or aggressive run-ins with those dealers or their associates, whereas the violence committed by the white dealers did not involve Lavin. Nonetheless, I felt as though there was an opportunity to provide some context about race relations in Philadelphia during Lavin's tenure there, and in this area the author fell short. This would have given the reader a better sense of the climate in which Lavin was operating his relatively insulated enterprise.

Deb says

Great look into the drug underworld. Very interesting.

Drew Zagorski says

I've read several of Bowden's books - Black hawk Down, Killing Pablo and Guests of the Ayatollah, among them - and all have been riveting, and am planning to read his latest about the capture of Bin Laden. This book, however, fell short of the standards of those three in particular. Maybe it was because of the main character in this one, who from the beginning was of a criminal ilk, so to my mind, there was no fall from grace. He really wasn't the "all-American" boy, but a drug dealer and poser from the get go. It would have been a more compelling tale had he actually been a stand up guy who got onto a the slippery slope and couldn't control the descent. Or maybe it was that this was one of Bowden's earliest books so he hadn't quite honed the razor sharp story telling of the later books. Either way, I found myself counting the pages until the end of the book, and hoping to finish it quickly. Not his best - his other books are well worth reading, though.

Amy says

Loved it. Larry Lavin is a complex drug dealer to say the least. Educated at Phillips Andover and Penn he also has a criminal side that is tempered with a congenial personality.

Jeff says

A very interesting book about Lawrence Lavin DMD, a cocaine kingfish of Philadelphia, PA. There is something sick and intriguing about this true story that makes it hard to put down. It gives a thorough impression of Larry's charisma... and audacious choices. Excellent detail and insight to the 'cocaine days' of the early 80's.

Brad says

This book and I were not compatible but I wish it well. I understand other people have enjoyed it.

Doctor Dealer aggravated me on nearly every one of the 45 pages I was able to read. It's a true story with wooden unrealistic dialog ("Confectioners' sugar!") and long, boring introductions to characters.

I guess I was supposed to care more because the characters are real but I think the true story nature made me more critical. I found myself sighing and rolling my eyes at the book: "Oh who would say that?", "whose life is that easy to explain?", etc, etc.

I was resolved to stick it out for at least 100 pages, but then the author used the word "gusto" and that pushed me over the edge and I gave up on it.

Caveman Pleasures says

The first thirty or so pages were slow, but then the story started snowballing, and things got very interesting very quickly. I was hooked...as if this book itself were cocaine.

I like how the book takes a totally amoral stance. Bowden doesn't condemn Lavin, nor does he vouch for him. I got the feeling that Lavin was due for a fall, not for moral reasons, but for flying too close to the sun. Still, he got about three or four times the sentence he deserved in my opinion.

Mary says

Really good true crime

Larry Lavin comes across as genuinely likable. He's probably somewhere on the sociopath scale. In the book, his love of risk is a constant. He's self-absorbed and arrogant, and he repeatedly shoots himself in the foot. He couldn't see how much danger he was putting his family and himself in. He definitely never saw the

awful effects of cocaine on the people who bought the stuff from the dealers he supplied.

And at the same time, he was generous, helpful and caring. Finishing dental studies at Penn was a big accomplishment. This guy was smart in so many ways. And just downright stupid in others. I did some research and was happy to find out he got paroled in 2004.

It's a well written book that kept my attention from beginning to end.

Peter says

I really enjoy Bowden's style of writing and would recommend any of his books.

Dawn Payne says

Whoa. Wow. Really?! It read like an unbelievable, twisted-plot FBI drug movie. AND, it hits "home" b/c of some odd connections. Ask me in person. :)

Benjamin Wetmore says

Needed a stronger editor, could have been about 50% of what's present in the book. Lots of unnecessary detail.

There's a ton of background on the subject in this book where the main excitement of the story: the flight from justice, is really buried in the last chapter.

Some great explanatory journalism in here, such as what 'freebasing' cocaine really is, and how the subject, Larry Lavin, grew the drug trade from college to the streets, while maintaining heavy growth.

There's a great explanation of the shady deals that Lavin is lead into by his financial advisor, but not necessarily a lot of depth into the transactions themselves. Bowden tells you of the various schemes they were bought into: a failing arena that they later try to burn for the insurance money, a record company that's mostly a sham, a limo company, but there's certainly more depth to those companies that isn't covered. We get a lot of personalities and a crazy amount of detail about how various people were feeling at various points, but some more about the actual activities of the laundering companies would have been interesting.

Overall, a great read, and excellent investigative journalism.

Three stars only because it can be very dense and hard to get through at some parts due to the excessive detail. It feels like one of Bowden's early books (1987), whereas by his later books like Black Hawk Down, Killing Pablo, Road Work, he's infinitely more polished and punchy as a writer. Still a great read.
