

DISCOVERIES

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**Franklin, John with
Sharon Franklin**
GIFT OF THE JAGUAR
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A gorgeous ethnographical novel set in the Peruvian Andes, *Gift of the Jaguar* is a handsomely crafted tale of a youth's passage into adulthood—with the help of one very scary cat.

On the verge of his 18th birthday, Juan is still haunted by the memory of his sister Marta, who died when he was just a boy. Ready to take on his plot of land and the responsibilities that come along with it, Juan is stalked by a massive, deadly jaguar that is both a real threat and a pulsating symbol of the boy's grief. Seeking help from the shaman grandfather of a childhood friend (Rosa, also Juan's love interest), the protagonist is sent on a sacred journey to a holy peak in the Peruvian Andes, where he will find out the truth about his sister's death and his destiny. *Gift of the Jaguar* is simultaneously a story of psychological growth and spiritual discovery, a tale of personal and religious revelation. While authors John and Sharon Franklin engage Andean mysticism—and, more broadly, South American religious traditions—with the eyes of an anthropologist, their fiction still seeks to impart transcendent truths. Though the authors are native Virginians with only travelers' knowledge of Peru, readers will swear the Franklins were raised in Lima. They paint pictures of local culture that are vivid but admirably subtle. The book is no travelogue, designed merely to prove its authors' worldliness. It is instead a beautiful, measured interpretation of South American mountain life and religiosity. Further, the Franklins write with a deliberate precision that recalls the simple rhetorical grace of Peter Matthieson—specifically *The Snow Leopard*, another story of spiritual growth that focuses on the pursuit of an elusive beast. This is high praise, for Matthieson is a modern master, and the Franklins might be on their way.

Truly a gift.

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