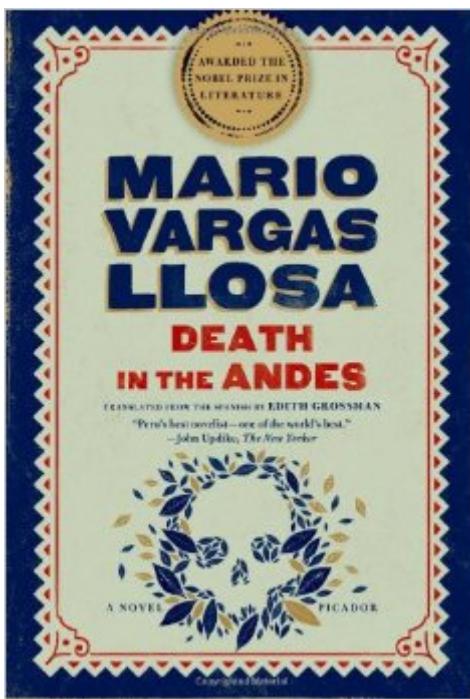


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Death In The Andes: A Novel



Synopsis

In a remote Andean village, three men have disappeared. Peruvian Army corporal Lituma and his deputy TomÃjs have been dispatched to investigate, and to guard the town from the Shining Path guerrillas they assume are responsible. But the townspeople do not trust the officers, and they have their own ideas about what forces claimed the bodies of the missing men. To pass the time, and to cope with their homesickness, TomÃjs entertains Lituma nightly with the sensuous, surreal tale of his precarious love affair with a wayward prostitute. His stories are intermingled with the ongoing mystery of the missing men. Death in the Andes is an atmospheric suspense story and a political allegory, a panoramic view of contemporary Peru from one of the world's great novelists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Death in the Andes is a story of brutality and fear and ignorance. The language is often coarse and vulgar. The ending is especially disturbing. Were it not for the remarkable writing of Mario Vargas Llosa, I might have put this unsettling story aside. But Mario Vargas Llosa is a captivating story teller and I found myself wanting to know more and more about his characters that inhabit the harsh mountains of Peru. The reader encounters alternating viewpoints and layered conversations that intermingle the present and the past, forcing the reader to remain alert. Death in the Andes is structurally a mystery story in which two soldiers assigned to a barren outpost investigate the disappearance of three men. The brutal Shining Path terrorists (the Senderistas) are the natural suspect, but Corporal Lituma also mistrusts both the townspeople (largely traditional Indians) and the construction work crew building a highway across the mountains. Initially, he has little patience

for talk of the pishtacos, vampire-like humans that sucked the blood and ate the melted the fat of their victims. There are stories within stories. Young French tourists are stoned to death, rather than shot, to save bullets, and to permit others to take part in the killing. In fascination we listen to a lonely young man describe his improbable love of a prostitute. We witness a village turning upon itself and selecting victims for the Senderistas. We meet an aged, repulsive woman who in her youth helped kill a pishtacos. We gain a nebulous understanding as to why Peruvians and foreigners involved in re-forestation programs and nature preserves become prime targets for assassination. I have already begun to read *Death in the Andes* again and I am searching for more writings by Mario Vargas Llosa.

Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa continues to speak out politically in yet another realistic and uncompromising novel set in his home country of Peru. In this novel, he brings the reader face to face with the horrors of the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), a Maoist terror group operating in the mountains of Peru from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, with seemingly few direct challenges from the government. The novel's sense of immediacy, enhanced by vivid descriptions of real events affecting real people, provides a close-up look at the tactics used by the Shining Path in the central and southern mountains of Peru, where they attacked indigenous Indian peasants, all foreigners, all educated Peruvians working to improve the lives of the peasants, and anyone representing the government or police. The novel opens with an old woman, arriving at a rural Garda station to say that her husband, a foreman on a road-building crew, has disappeared. His is the third unsolved disappearance from their small mountain village in the past three weeks. Local peasants, farmers, laborers, and Indians have provided no information to the two Garda officers, Cpl. Lituma and Tomasito, his assistant, and both men worry that they are surrounded by the terrorists they are there to monitor. Tomasito himself has escaped to the mountains to avoid death at the hands of a mob leader for whom he had recently been a bodyguard "until he fell in love with his boss's girlfriend. Without transition, the narrative suddenly shifts to a pair of adventuresome but naïve French tourists traveling through the Andes by bus. Even after masked men stop their bus, they believe that nothing can happen to them because "We are French tourists, señor." Other story lines also evolve and broaden the scope.

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