

# *Ethnobotanical Leaflets*

[Journal Contents](#)

[Back Issues](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

[Research Notes](#)

[Careers](#)

[Meetings](#)

[Botany Resources](#)

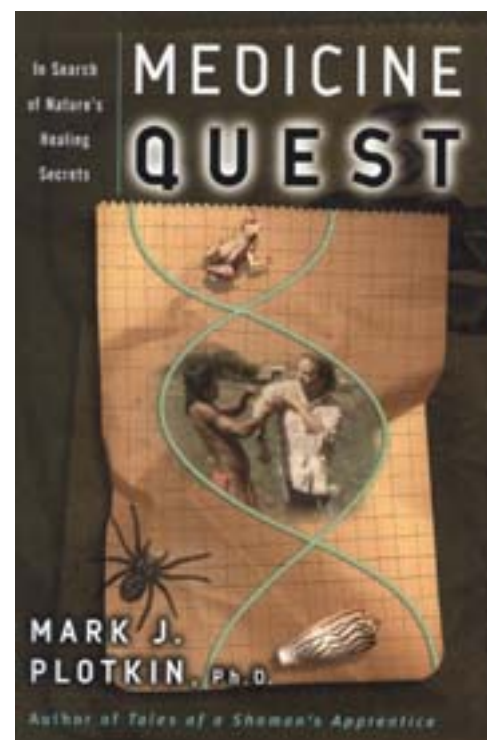
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**Medicine Quest** by Mark J. Plotkin. ISBN 0-670-86937-6. Viking, published by the Penguin Group, New York. 224 pp. U.S. \$22.95, Canada \$32.99.

In *Medicine Quest* Mark Plotkin goes beyond *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*, his critically acclaimed exploration of the Amazonian jungles that has become a classic of its genre. Here he explores the frontiers of our search for new medicines, transporting readers from freezing Arctic wastes to twilight ocean depths to steamy rain forests. In these far flung places, the race is on to find new medicines for such intractable diseases as AIDS, cancer, diabetes, and tuberculosis. It is a quest powered by the desperation of the ill and the compassion of those who would cure them.

Plotkin highlights the ironic marriage of natural products, indigenous wisdom, and biotechnology and details discoveries that are already producing stunning leads in the laboratory: painkillers from the skin of rain forest frogs, anticoagulants from leech saliva, and antitumor agents from snake venom. *Medicine Quest* is a historical odyssey as well: Plotkin provides fascinating background on the centuries-old pursuit of cures that ranges from ancient Egyptian expeditions to foreign lands in search of healing plants, to the nineteenth-century development of aspirin; from willow bark that gave birth to the modern pharmaceutical industry, to the extraction of penicillin from fungi that helped determine the outcome of World War II.

This entertaining weave of medicine, ecology, ethnobotany, history, exploration, and adventure will thrill scientists, naturalists, armchair explorers, and the exploding number of Americans who spend \$10 billion a year on medicine in their thirst for nature's healing secrets.



[Return to Home Page](#)

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