



Blood of Toma

Lauren Lee Merewether

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Worlds collide in this unique, action-filled tale of Aztecs and conquistadors.

Power, greed, revenge, duty, and love surround a young Aztec high priestess and an honorable conquistador flung together in the exotic and deadly jungles of Mexico in *Blood of Toma* by Lauren Lee Merewether. Raging passion and exciting action will captivate young adults.

Tomantzin, or Toma to the few allowed into her inner circle, has always known a life of privilege. As the only daughter of the leader of the Texcoco people, she was raised and revered as a high priestess, destined to be sacrificed to the gods to ensure survival of the land. As the ceremony draws closer, the murder of her father, the Tlatoani, coincides with the arrival of Spanish conquistadors, led by Hernán Cortés. Not knowing whom to trust, Toma flees the safety of Texcoco and finds herself at the mercy of Arrio, second in command to Cortés himself. Together, Toma and Arrio must stop a war from destroying the Mexica people while appeasing the conquistadors' relentless quest for gold.

Aztec society in the early sixteenth century serves as a fascinating background, and Merewether does an admirable job of bringing order, beauty, and a sense of honor into the lives of the Mexica people, known for slavery, brutality, and human sacrifice. A glossary of names and terms assists with unfamiliar concepts, gods, and people, although a pronunciation guide would have been welcome here as well (say *Ixtlilxochitl* five times fast). The plot is full of action and tension, with many twists and turns. Unfortunately, some bigger surprises are revealed in the glossary.

Teens will relate to Toma's struggle to be a dutiful daughter and a worthy person. She is not perfect and often struggles with anger, pride, and confusion. Arrio, as a conquistador, is constantly battling his attraction to Toma, the "little heathen." While it is clear that the two are physically attracted to each other, the language barrier makes communication difficult, and Merewether's attempts to describe the connection of mind, spirit, heart, and soul are often muddled, as when the two touch foreheads, "exchanging their beings with one another. Her fingers grazed his which prompted a nudge of his thumb to hers. They found each other's souls once again with their eyes."

The grammar and punctuation is problematic throughout, with odd turns of phrase and placement, such as "brunched" used to describe a furrowed brow and chapter titles like "City, of the Great" or "Peace, from the Night." Articles are dropped or added unnecessarily, and, at times, it's not clear what imagery Merewether is trying to evoke, as when Toma eavesdrops on conspirators: "As she realized they had not seen her by hearing their unwavering tone, she calmed herself, and her vision cleared as the sparklers in her eyes began to die."

Teens and young adults will enjoy the uniqueness of the setting as well as the action-filled plot. Those interested in the time period or Aztec customs may also enjoy *Blood of Toma* for its historical perspective and insight.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (July 10, 2014)

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