



## Isle of Passion

By Laura Restrepo  
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### Introduction

In 1908, Mexican captain Ramón Arnaud and his young bride, Alicia, set sail for a tiny Pacific atoll once dubbed "Isle of Passion" by the Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan. Accompanied by eleven soldiers and their families, the captain is under orders to defend the island against an improbable French invasion.

With its treacherous coral reef and stagnant lagoon, the island is a dire, forbidding place for the new inhabitants. They manage to create a viable community, but eventually, amid political upheaval at home and the first rumblings of World War I, they are forgotten.

Left to the mercies of nature and each other, they fall victim one by one to scurvy, hunger, despair, rivalry, lust and, ultimately, violence. Alicia, determined and resourceful, becomes a beacon of strength for the remaining castaways, whose collective survival will depend upon her courage and her cunning.

### Questions for Discussion

1. How do the natural resources on Clipperton, or the Isle of Passion, hint at the hardships these characters will face over the course of this novel?
2. *Isle of Passion* is narrated in short chapters that take place over the course of many years, but not necessarily in chronological order. Why do you think the author chose an out-of-sequence narrative to tell this story?
3. How did the narrator's interviews with friends and family of the original island dwellers impact your understanding of the historical facts on which this novel is based?
4. What logic informs the decision by Ramón and the others to refuse rescue by the American ship?
5. How is the theme of individual heroism presented in *Isle of Passion*?
6. Which is more problematic to the Isle of Passion survivors: the unpredictable island conditions and dwindling resources, or the increasing internal conflicts between them?
7. Based on the attitudes expressed by both the male and female characters in this novel, what are some of the social expectations of women in this era, and what are some of the expectations of men?
8. What parallels do you see between the situation on the island and the challenges faced by contemporary survivors of natural disasters?
9. In a life-or-death situation, do you think that any kind of behavior—even murder—is acceptable? Consider your response in light of Alicia Arnaud and Tírsa Rendón's killing of Victoriano Alvarez.
10. What are some of the major themes that animate this novel?

### About the Author

Laura Restrepo is the best-selling author of six novels, including *The Dark Bride*, *A Tale of the Dispossessed* and *Delirio*, which received Spain's prestigious Alfaguara Prize in 2004. She lives in Colombia.