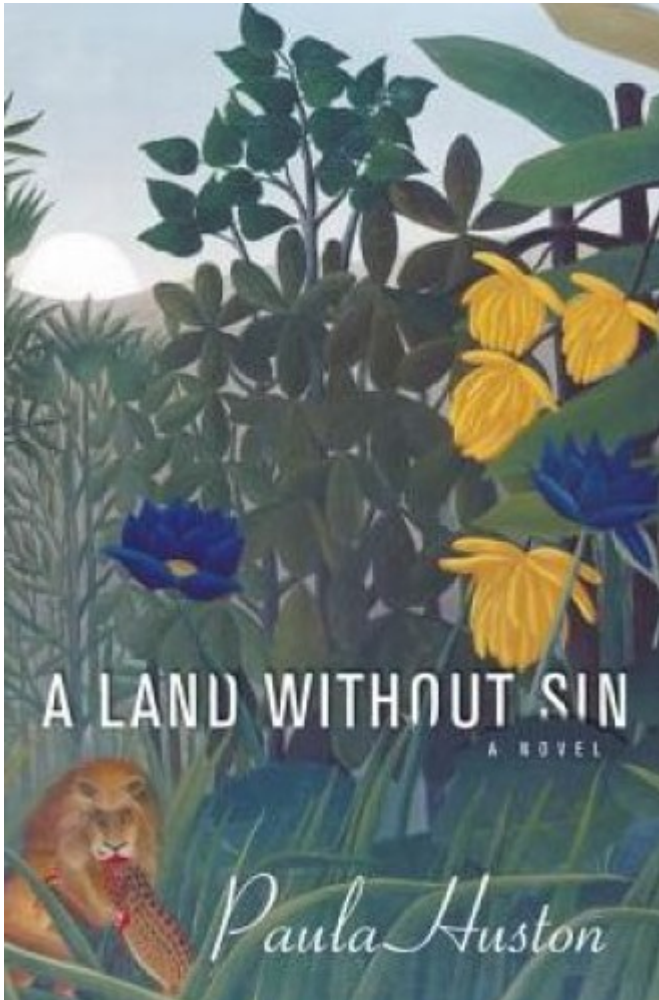


Cycles of violence

By [Amber Noel](#)

January 6, 2014

## In Review



### **A Land without Sin**

By Paula Huston

Slant

Paula Huston's novel follows Eva, a tough young American photojournalist, as she searches for her brother Stefan, a priest who has gone missing into the Lacandon

jungle, a hotspot of guerilla warfare in southern Mexico in 1993. Eva takes a job with a Dutch archaeologist, and in the process of documenting Mayan hieroglyphs she finds herself drawn into a story and conflict that her experience as a war photographer did not prepare her for.

The book moves like a fast-paced thriller, but the energy is never careless. It creates an atmosphere of attention, deep alertness and immanent yet hidden meaning, like a good piece of spiritual writing—or like a night in the thick Lacandon jungle. The plot takes the reader into dark and unstable centers of demonic and human power, from Mayan burial temples in Tikal, Guatemala, to the chaos of revolution in southern Mexico, to Eva's secret-burdened suburban childhood home.

Huston presents a mystery: Why do human beings repeat the practice of violent ritual sacrifice, and what, if anything, interrupts it? In such an impossibly blood-stained world, are there any signs at all of this cycle's end, and if so, where can we find them? In a search for an answer to these questions, the novel moves with urgency, the plot crisscrossing elegantly over space and time, weaving cultural and personal histories together, drawing a nation, a family and a history into the dark core of atonement theology.

This beautifully researched novel is a story about murder and propitiation, Mexico and America, war and the church, family and the cross. It's an easy read with theological guts, an adventure mystery that drops breadcrumbs along the road to real conversion.