



Bending the Boyne: A Novel of Ancient Ireland

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2200 BCE: Marauders invade ancient Eire seeking copper and gold. The astronomer Boann and the enigmatic Cian must use all their wits and courage to save their people, the peaceful starwatchers, from the invaders' long bronze knives and scavenging ways. Tensions between new and old cultures and between Boann, Elcmar, and her son Aengus, ultimately explode. What emerges from the rubble of battle is a fresh take on Ireland's oldest legends.

BENDING THE BOYNE draws on 21st century archaeology to show the lasting impact when early metal mining and trade take hold along north Atlantic coasts. Carved megaliths and stunning gold artifacts, from the Pyrenees up to the Boyne, come to life in this researched historical fiction.

Bending the Boyne: A Novel of Ancient Ireland Details

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From Reader Review *Bending the Boyne: A Novel of Ancient Ireland* for online ebook

Mark Patton says

J.S. Dunn's *Bending the Boyne* weaves together historical fiction (based, essentially, on archaeological evidence) with Irish myth to create an engaging human story set in 2000 BC. At its heart is a conflict between two groups of people: the native Irish "Starwatchers," a peace-loving Stone Age culture led by astronomer-priests, both male and female; and an invading group of copper/bronze using people with a strongly developed warrior culture, an insatiable demand for copper & gold, and a well-established network of trade routes extending the full length of Europe's Atlantic coast. It is told, very much, from the point of view of the "Starwatchers," with two characters in particular taking centre stage: Boann, a young woman in training to be an astronomer priestess, and Cian, the young man who loves her, and is loved by her. They are torn apart when Cian takes the decision to live, for a time, with the invaders, and falls under suspicion: is he a traitor to his own people, or is he really spying for them? He undertakes a long voyage of discovery, taking him to Brittany, the Loire Valley and the Basque country. It is certainly a page-turner and is, in many respects, meticulously researched (the description of Copper/Bronze Age mining activities, in particular, is based very closely on archaeological evidence from sites such as Mount Gabriel, in Co.Cork).

Dunn's inclusion, in the book, of flesh-and-blood characters who later go on to be regarded, in Irish myth, as superhuman heroes, even as gods, challenges us to question just how far back in time the oral traditions that gave rise to later myth might go. She writes in a specifically Irish tradition of storytelling reminiscent of Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and, in our own time, Frank Delaney.

If I have a criticism, from a historical point of view, it is the same criticism I have of Bernard Cornwell's *Stonehenge*. The novel is ostensibly set in 2000 BC, but the society described (large numbers of "invaders" with a warrior culture, industrial-scale mining, sea-crossings directly from Ireland to Brittany) seems more like that of 1800 or 1700 BC. That, however, need not mar anyone's enjoyment of the book as a work of fiction.

Susan Johnson says

I found this to be a fascinating read about 2200 BC in Ireland. It talks about how a people who studied astrology and how they discovered scientific truths we still use today, how they became aware of equinoxes and the movement of the skies-sun, moon and stars and, even more interestingly, how they recorded their findings. it makes an interesting story. I have been to Newgrange in Ireland and I wished I had read the book before I went. It would have made the visit come even more alive for me.

I found this book challenged many unknown biases I had. I had thought the people of this more time spent most of their time hunting and gathering and just plain surviving. Yet these people were making complex observations and recording them in a manner that has lasted around 4000 years. It's just amazing if you think of it. I enjoyed the parts of the book that told of the people not just surviving but refining their lives. Boann and Enya enjoyed a breakfast of stirabout with fruit, soft white cheese and hot infusion of mint and blackberry leaves. Really very similar to what we eat now. Taranis enjoyed even more elaborate meals on the Continent.

I highly recommend this book to those who have an interest in the past. It's extremely informative.

Jane says

2200 B.C. This novel tells of several tribes: in Ireland [the 'Starwatchers': peace-loving astronomers in the River Boyne area]; the 'Invaders' whose origin is 'the Continent' [Europe?], interested only in conquering and in finding precious metals--gold, copper, and tin--and trade; the 'Seafarers', who live on what we would call the Iberian Peninsula today and who are willing to engage in hunting for metal and in trading, and Basques. These groups interact among each other. Boann, the astronomer, and the mysterious Cian, try to save their people from the encroachment of the invaders. The author has taken mythological or legendary names from long ago, made them into non-mythic characters for his fictional recreation of the evolution of the Bronze Age. Originating in the mists of time, his characters have eventually become deities and heroes in Irish legend. He used recent archeological evidence as a basis for his story. Archaeologists call the 'Invaders' the Beaker Culture. The name has been taken from the shape of their pottery.

Usually, prehistoric stories leave me cold, but I enjoyed this one and learned a great deal. The story became confusing at times and sometimes I wondered at the author's choices of expression. I didn't feel there was that much personality to each figure; I thought each was used only to advance the author's fictional speculation. There was a good deal of explanation of the 'standing stones', stone circles and ancient astronomy. I also liked the details of copper smelting done by Creidhne [later that name was used for the ancient god of goldsmithing.] The only note of fantasy I could see was the startling *very last line* of the novel. All extra material was fascinating, especially **"Pronunciation of characters' names, mythic origins, and role in Bending the Boyne: A Novel of Ancient Ireland.** On the author's website besides bibliography, there are links to various artifacts mentioned in the novel:

http://jsdunnbooks.com/links_artifact...

Iris says

Bending the Boyne is the story of Boann and Cian who both try to find their own way of dealing with the invaders who threaten the way of life their people have known for ages.[return][return]Bending the Boyne does a good job of combining archaeological fact, Irish Myths and imagination into a compelling story and opens a window into Bronze Age Ireland and the way people might have lived during those times.[return][return]Reading Bending the Boyne I just had one major problem. While I understood why the author chose to let the invaders speak modern Dublin dialect, I found it very distracting and it seemed out of place to me. This might have been due to my inner linguist who knows a lot about Irish English and its history, so this issue might be one of personal taste.

Lisa (Bookworm Lisa) says

I am very impressed with the work that went into this book. It is about ancient inhabitants of Ireland. This

group of people were starwatchers and studied the heavens. They carved the cycles of the solar system and season into rock and temples. They were a peaceful people,

They must deal with Invaders from the sea who come to plunder the metal resources and leave destruction in their quest for precious metals. The Invaders take natural resources from the starwatchers without a care to trade or whether or not it takes the food that they needed for the winter season. The detail that J.S. Dunn explains the process of the early miners and the refining process of copper is very interesting. You can tell that he did meticulous research on the Bronze Age. In his Biography at the back of the book it states that he has a keen interest in the early Bronze Age Culture. It also indicates that he researched and made friends in the fields of "archaeology, geology, and Bronze Age tool-making."

Boann is learning of the heavens from her father, his apprentice, Cian, has left the community to dwell with the invaders. She is planning on taking her father's place when he passes and carving the history of the stars into stone. It is a very meticulous and exact trade. She is placed in a position to keep peace between her people and the Invaders by marrying their chief.

Cian watches and learns from them. He then is placed into a position where he can help his people by learning from the enemy and knowing how they work.

This historical fiction novel is well thought out and very interesting. I personally love to find out about ancient cultures. I was unfamiliar with the people of the Boyne. They have left amazing mounds as a tribute to their culture that predated Stonehenge. If you love historic fiction and ancient civilizations then I highly recommend this book to you.

Evy says

I greatly enjoyed this book. I do however feel that with a bit more polish and editing it would be a significantly better book. I am a medieval historian and a linguist with a strong interest in this time period so I came to this book with high expectations. Initially I almost stopped reading the book as the beginning was a bit slow and confusing. I really did enjoy the way that the author tied in myth, literature and history to try and recreate life in this period. The ending seemed a bit rushed and I had to reread sections because I felt that I had missed something, I hadn't it was just confusing. That being said I did have a hard time putting it down once I got into it and I would recommend it to people interested in this time period or the spiritual aspect of early Ireland.

Allie says

In Eire, Boann lives happily spending her days following in the steps of her astronomer father and healer mother. Her people, the Starwatchers, aren't the only ones inhabiting Eire. They face hostility from the Invaders with their long swords and horses. The Invaders seem to only want metals, which puts them at odds with the Starwatchers' peaceful and earth friendly culture. To cement a peace agreement, Starwatchers agree

to Boann's marriage to the new ard ri, Elcmar. Boann bares Aengus, a fine son. But the new heir doesn't produce the peace that was hoped for. Cian, Boann's Starwatcher childhood love, lives the Invader Camp to learn their ways to bring them down, but he is sickened by the marriage and the Invaders in general. Boann tries to maintain a semblance of peace, but with Elcmar's stubbornness, she feels she is failing. Cian leaves Eire and travels to the continent to learn about metals and smelting and to free his heart. While his life is a commercial success, he longs for Boann and the Eire. Who holds the future of Eire in their hands; Elcmar, Boann, Aengus or Cian? Whose culture will prevail?

I had never heard of JS Dunn, but was excited to read a book about Ancient Ireland. I began to read and was immediately drawn to the emerald Eire. I loved gathering herbs with Boann, and living the peaceful earth loving ways of the Starwatchers. Like Cian, I hated the Invaders. A filthy people who took life and resources without a second thought.

However, the Invaders taught new concepts. Debt, Credit and trading and innovation of metals. These are hard concepts to grasp, and it is difficult to see how they are important., especially when they aren't used by your culture.

For all the Invader innovations, there are a multitude of Starwatcher values that are awesome. Architecture and astronomy go hand in hand with the building of mounds and the celebrations of the changing sky.

Healing and herbal medicine are strongly valued in the Starwatcher culture, as is being a sustainable community. These details are vivid. I am sure that in this book you would have all the details to build your own mound, if the thought possessed you.

Nan Hawthorne says

When a novel set in prehistoric Ireland has in it the line "She and the Dagda worked to save their people from cultural annihilation" you know you have less of a story than a lecture. Sadly what could have been a fascinating look at pre-Celtic Ireland fell too much into this category. We learn that the recently arrived Celts of Eire were nasty, raping, environment destructive, greedy people bent on divesting the Starwatchers, who were peaceful, Earth centered, and matriarchal, of their admirable livelihoods. The Cian story is at least interesting, with his travels in Europe, but he is bent on aping the rapine of the Celts which rather ruins the point of the book. The book lacks a satisfying resolution and rushes to a non sequitor ending. It was a good effort that needed a lot more focus. J. S. Dunn has potential but he needs more guidance from an editor.

Kathi says

I have visited the sites of Newgrange, Knowth, and Dowth several times, and of Loughcrew once. I found the story fascinating and loved the way I could match my memories to the scenes in the book. It definitely deepened my appreciation of the tale and, at the same time, the story added depth to my recollections.

The author's style is a bit clunky, for lack of a better term—maybe reflecting the fact that a supposed museum docent is relating the tale. Yet one cannot help but admire and appreciate the research and meticulous attention to detail with a story that matches the archeological record.

Makes me want to revisit Brú na Bóinne. (Sigh)

Rayven says

My love for Ireland and her myths is what drew my attention to "Bending the Boyne" by J.S Dunn. "Bending the Boyne" is classed as Historical Fiction, but it does have a bit of a fantasy feel to it. For the story starts and finishes in present day. But for me it was much more than that. It was a tale of people who loved their way of life, who have walked gently on the earth and who are observers of the heavens. Their way of life is threatened as change descends upon them and their only way of survival is to adapt.

This story is told from the view of the Starwatchers, who watch and learn from the heavens above. In this observation their stories and knowledge of the heavens are passed down from generation to generation in the stone carvings and mounds that sprinkle the Boyne Valley. Among the Starwatchers are Boann, daughter of Oghma a sacred stone carver. Boann is also a Starwatcher and healer to her people. Dagda who is the leader and for lack of a better word Shaman to the heavens and the people of the Boyne. The tale begins when tragedy strikes at the hands of the invaders, who search for the "Sun Metal. We see the beginnings stages of the Iron Age and have a front row seat to what it might have been like as the lust for gold, copper and tin swept the Isle of Eire. Boann and her people struggle to keep peace as the two clans unite under Boann's marriage to the "Ard Ri" Elcmar. Even with attempt at peace the struggles continue and the only way for the Starwatchers to survive lies in the fate of Cian. Cian's love for his people sends him deep into the world of the invaders where he must learn their ways and gather knowledge that will help his people deal with the changes to come.

J.S Dunn is a master storyteller, as we see this story and archaeological fact merge together in such a beautiful way. The depth to which this book was researched truly shows the author's love and passion for Ancient Ireland and her people. The storyline drew me in as much as the detail that was given to the surrounding landscapes of the Boyne. I have visited the sacred sites and there were many times in I was caught up in the feeling of Deja vu, as I found myself along side Boann deep in the central chamber of Newgrange waiting for the Solstice sun to rise, or walking along side of her as she visited the surrounding area of Loughcrew. Through J.S Dunn's writing I was seeing these sites through ancient eyes.

All the characters in this novel were so well developed that I was emotionally invested with each one. There were so many times where I was so caught up in the emotion of the story that my heart stopped, for there were twist and turns that I did not see coming. Within the story the ancient myths of Ireland were woven into the plot in such a clever way. This book is so well written and the story line moved at just the right pace and kept me interested to the point that I was getting up in the middle of the night to read. I could not put my kindle down!

This book is not an easy read, however if you are looking for a book that engages all of your senses and your intellect then this book is for you. Reading this book was such an enjoyable experience and with that said I give it 5 Stars.

5 Stars!

Reviewed for DarkissReads. www.darkissreads.com

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

I thoroughly enjoyed Bending the Boyne. It takes place in Ireland in 2200 BCE and follows the story of two

"tribes." This is the first time that I've ever read anything about this time period in Ireland. I love when a book can take me someplace that I've never been before. I've been trying to read more about ancient history because I just don't feel like I read enough about times prior to about the 1300s or 1400s, which is pretty recent in the whole scheme of things.

I loved how much research the author must have done into this subject matter. In the book blurb, it states that the book covers a lot of things that were learned from the archaeology of where Boann, the main character, and the other members of the Starwatcher tribe once lived. Because there was such a focus on place and so much research on what life was like then, the writing is really realistic. You really feel like you are living through the things that both tribes are feeling and going through. I also really enjoyed reading the Author's Note. I'm always super interested in how authors, especially those that write historical fiction, make their stories genuine and realistic. Dunn does a really fabulous job of pulling the reader into a very interesting story about the people of Ancient Ireland.

Bottom line: Historical fiction lovers who love good detail will love this one.

Juli Rahel says

The story centers around Boann and how her life changes when Invaders land on Eire's shores and threaten her village. I found the beginning of this book fascinating. Dunn went into a lot of detail when describing the Starwatcher's culture and tradition, really showcasing his research. After reading the book you really feel you have developed an understanding of the importance of starwatching to these cultures. The threat posed by the Invaders is very well described, especially the conflict between how two different cultures clash and how the gape between the two seem impossible to overcome.

Boann is a goddess in Irish mythology, the Goddess of the river Boyne. Elcmar, her husband, and Aengus, her son, are also part of this mythology. After having read the book I looked into a number of myths concerning Boann, Brigid, Aengus and Elcmar and it is remarkable how many of the storylines have been woven into the book by Dunn. As it happened, I have also been reading 'The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael' by Fiona Macleod / William Sharp in which there is a tale titled 'The Awakening of Aengus Og' and it seems it concerns the same Aengus. I personally love these intertextualities because they add so much more depth to a book.

What is captivating is the way Dunn has incorporated the process of trade, of creating bronze and mining copper and gold into the story. Although the chapters concerning Cian and his travels in Continental Europe can at times take long to read they are always worth your time. They truly add to the story of the book and allow Cian's character to grow beyond the stereotype. I myself do not know that much about mining, but Dunn has incorporated it in such a way that it is not only interesting to read but also entertaining.

Heather Domin says

This novel takes figures from Irish myth and places them in a realistic historical setting; familiar names from Celtic mythology are given real lives and historical contexts for their legendary actions. Every page is packed with information, and plenty of back matter is provided for explanation and further reading. I personally would have wished for a little more emotional connection to the characters, but the author's

passion for the topics and narrative is evident throughout the novel. I'll be posting a slightly longer review in my blog.

Leigh Ann says

Can't wait for this book to come! I am so excited to read it!

Penelope Bartotto says

Bending the Boyne is a mind-bending tale that is as spectacular as the night sky which plays a very prominent role in the story. I will admit going into this story I truly had no idea what I was getting myself into, was I reading something that was going to trip into the paranormal fantastic or follow a more realistic route. Reality is the direction I feel this delightful story follows, and it leads the reader on a journey that spans many lands, times, peoples, and traditions.

The story told here is incredibly well researched and thus written superbly, you cannot help but see the attention to detail that Dunn has put in the writing of a fantastic tale. The key characters are solidly developed and fit well into the story line that has been created, even with the twists and turns that make the story such an adventure. The plot is easily identified and carried out with a great design format that keeps the reader hooked like a fish in the river running near the Boyne mounds. There is a great amount of historical features that could have easily been swallowed by the fictional aspects of the story, but Dunn magically blends the facts with the fiction. As someone who loves history, is highly interested in Celtic Mythology, and just loves to read... this book will hold a cherished spot on my bookshelf.
