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Bending the Boyne

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It is 2200 BCE in ancient Ireland—the Eire—and Starwatchers, a quiet, self-sufficient people, look to the stars for guidance. While the stars help them cultivate an understanding of their history, they spend peaceful lives as herbalists, astronomers, and stone carvers, the incredible megaliths that rise from their lush landscape serving as an essential source of self-discovery, mystery, and pride. But there is a change in the atmosphere and newcomers threaten to disrupt this idyllic life. Invaders from the Continent have arrived on their shores and they lust after the rich metals of Eire to create long bronze knives, which, with precision and skill, they threaten to devastate the Starwatchers' lives.

This novel follows the trials of Boann, the bright and resilient daughter of Oghma, a revered stone carver among the Starwatchers. Boann, an herbalist and aspiring astronomer is youthful, strong, and wary of the Invaders and their brusque advance into Starwatcher territory. The Invaders steal livestock with abandon and with every passing day grow more reckless in their deeds, testing the limits of the "quiet ones" with their violence and greed. Boann's heart yearns for Cian, a former apprentice to her father and she struggles to understand why he has left his people to live amongst the Invaders. When animosity between the two peoples reaches its peak, Boann finds herself agreeing to an unwanted marriage to create peace. From this, a violent and impassioned beginning unfurls and Ireland is born.

Dunn's creation of Boann is vivid and powerful and is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of this book. She is a full-fledged character whose nuances create a relatable and realistic rendition of a young woman in the Bronze Age. Boann has dreams, fears, and aspirations. Her feelings about life and love humanize her—she is not simply a flat figure in ancient history mimicking the movements attributed to women of the Bronze Age in history books. Boann serves as a gateway into a period of history often relegated to the dusty corners of our brains simply because it seems too ancient, too long ago. Because she is so real, the reader cares about her struggles and by extension finds the epic and even mythical aspects of Ireland's history more accessible.

The allure of historical fiction lies in its ability to bring periods of history thrillingly to life. Often in this genre, vast amounts of historical detail distance the reader or create a clunky text where fictional characters compete with passages that read like pages from a history book. While there are moments where certain facts—such as the method for creating copper and bronze—seem more didactic than necessary, overall, *Bending the Boyne* succeeds in creating a seamless text where historical research and imagined worlds interweave effortlessly. This is a superb novel that will be of particular interest to readers intrigued by archeology and mythmaking.

Bending the Boyne was awarded first place for historical fiction in the 2011 Next Generation Indie Books Awards.

SHOILEE KHAN (May 19, 2011)

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