

Only the Stones Survive

Morgan Llywelyn

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
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From Reader Review Only the Stones Survive for online ebook

Meaghan says

There were elements of this book that I really loved, for instance, I love that this is a book based around mythology and folklore – especially Irish mythology and folklore, of which little is known or spoken about. However, as I know so little about the mythology, after reading I still wasn't completely satisfied that I understood the provenance of the Tuatha de Dannan. 'Before the Before' was referenced, and other historical events in Dannan history were alluded to, but improperly explained. I felt as though I didn't understand where these creatures had come from and that lessened my enjoyment of the book. To put it another way, it felt like reading half a conversation.

For me though, there were some redeeming factors. One of my favourite parts of the book was the description of the near-death experience, in which a man longs to join his wife in death but also must live. The description here was beautiful. However, for an epic high fantasy I'd hoped I would get stuck into the world-building more than I did. Whilst Ierne felt mystical in some ways, I feel like it should have felt like another character and been concentrated on a lot more. Like the Lord of the Rings, there are lots of characters in *Only The Stones Survive*, but unlike Lord of the Rings, I felt like this book could have done without some of them, who I felt were too similar and didn't really stand apart (especially in the Gaelic tribe).

In short, I wouldn't buy this book or recommend it to a friend because I didn't learn much from it. I have read mythological novels before, such as *The Gospel of Loki*, which in my opinion was far superior. I think this book is only for people who have already heard stories and have some knowledge about the Tuatha de Dannan.

*This book was sent to me for review via NetGalley.

**Thanks to Macmillan-Tor/Forge for the opportunity to read this book.

Pamela Morris says

I got this book on Edelweiss as an advanced e-galley. I love Celtic fantasy, and overall I did enjoy this book. I definitely felt it could have been fleshed out more. It seemed almost an abridged version of what it could have been.

Rob says

...I enjoyed reading *Only the Stones Survive* at some level. Llywelyn delivers a clear story of a bit of pseudo-history that is the foundation of a lot of modern fantasy. She also manages to firmly anchor it in the real world, with the many references to existing locations. That being said, the author's firm grasp of the source material doesn't really make up for the lack of characterization. With the shape of the story largely known and the outcome inevitable, the novel would have been a lot better if Llywelyn had managed to evolve her characters beyond the archetype. As it is, the novel is interesting for fans of the author and people with an interest in Celtic mythology. It is not the book Llywelyn will be remembered for though.

Jason ON says

Many, many, *MANY* moons ago I read a bunch of Morgan Llewellyn's books: **Bard**, **Lion of Ireland**, **Pride of Lions**, **Druids** and more. It's been years since I read a Llewellyn book and on a whim I grabbed this one a couple of weeks ago.

If you've read **Bard** then you already know the story here: the Milesians leave the Iberian Peninsula, come to Ireland and slaughter the existing people. This book, **Only the Stones Survive** is the other side of that story, from the point of view (for the most part) of the Tuatha de Danaan instead of the invaders.

What I liked about the book:

All the proto-Celtic philosophy and how Morgan Llewellyn weaves Irish lore with reality. Of course, she's a master at doing exactly this. From Joss's POV we get to see a view of the world that's not as common as the Greco-Roman/Judeo-Christian ideals that we've all been taught since an early age. And I really appreciate how she wove the fate of the remnants of the Tuatha de Danaan into Irish history.

What I didn't care for:

POV switches. It really annoys me when authors change POV characters in the middle of a chapter, but this book sometimes changes them in the middle of a paragraph. Very annoying.

All in all it's a great story even if a little convoluted. If you read **Bard** then you'll want to pick this up as a companion piece, but let's face it, it's not Morgan Llewellyn's best novel.

Leah says

[3.5 stars]

The beginning was a bit slow, but I still enjoyed this story. From the beginning I expected the tragedy that the Danann would suffer, but as the story progressed it became clear that disaster and misery were also in store for the invading Gaels. The story had a ring of legend to it with the flawed heroes (the warriors) inevitably turning on each other when they should have enjoyed their peace, and the decimated Danann finding a new home and beginning anew. I would like to explore some of the history behind this fantasy story, the place names and characters, the Hill of Tara. Irish history is haunting and beautiful in it's mythical ancient-ness.

Rebecca says

After doing some background research on the history of Only the Stones Survive, I was super excited to be offered a chance to review it by my contact at Tor Books which I accepted. The book is based on Irish mythology, specifically the people called the Tuatha de Danann which eventually evolved into the faeries we are more familiar with. I'm a big fan of world mythology, particularly Western European folklore, so this

book really caught my eye. Besides, anything that is vaguely inspired by the Fae is probably on my reading list.

Only the Stones Survive is the carefully told story of the fall of the Tuatha de Danann through the eyes of one of the few surviving members of their race. Joss, later called Elgolai na Starbird was a child when the war with the Gaels began and was a man when it ended. He tells of the slaughter of their Kings and Queens and warriors and how the children and the old hid in caverns, ever on the lookout for their enemy. I was surprised by how moving I found the story to be and was pleased with the outcome. I'm not sure what exactly I expected when I picked it up, but at times the emotions of the characters felt somewhat distant as if the reader is a bird observing events from a great height. At other times the emotions were raw, particularly in the moments of grief and loss. The overall tone of the book was somewhat despairing, but finished with a hopeful, almost triumphant feeling. I was surprised that I enjoyed the book so much!

Morgan Llywelyn is an extremely talented writer and this book is one of many on the history of the Celts and Ireland. In the future I can see myself exploring her works further, both fiction and nonfiction. I would definitely recommend Only the Stones Survive to fans of historical fiction, folklore, mythology, or those who enjoy a broad spectrum of fantasy novels. This was really a beautifully done tale of love, loss and the growth of a leader, reluctant though he may have been.

Matt Mitrovich says

Originally posted here: <http://amazingstoriesmag.com/2016/02/...>

There is a sub-genre of speculative fiction that revolves around telling the true origins of the myths and legends of different cultures. Common stories include the gods being humans with extraordinary abilities/technology or just aliens that wowed us humans with their sufficiently advanced technology. There are good and bad ways to tell these stories and a recent example that I read is Only the Stones Survive by Morgan Llywelyn.

Only the Stones Survive focuses on the myths and legends of pagan Ireland. In the distant past, Ireland is inhabited by the Túatha Dé Danann or the "Children of Light". They have been on the island for so long that they don't even remember when they arrived or where they originally came from. They look like small humans (except for their pointed ears) and they do their best to live in harmony with their surroundings. In return, their home grants them supernatural abilities.

Our main point of view for this culture is the young Joss who comes of age when a tribe of Gaels has arrived seeking a new home after their lands in Iberia can no longer support them. They come with iron weapons and take whatever they want from the land instead of seeking a balance like the Children of Light. Joss' people try to fight them, but their bronze weapons and magic are no match for the Gaels. As Joss' people are exterminated, he has to learn to find a way to save his people from the onslaught of the newcomers.

As mentioned earlier, Only the Stones Survive gives the true origins of the Celtic fairy tales of Ireland. Even the fear of iron, which was even worked into the The Long Earth series, was explained. If you have an interest in Irish mythology, you will probably enjoy the book, but I frankly found it boring. I mean it wasn't badly written (except for one scene I will mention later) and there wasn't particularly anything offensive

about it, I just didn't like it. I felt like the author skipped over a lot of interesting bits, like the battles or the politicking of the Children of Light. There were references to a weapon called "Earthkillers" that the Children were afraid to use and it almost seemed like they were building up to their eventual use (or their refusal to use them) but they were forgotten about by the end of the book.

Additionally there was one scene that annoyed me. Two characters talked about what just happened to them and what they felt about it...only to have several chapters after that cover the events of the same conversation in detail. What was the point of giving away so much of the book so early? It was like spoiling your own work to audience. Don't get me wrong, foreshadowing can be used well in a story, but this was clumsily done in a book that is otherwise well-written.

I wish I could say more, but this book just didn't create any strong emotions for me. I wanted to like *Only the Stones Survive* and while on an objective level I can see why people would like this (which is a change of pace from other books I can't recommend yet seem to be the lone voice of criticism, like *Rewinder*). If you have an interest in Irish mythology, you will probably enjoy this book. If not, then there are plenty of other books out there you should be reading.

Ely says

I liked the premise of this book, but I just don't like the writing style. I feel like we're being told everything rather than actually seeing anything.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

My rating is 3.5 stars.

This was my first foray into Morgan Llywelyn's Celtic historical fantasy novels. Sure, I've seen them on the bookshelves here and there, heard of the awards the author has garnered, but I'd never taken the time to open one up and experience the vivid worlds which she crafts so effortlessly. Now, I find myself regretting that decision.

In *Only the Stones Survive*, a reader is carefully deposited upon the island of Eire. Here the ancient tribe of the Tuatha Dé Danann (Who might be extraterrestrial or supernatural in origins!) shepherd over the peaceful land, living in harmony with nature and preferring to be left alone by all those mariners (traders and settlers) alike who would disturb their harmonic existence. To this end, they have set aside their ancient weapons of destruction, only using their magic in limited ways to shield the emerald isle from would-be invaders.

Into this endless rhythm of the seasons and eternal peace grows Joss. This young Danann is our narrator, introducing the carefree existence of his youth, the peaceful nature of his people, and their shadowy origins. And it is through Joss' eyes and through his words that Morgan Llywelyn carefully and beautifully portrays the end of his civilization.

When Joss is still considered a child among his people, seafarers from Iberia first appear. These poor,

desperate Gaulic tribes have gambled their lives and the future of their people on building boats (Most are not worthy of the title ship.) and setting off in search of the fabled island of Eire, where they intend to settle and build a new life for themselves. And while they are war-like and savage in their ways — at least as compared to the softhearted Dananns —, their motives are rational enough and familiar enough that it is difficult to hate them completely, even the worst of them.

As the story quickly grows from this beginning, the narrative highlights the struggle of people against people. Each race endowed with their good and bad qualities; each desperately attempting to survive and thrive in their chosen way; and each the antithesis of the other until there appears to be no hope of peaceful co-existence.

For me, the most memorable element of this book was the beautiful writing. It isn't complex or filled with wonderfully crafted sentences as much as it is lyrical in nature. As I read, Llywelyn's words reminded me of a poem recited or a melody sung. The whole book transcending the specific story being told and instead becoming a living, breathing epic.

The other notable feature was the many philosophical features of the Danann's conversations.

"Time is an illusion with a purpose."

"Live your life in the expectation of sudden joy, Joss."

The Danann's preferred *"the steady glow of serenity to the destructive tarnish of commerce, whereby everything was bought and sold and nothing was ever enough."*

These were merely a few of favorites, which I underlined and bookmarked. Not everyone might enjoy these types of conversations between characters, but I found them very refreshing, uniquely compelling, and immensely insightful as I had to watch the old give way to the new.

The only criticism I could level against the novel would be that the characters are not as important to the tale as the historical events taking place. Or, to put it another way, the story is about the clash of two cultures, not Joss or any other person's role in it all. Sure, many people are tightly woven into the tale, catalysts for one important event or another, but they are caught up in the events, not controlling them, which caused me to view them as swimmers attempting to ride the crest of a wave even as they sense it is heading to its inevitable crash onto the shore.

All in all, I found *Only the Stones Survive* a wonderful introduction to Morgan Llwyn's Celtic tales. The beautiful, lyrical writing drew me in, and the clash of cultures kept me turning pages, as I wished against all hope and logic for Joss' world to remain unchanged. But, then again, every ending is merely a new beginning, and so it is in this one as well, as a fresh, beautiful world arises from the ashes of the old.

I received this novel from Forge Books in return for a honest and unbiased review. The opinion you have read is mine and was not influenced by anyone else.

Brittany says

Check out my blog to see Reviews of Book and Movies, and check out some Recipes!

Genuinely stuck at a 3.5. the intro, the world building, the descriptions are immaculate. the story is disjointed and slow and falls flat for me. the ending left me feeling disappointed, like I kept reading for this. this one was a much slower finish as it was hard to get into the flow of reading it. I get that it was supposed to be philosophical, but it brought up all kinds of ideas and then just dropped them without development.

Great thought, but delivery needs more work

Susan says

It's interesting reading historical fiction/fantasy when studying the same material in a college class - I recognize the research that went into the writing. And the book is very well-written as well as being based on current knowledge, but it still left me wanting something more ... characterization, maybe? That's not quite right either, because there were strongly defined characters. They just seemed very modern in their outlook, when everything else about their place and time in history was so authentic. But all in all, a very good weaving of myth and history.

Andy says

I had a hard time rating this book. As a stand alone book I think it merits 2 or 2.5 stars at most. If read in conjunction with Bard, Llywelyn's prior book that covers the same story from the perspective of the Gaels, then I think it merits closer to 4 stars. Ultimately I rated it as a 3 as a compromise. Unfortunately, it does not carry the weight of the story. This is really little more than an involved addendum to Bard and, when the scenes which are shared with that previous book are removed, it is mainly a retelling of the invasion story from the perspective of the Tuatha. While this provides interesting material, it really doesn't stand as a story. I would urge readers to read Bard prior to reading this, and to certainly refrain from this book if they have not yet read anything by Morgan Llywelyn.

Althea Ann says

Fans of Morgan Llywelyn will be familiar with the setting and themes presented here - her fantasy/New Age take on Celtic history. I've read a good number of her books, although not in a few years, and enjoyed them greatly. However, 'Only the Stones Survive' feels more like backstory for a novel than the novel itself. It's the alternate history, not the story set in that history.

Here we learn how the Tuatha Dé Danann, a tribe with ancient and possibly extraterrestrial or supernatural origins, have settled on the island of Eire. They've been here for so long that they themselves no longer remember all their history. They have renounced their fearful weapons in favor of a peaceful, agricultural existence. Even their formidable magic is rarely used.

None of this works to their advantage when they are invaded by a rough group of seafarers from Iberia. The softheartedness of the Tuatha Dé Danann allows the invaders to make landfall - and live. In return, many of the peaceful people are soon slaughtered.

The book has a main character, a young elvish (oops, I mean Tuatha Dé Danann) man, through whose eyes

we see the sweeping events that affect his people. But none of the individual characters really came alive for me. The focus here is Llywelyn's fantastic/wishful-thinking history of the origin of the Celtic people.

If you're a Llywelyn completist, you may very well enjoy this. If you're new to the author, I'd recommend starting with one of her classics instead, such as the epic 'Lion of Ireland.'

Many thanks to Tor and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinion is solely my own.

J.S. Dunn says

First, kudos to Llywelyn for a long career of recycling the *Lebor Gabala* and other medieval translations of Gaelic myth as transcribed by monks. The monks unfortunately didn't have a contract with Tor/Forge to pump out the tales as fantasy. She has done a service in keeping people interested in western Europe's oldest mythology, even if it is reduced to pabulum. Anything for a buck, in Big Phat Publisher land.

That being said, this is a 2.5 stars effort but am showing it as a 3 for good measure. This title is not up to her personal best and as others note, it reworks her own title, *Bard*. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery even when it's your own work, apparently. Overall, this story seems to have been composed in the mornings before lunch and a substantial naptime. I'm getting to that age also so good on her for the nap. Read it at your peril. If a few Arthurian references were added, it could be called *The Nasal Mists of Avalon*. It's fantasy of a disappointing, simplistic sort.

Only The Stones Survive mixes the neolithic megaliths (Bru na Boinne) with copper/bronze age events and throws in the iron age. Just to be on the safe side? ---It also adds anachronisms to the ones beloved of those transcribing monks, like chariots and gems; neither of which would be an oirish thing a'tall. Difficult to drive a chariot* over rocky trails. *Note, Some Pretanni tribes used chariots ---but not until the Roman era in Britain/Prydain. Of course there's no anchor date here and a mishmash of cues so hey, where are the Romans? Not far behind. Caught in the nasal mist. An example of an added anachronism, and that also doesn't suit this region, is to have characters writing, and on wax tablets (see p 23 of hardbound). And there is the overly florid, and sometimes insipid prose, and misuse of buzzwords as if those were symbiotic. This reduces Europe's oldest mythology to fantasy that relies on every last fuzzy-green feelgood trope when not bemoaning poor old Eriu and its tragic history.

There IS a new paradigm for how Gaelic language and culture arose, but you won't find it here. Despite her personally knowing Sir Barry Cunliffe, emeritus, of Oxford and now retired; Llywelyn does not incorporate the new paradigm. Countless mention is made of 'Celts' coming from the 'northern forests' , ie, from the Continent TO the Isles: the old model. The new paradigm fits better with the evidence in archaeology, and linguistics, and genetics: there was no invasion of a distinct 'race' of Celts. Gaelic most probably arose on the Atlantic coasts as a trader tongue and established itself firmly in the Isles before it washed inland along trade rivers on the Continent. There are many excellent nonfiction volumes on this topic. None of them are in the author's Bibliography at the back of this title. Contact me here on GR if you'd like to be updated and edified. Eg, *Facing The Ocean*, *Celtic From The West*, and etc.

Readers who want an accurate depiction of "prehistoric" Eriu should read *accurate* historical fiction based on recent archaeology (rather than volumes from the 1970s) about the great mounds of the Boyne and what happened when marauders came into Ireland. Llywelyn received a HF title that uses the new paradigm for ancient Ireland, a few years ago at an Irish authors' event, so she had ample chance to flatter it [*Bending The*

Boyne] in this work---she did little enough of that, preferring to mimic her own fantasy bias. The work could also have been titled, *Only The Cliches Survive*.

Gino Kutcher says

The ending was a bit abrupt and the path from beginning to end would not be easy to track even in full daylight but in many ways this suits the story itself. This did not match my tastes as well as *Red Branch* or *The Lion of Ireland*, but it is worth the read.
