



Born of the Sun

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In this beautifully executed continuation of *The Road to Avalon*, her earlier depiction of sixth-century Britain, Wolf tells the story of Niniane, a Celtic princess, and Ceawlin, bastard son of the King of the West Saxons. Eighty years after the death of Arthur, the Celts are disorganized, drifting away from the cities built by the Romans. The vigorous Saxons, on the other hand, have settled down and become civilized, creating in many ways a more viable culture.

Born of the Sun Details

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Author : Joan Wolf

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From Reader Review Born of the Sun for online ebook

Gordon Ehler says

Satisfying tale. A love story, a story of personalities and conquests.

Christy says

I liked this one almost as much as the first in the series. They are separate stories, only related by place and general time period. It was interesting to see the "bad guys"/pagans actually be the good guys. The book did drag on a bit at the end but then was wrapped up nicely. Lots of battles over who would control what land, but nothing graphic. If I lived in the dark ages, I think I'd want to be a boring farmer's wife so I wasn't always worried about who wanted to come after me and my family next. This story is a good glimpse into what life may have been like in 6th century England.

Misfit says

Second in an excellent Trilogy. This book is absolutely outstanding. I could not put it down and wanted to read the whole thing over again as soon as I finished. This book is filled with history, love, treachery, intrigue, a truly evil villainess, battles and more. Ceawlin and Niniane are a wonderful couple -- I enjoyed the pairing of the pagan Saxon who would be high king and the Christian British Princess Niniane. Learning to make a marriage with such two opposing lifestyles and customs, the hatred and mistrust between the Britains and Saxons make for compelling reading.

This is a must read for any lover of historical fiction, and sheds light on a little known period of England in the dark ages.

Estara says

This was as good as I remembered (and had hardly any spelling mistakes), after not having read the paperback for at least ten years, I think. Certainly the last time I read them when I was a student, so it must be ten years.

This isn't really a romance, this is a historical saga centred on one eventual pair of lovers, and, as Joan Wolf points out in the afterword, set at a period of time in English history that we basically have no written accounts for. She quotes the data she found in one of the two sources she used - apart from Beowulf for a lot of the feasting customs - and invented from whole cloth.

I think it works extremely well - Niniane's situation as a captive British Celt princess with the prospect of marrying the son of the reigning West-Saxon king, who mostly wants to keep her head down and survive in captivity doesn't make for utter emotional romance. She can't afford reacting head over heels, and she has horrible examples of a woman who reacts in that way in King Cynric's wife Guthfrid.

Her son and heir comes across as a total megalomaniac egotist, but he is the younger of the King's sons - much before Cynric married for political reasons, he joined the kind and beautiful Fara in friedlehe - sort of a legal concubine situation - and she's been running the women's side of the compound at Winchester ever since. Her son Ceawlin is a year older than his brother, but had to grow up wary because according to heritage and custom he should support his younger brother and love him - even though he is actively being threatened by him.

When we meet Niniane she is 14 and Ceawlin 16 and both don't have much to do with each other. After living for two years in the women's compound and being treated quite well Niniane is poised on the verge of marriage to Edric and dreading it, when he manoeuvres Ceawlin into a duel and tries to poison him with his manipulated sword - the plan backfires, because of a warning shout by Niniane - and now Cynric has to live with the fact that his favourite son killed his brother and his legal wife is actively calling for killing Ceawlin.

Eventually Ceawlin has to be sent away for his own safety to build some support for himself and lay low for a while, and this happens to be at Bryn Atha, the Roman villa which belongs to Niniane's Atrebate family. He and Niniane are hastily married - she is still thankful she didn't have to marry his brother and he thinks she's nice enough and can see the political advantage, so both agree.

By now they are 16 and 18, and this is where their personal life and Ceawlin's drive to become West-Saxon king and enlarge his holdings start taking shape. Niniane uses her brains and Ceawlin appreciates those as much as her beauty, he has many children by her (his father had problems getting any children) and so they grow together more and more, even as they disagree on certain ways of dealing with the problems coming up.

I haven't even mentioned the roles of Ceawlin's best friend Sigurd, of Gereint, an Atrebate prince who becomes the first British eorl, of Niniane's children and of the relentless hate her brother Coinmail has for Ceawlin - we follow the story until they are both in their mid 30s and Ceawlin becomes the most powerful king of the Saxons at the time.

They have to deal with the death of friends and family, but they grow ever closer together - and the fact that Niniane in her day and age accepts as normal certain behaviour from her husband that a modern woman would not stand for works for me, because we can still see her will and the way Ceawlin accommodates it and his care - as much as he can allow himself to care for her without losing face.

Janet-Quintin Brown says

My favourite book

Joanne says

4.5 stars -- Wonderful mix of historical details and love, war, treachery, and relationships during the times of the Saxons (6th century). Great love story of the struggles and joys of a couple from opposing backgrounds - Niniane, the Christian Celtic princess, and Ceawlin, the pagan Saxon prince. Loving these gems from the past.

M A says

This novel made a tremendous impression on me. I'm anxiously awaiting it in ebook. This is one of the few paperbacks I ever owned I ended up "reading to pieces."

This is an excellent, epic novel describing the struggles between Britons and Saxons in the years following Arthurian rule. Wolf fleshes out an intriguing world, sparkling characterization, and a touching love story between Ninian, a British princess taken captive and betrothed to the Saxon heir apparent and Ceawlin, the prince's half-brother. Unforseen trechery and unexpected death place Ceawlin in the position of heir and outlaw. Marriage to Ninian secures his support among many British people, but kingship over both people means a lifetime's effort. Because of its epic, family saga style, readers witness the growth of Ninian and Ceawlin's marriage from a political match and cautious friendship, to passionate love, to a true partnership. It's a long, engrossing read well worth the time investment.

Shwetha says

amazing!!! this story stayed in my mind for days after reading it. a good story is one that makes an impact and this one did... like all Joan Wolf stories.
what can i say? loved the hero, loved the heroine, loved the story. wish i could get my hands on another book like this one

Kelly says

Hm -- more bodice-ripper than straight historical fiction, but I have a soft spot for Joan Wolf. Let's see -- post Arthurian time, the Saxons are taking over, oh my!

JR Foster says

If you enjoy The Last Kingdom on Netflix which is based on Bernard Cornwell books, you'll enjoy this read, although it does predate that story of King Alfred reign. But I was very familiar with the name of the Cities that have since changed.

This was a Cleanly written HF novel about the Dark Ages where Anglo Saxon Britain reign came to be. The book does its best to fill in the culture and probable story of the Saxons century reign over Britain! I enjoyed the historical piece immensely, and the characters equally, as the author gave you a true glimpse into the life! The main characters Saxon King and His Christian Wife was a bonus, but this story was more about the history of the Saxons reign and trying to gain power throughout Britain.

Now, I really need to read Cornwells books, because I'm obsessed with the show!

Lorraine says

Great book ! This, the 2nd book of the trilogy of Dark Ages of Britian, is a dynamic book. I read The Road to Avalon #1 of this trilogy. The Road to Avalon is about Arthur and how he became High King and eventually managed to produce an era of peace between the British and the Saxons. I am pretty well-versed in the Arthur stories, but after King Arthur, what takes place is a blank. Not any more is the time after Arthur a blank. Born of the Sun, the 2nd book of this trilogy, has filled in the blanks. The # 2 book's setting is the Kingdom of Wessex about 50 years after the reign of Arthur. Prince Ceawlin's, bastard Prince of Wessex, story is truly a fascinating one. Although this is historical fiction done at its very best, it is still fiction, but there is a great deal of history present here with Prince Ceawlin and others who are present are found in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, one of the contemporary written records of the time period of this book. The author is to be commended for the story she has woven around Prince Ceawlin, the Kingdom of Wessex, Niniane, Princess of the Celts who had been captured by King Cynric, Prince Ceawlin's father, and the Saxons and the Celts. I had a very difficult time putting the book down once I was caught by all that was taking place in the Kingdom of Wessex. Prince Ceawlin marries Princess Niniane after the death of his father. They must get away from Wessex as King Cynric's vengeful wife wishes Ceawlin dead and most probably, Princess Niniane too. Thus the newly married prince and princess leave Wessex and go the priness's home, Bryn Atha. There Prince Ceawlin begins to woo the British as he wishes them to support him to become the next King of Wessex. Also, the prince starts to fall in love with his new wife which definitely surprises him. Prince Ceawlin is successful in all he attempts to do - husband, the next King of Wessex, leader of a war band, father, and eventually, High King. I was truly enthralled with this book and was sorry to read the end. I really wanted Born of the Sun to keep going. I congratulate the author on a book so well written and I highly recommend Born of the Sun.

Ray says

I love the story of the Saxons coming together to settle England peacefully. This book makes me wish I had a time machine to go back and see what it was really like then.

Katrina says

I have to say that the high rating this book got is not only deceiving, it is also undeserved.

To be fair, it took the longest time for me to get hold of a copy (it was maybe a year) so the anticipation and expectation were rather immense. I'd also judged 'Born of the Sun' based on my experience of 'The Road to Avalon', which had been great; I'd been so eager to start with the former after finding a diamond in the latter. I'd also been more invested in 'Avalon' because I am a fan of Arthurian legends and an avid Morgana/Arthur shipper, so the couple in this novel could not incite in me the same emotions.

Niniane is an incredibly bland heroine, and Ceawlin is perfectly unappealing. I was not convinced of their chemistry nor their compatibility. Niniane is likable and I appreciate that one of her best traits is strength, but I do not like how she is subservient and yielding (no amount of "she's stubborn in her own way" or "she's like a lioness" will tell me otherwise). She is treated like crap for a lot of the time and although I understand

that this was set in 500 AD and published in 1989, I do not appreciate how she waves away her fury and tolerates disrespect. If I could be told that a comely girl of 15 could be abducted by a Saxon barbarian for years and still remain a virgin, she certainly could have had better stature in the same setting. Her guardedness and civility oftentimes become Wolf's excuse not to explore her character. My favorite scene of hers is when she wept in the clearing for Cerdic because it was the only time she felt something at all, other than pertaining to Ceawlin. Could the strong woman Wolf tried so hard to illustrate really be defined by a man?

Niniane, though flat and lifeless, is bearable, but I found Ceawlin very annoying. In the beginning he was forgivable; he was ambitious, harsh, and idealistic, traits that come with being an untested youth. But as the story progressed, he became predictable and insufferable. He is too perfect a man, too perfect a warrior, too perfect a king. He is also a wonderful lover, husband, and father, in case you don't know. He loses any connection with the reader save for those who are attracted to him. What I dislike the most is how hard Wolf tries to push that he's perfect. For every flaw he has there is a compensation; for instance, in the scene where he hit Niniane, because he is a mighty king this is understandable behavior. He is ruthless and power-hungry yet because he is merciful it's excusable. He is also rude and a liar, but because of his blue-green tinted charm all is forgotten. Even the war and action bits were dreadful to read precisely because it all went far too smoothly (200 farmers versus 100 warriors and only 20 farmers are dead and 170 from the warriors? Really?). And in the end, it is revealed that the biggest war to threaten his reign was actually according to his plans. Because of COURSE it was. I realize that Ceawlin is based on the "real" Saxon king and that his empire had indeed been great, but I honestly hoped that the book would not have a happy ending if only to dent his bloody perfection.

I hate the little details Wolf puts in about looks; how white Ceawlin's teeth are (during the pre-oral hygiene era, take note), his halo of blonde hair, his astonishing and oh-so-unique blue-green eyes that change to turquoise when he's mad, Niniane's fan of coppery-brown hair (that is actually red, how did that happen?), her head that she holds like a delicate flower, her reed-slim figure (that survived SIX childbirths mind you), her slate-gray eyes that are more blue than gray when she's happy (I didn't know eyes were mood rings). I really dislike how hyper-specific Wolf gets about facial expressions to convey emotion when she could be writing instead about what the characters actually feel instead of dismissing them with stony expressions and collected responses. One of the more hilarious lines in the book is "Her eyebrows rose into two fine question marks." I'd like to see someone actually do that.

The only characters I liked were Sigurd (I am a sucker for the underdog and I was honestly rooting for him) and Crida (who has been far more interesting to me in his handful of chapters than his father in the entire book). I would have preferred it if Wolf had allotted more chapters to them than to Ceawlin and Niniane's nonsense.

Needless to say, 'Born of the Sun' is a disappointing sequel to 'The Road to Avalon'.

P. says

An excellent read, very well written and plotted. The characters are good, but subsumed by the plot to a certain extent and therefore not as compelling as they, no doubt, are supposed to be. A long read, but generally rewarding.

Terry (Ter05 TwiMoms/ MundieMoms) says

I started this book back in 2012 and then don't know what happened that I didn't finish it. I loved it. It is a historical romance and the second book in a trilogy, but the books are in this case 80 years after Arthur's death and the next book is several hundreds years later. This is the true dark ages of Britain which is a time where there are almost no written records (most of the people were illiterate and the monks who later recorded some history were not in Britain yet). The only records are legend that was recorded later, sometimes centuries later. We don't really know if Arthur actually existed, and from the author's notes, she used Ceawlin of Wessex as the hero of this book of forgotten history based only on a few references to him including that his reign in Wessex began in the year 560. Nothing is known of him other than battles he fought and who he was with and who he defeated.

So this book is fiction based on what little came down verbally from the dark ages. Can we imagine in these days of a time when nothing was recorded in writing? The author has written a beautiful story of Ceawlin and Niniane and their lives in a time of betrayal and battles and hardship. But it is also a time of people fighting for survival and freedom against the evils of the time. It's a wonderful love story - and I say love story rather than romance because to me there is a difference. It's about sacrifice and dedication to a cause and to a people who depend on their leadership. I loved it.
