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## Magdalene Rising: The Beginning (formerly titled: Daughter of the Shining Isles)

Contributed by Elizabeth Cunningham  
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It is 6, or perhaps 4, B.C., and in Israel a baby boy is born. At the same time on Tir na mBan, the magical Isle of Women near Scotland and Ireland, a red-headed girl is born. Her eight mothers are Celtic weather witches, her father the Celtic god of the sea, Manannan Mac Lir. The boy is Jesus of Nazareth (whose father is also a god), although when he appears at the Druid College on the Island of Mona, he is called Esus, after a minor Celtic god. The girl is Maeve, the Little Bright One. On the day of her first bleeding, Maeve sneaks away from her mothers to a sacred precinct in Tir na mBan, where she first meets the Cailleach and has her first experience with scrying. Who does she see in the sacred well? An Appended One. (Well, she's never seen a human male before.) She begins school with the Cailleach and learns geography, Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. A few years later, Maeve is taken to Mona, where she is enrolled in the Druid College. Among the other students is the Stranger, her Appended One, Esus, who has been told by an old woman to study among the Keltoi. To qualify, prospective students are required to tell their genealogies and stories. Because Esus is more fluent in Aramaic than Q- or P-Celtic, when he recites most of the Old Testament, Maeve is his translator. As everyone who has read Cunningham's previous novels—The Wild Mother, The Return of the Goddess, and How to Spin Gold—knows, this is an author who knows how to tell a story. In this case, to be sure, the story is not history or even revisionist history, but pure, glorious fantasy. And Maeve is, well, a smartass kid. She's a naïve, adventurous, stubborn, anachronistic narrator. Esus is likewise a smartass; a stubborn Jew whose wisdom continually confounds his Druid teachers. They fall in love, of course, for they are the yang and the yin of the love of the world, the two polarities that make up the whole. Their story moves forward, sideways, up and down, among the yew trees and the sacred places of the island, and as you follow them you simply cannot put the book down. Let us hope that Cunningham has already begun working on Part II of the Magdalen Trilogy. We need to find out how the Celtic Maeve—who at the end of the book is set adrift in a coracle—becomes Mary Magdalen. We need to find out how Esus returns home, and what happens (what really happens, not just what the fathers of the church tell us) when they meet again. This story is to be continued. Please! Soon! Editor's note: This review was written for the book's original publication by Station Hill (2000) and has been re-issued as the prequel to The Passion of Mary Magdalen, published by Monkfish, which is currently in print. ~review by Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D. Vol. 1, The Magdalen Trilogy By Elizabeth Cunningham Monkfish Publishing, 2007 \$24.95