

The Clan of the Cave Bear : a novel *by* Jean M. Auel



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Author: Jean M. Auel

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The story of Ayla begins when, as a five-year-old orphan, she is adopted by the Clan, a group of Neanderthals. Initially, she inspires surprise, then wariness and finally acceptance by the Clan. She is cared for by its medicine woman, Iza, and its wise holy man, Creb. But she makes an implacable enemy of the group's future leader, Broud. He will do all he can to destroy her - but Ayla is a survivor. Jean Auel's imaginative reconstruction of pre-historic life, rich in detail of language, culture, myth and ritual, has become a set text in schools and colleges around the world.



Reviews of the *The Clan of the Cave Bear : a novel* *by* Jean M. Auel

Rgia

I loved these stories so much, that I wanted to name my only daughter, "Ayla", after the central character. However my husband was not a fan, so we compromised on Maya. This is one of my all time favorite book series, and I am a prolific reader so that is saying something! I was an anthropology major in college, and I find the way that she wove human discoveries, inventions, and herbal medicine - into the story of complex hierarchy and cultural relationships present in societies (small and larger groups of people) fascinating. This book takes you on hunting trips and the

experience of learning new languages, falling in love and having your heart broken. Having a child, losing a child. Learn about the good in people and the bad. It teaches about respecting women and how different societies have different expectations on that front. Wonderful wonderful books <3
Flamehammer

I know I'm decades behind in picking up this title, but I'm so glad that I did. In the first of Jean Auel's "Earth's Children" series, we get a first-person perspective into what it would be like to live as a Neanderthal person more than 25,000 years ago, and I was fascinated at every turn. Auel has created such a believable and historically viable story, that the reader can't help but fall into the lives of these people, who call themselves the Clan of the Cave Bear.

What I think I loved most about this story was the gender dynamics of the Clan. We get a glimpse into a society radically different from those of modern times and yet one that can also be strikingly familiar at times. In the Clan, women are second-class citizens: they are submissive to the men, they depend on the men for leadership and guidance, and they are happy with their roles in life. In part, this dynamic is driven by the developmental limitations of the Neanderthal people -- individuals are incapable of free thought and everything they "know" how to do is genetically pre-programmed into their brains. Men are genetically the hunters and leaders with their stronger bodies and dominant minds. Women are genetically the gatherers, caregivers and mothers. These societal roles are immutable, with change being beyond the capacity of their brains to even comprehend.

The starkness of this dynamic is very well illustrated when Ayla, a Cro-Magnon girl, comes to live with the Clan. Because her brain is wired differently from that of the Neanderthals who rescue and take her in, she constantly finds herself at odds with the Clan's way of life. She questions. She challenges. She desires independence. She struggles with the gender restrictions that the Clan has placed on her to the point of causing her great hardship in the early years of her life.

This hardship, and Ayla's perseverance through it, is also one of the spectacular aspects of this book. Ayla loses her birth parents at a very young age to a natural disaster. She is alone in an unfriendly wilderness as a toddler -- without shelter from the elements or wild animals, without food, without guidance or care. When she is discovered by the Clan, she must learn a new language and fit into a mold in the Clan's society for which she is not physically or mentally suited. She is constantly seen as ugly for her physical features that are unlike those of the Clan and she is constantly being chided for her boldness and independent way of thinking, despite her desperate attempts to fit in.

SPOILER ALERT!!!

Ayla's story, much like the future of the Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons, is not one with a happy ending. In spite of all of her struggle and hardship, she finds herself alone again at the end of the book, hardened and wizened, having lost her adoptive parents to death and having lost her son as well as the camaraderie of a people and culture due to her inability to completely submit to the Clan's way of life.

This book was such a fascinating and heart-wrenching experience for me; I am anxious to continue reading the series and hope to see Ayla rise above her hardship and thrive.

Otrytrerl

I just ordered this book for a re-read. It is one of my all-time favorites, but it's been many decades since I read CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR so I cannot speak to literary style, but I know that the story of a young girl orphaned and adopted by a clan of Neanderthals grabbed my interest and never let go. I was fascinated with the concept of interaction during the evolution of humans.

As an aside, I would have preferred to avoid the male-dominated terms human and man in reference to our evolution, but female and woman feel too much like byproducts ("Thanks for the rib, Adam. No, no, I'm fine. I'm sure I can manage with just one...") and girl, while free of literal reference to

the male gender, has its own historical bias when used to designate non-masculine adults. Even person incorporates a male word. Might we someday switch to perdaughter? Sigh...

But I digress.

CLAN is a fictional guess at how various branches of our early hominins tree interacted. We know that they did interact, and in fact that there was intimate interaction, at least between Homo sapiens and Homo neanderthalensis. The proof lies in our modern DNA. For those who need a brief tutorial, as I did, Neanderthals lived in Europe for hundreds of thousands of years until Homo sapiens moved up from Africa, and eventually replaced the Neanderthals. (There are numerous theories about how/why this occurred.) Like many people whose DNA is not 100% African, I discovered that I have a small percentage of Neanderthal DNA. Some might find this disturbing, especially if they ever so proudly trace their roots back to when great-great-great-great-great grandpapa and great-great-great-great-great grandmama landed upon Plymouth Rock, and do not like to imagine a more diverse family tree. I hope, like I, that they can just as proudly embrace their inner wild woman, and even now and then send a thought heavenward in memory of one part of our human ancestry that is no longer earthbound.

Anyway, unless you hold fast to the theory that Adam and one-rib Eve appeared unevolved in the garden, and that their two sons Cain and Abel somehow managed to father the human race without the benefit of unrelated females, (Could this have been an ancient biblical shout out to two dad families?) I think you will find this tale of two clans conceptually interesting. (Warning: Avoid the movie version. Grunting and nudity do not do justice to the book.)

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