

The Mythological Cycle: "The Tuatha De Danaan"

The Tuatha De Danaan

LONG AGO the Tuatha De Danaan came to Ireland in a great fleet of ships to take the land from the Fir Bolgs who lived there. These newcomers were the People of the Goddess Danu and their men of learning possessed great powers and were revered as if they were gods. They were accomplished in the various arts of druidry, namely magic, prophecy and occult lore. They had learnt their druidic skills in Falias, Gorias, Findias and Murias, the four cities of the northern islands.

When they reached Ireland and landed on the western shore, they set fire to their boats so that there would be no turning back. The smoke from the burning boats darkened the sun and filled the land for three days, and the Fir Bolgs thought the Tuatha De Danaan had arrived in a magic mist.

The invaders brought with them the four great treasures of their tribe. From Falias they brought Lia Fail, the Stone of Destiny. They brought it to Tara and it screamed when a rightful king of Ireland sat on it. From Gorias they brought Lugh's spear. Anyone who held it was invincible in battle. From Findias they brought Nuada's irresistible sword. No one could escape it once it was unsheathed. From Murias they brought the Dagda's cauldron. No one ever left it hungry.

Nuada was the king of the Tuatha De Danaan and he led them against the Fir Bolgs. They fought a fierce battle on the Plain of Moytura, the first one the Tuatha De Danaan fought in a place of that name. Thousands of the Fir Bolgs were killed, a hundred thousand in all, and among them their king, Eochai Mac Erc. Many of the Tuatha De Danaan died too, and their king, Nuada, had his arm severed from his body in the fight.

In the end the Tuatha De Danaan overcame the Fir Bolgs and routed them until only a handful of them survived. These survivors

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boarded their ships and set sail to the far-scattered islands around Ireland.

When the Fir Bolgs had fled, the Tuatha De Danaan took over the country and went with their treasures to Tara to establish themselves as masters of the island. But another struggle lay ahead. Though they had defeated the Fir Bolgs, a more powerful enemy awaited them. These were the Fomorians, a demon-like race who lived in the islands to which the Fir Bolgs had fled.

Balor of the Evil Eye

Balor was the most powerful Fomorian king. Some of his followers were so ugly and rough they were frightful to look at, and some of them had only one hand and one foot. Balor built a shining tower on his island. It was made of glass, but shone like gold in the sun and from this tower Balor could watch out for ships and send his fierce pirates out to seize them if they came close. Not only did the Fomorians capture ships, but they sailed to Ireland and made raids there, seizing lands and slaves and levying taxes. Their druids had powerful magic spells, and it was through one of these spells that Balor got his power and his name.

One day when the young Balor was passing a house he heard chanting inside. He knew this place was out of bounds, for it was there the magicians gathered to work new spells, but curiosity overcame him. Seeing a window that was open high in the wall, he scrambled up and looked furtively through it, but he could see nothing for the room was filled with fumes and gases. Just as he peered through the window the chants grew louder and a strong plume of smoke rose in the air straight into Balor's face. He was blinded by the poisonous fumes and could not open his eye. He struggled to the ground, writhing with pain, and before he could escape one of the magicians came out of the house.

When the druid saw what had happened he said to Balor, "That spell we were making was a spell of death and the fumes from it have brought the power of death to your eye. If you look on anyone with that evil eye it means they will die!" And so Balor got his name.

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Among his own people his eye remained shut, but if he opened it against his enemies they dropped dead when he turned its deadly power on them. As he grew older his eyelid grew heavier and heavier until in the end he could not open it without help. An ivory ring was driven through the lid and through this ring ropes were threaded to make a pulley. It took ten men to raise the great heavy lid, but ten times that number were slain at a single glance. His evil eye made him of great importance to the Fomorians and he became the most powerful of them all. His ships raided Ireland again and again and Balor's pirates made slaves of the learned people of De Danaan.

But Balor had a secret fear. One of his druids had foretold that he would die at the hand of his own grandson. Balor had only one child, a daughter called Eithlinn, so he built another tower and shut the girl up in it with twelve women to guard her. He warned the women that not only should Eithlinn never see a man, but a man's name must never be mentioned in her presence. When this was done, Balor felt safe, for without a husband Eithlinn could not have a child and so he would not die.

He harried the Tuatha De Danaan more and more. He levied heavy taxes on them. They had to send him one-third of their grain, one-third of their milk, and, worst of all, one child in every three. So the Fomorians were feared and hated for their greed and cruelty and Balor was feared most of all.

Eithlinn grew up into a beautiful woman, a prisoner in the tower. Her companions were kind to her, entertained her and taught her skills, but Eithlinn felt lonely. As she looked out to sea from the high window of her tower, she would see long curraghs in the distance skimming over the waves and in these boats people unlike any she had seen before. In a dream, too, the same face would appear again and again and she felt a longing to meet this person. She asked the women who guarded her what they were called, these people that she had watched from a distance and seen in her dreams, but her companions remained silent. They remembered Balor's command that a man's name could not be mentioned in his daughter's presence.

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The Birth of Lugh

Though he had cattle enough, Balor particularly coveted one wonderful cow, the Glas Gaibhleann, which never ran dry and belonged to a man of the Tuatha De Danaan called Cian. Balor would disguise himself in different ways and follow Cian and his marvellous cow around, waiting for a chance to seize it and bring it back to his island.

One day Balor saw Cian and his brother go to the forge of another brother, Goibniu, to get some weapons made by him. Cian had his cow with him on a halter because so many people had tried to steal her that she could not go loose, but had to be guarded night and day. Cian went into the forge to speak to Goibniu, while the other brother stayed outside with the Glas Gaibhleann. Balor saw his chance. Turning himself into a red-headed boy, he came up to the man who stood by the cow and began to talk to him.

'Are you getting a sword made as well?' he asked.

'I am,' said the brother, 'in my turn. When Cian comes out of the forge he'll guard the cow and I'll go into Goibniu and get my weapon made.'

'That's what you think,' said the boy. 'But there'll be no steel left for your sword. Your brothers have tricked you. They are using all the steel to make heavier weapons for themselves and you'll have none!'

When the third brother heard this he was furious. He stuffed the cow's halter into the boy's hand and ran into the forge to confront his brothers. Instantly Balor cast off his disguise and, dragging the cow behind him by the tail, he hurried to the strand and into the sea and headed back to the safety of his own island.

When his brother came storming into the forge yelling abuse at him, Cian realized he had been tricked. He raced outside just in time to see Balor pulling the Glas Gaibhleann behind him through the water, and as he watched cow and man became a speck on the horizon. It was Cian's turn to be angry now and he ranted at his brother for falling for such a trick, but it was too late. The cow was gone.

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Cian went to a druid to ask for his help but the magician reminded him that no one could go near Balor without risking death, because of his evil eye. Cian was still determined to retrieve his cow, so he went to a woman druid called Birog, who had even greater powers. She disguised Cian as a woman and then she conjured up a wind so strong that Cian and she were carried off in a blast, high in the air, until they reached Balor's island.

The wind dropped and they landed safely at the foot of the tower where Eithlinn was imprisoned. Birog called out to the Eithlinn's guardians in the tower, 'Help us! Please help us! My companion is a queen of the Tuatha De Danaan. She is escaping from enemies who want to kill her. It's getting dark! Take pity on us and let us in!'

The women did not like to refuse another women in distress and they let Cian and Birog in.

As soon as they were inside, Birog cast another spell and all the women fell fast asleep. All the women, that is, except Eithlinn herself. Cian, who had thrown off his woman's robes, ran up the stairs and in a small room at the top of the tower found Eithlinn staring sadly out to sea. He thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. As he stared at her, Eithlinn turned round and there, in the room with her, was the figure she thought about all day long and dreamt about each night. Declaring their love for each other, they embraced with delight.

Because he and Eithlinn loved each other, it was Cian's wish to take his beloved from her prison and bring her home with him. He went to find Birog to persuade her to use her powers to help them to escape together. But Birog was afraid of Balor. She was terrified that the Fomorian king would discover them and kill them with his evil eye, so, in spite of Cian's protests, she swept him away from Eithlinn on another enchanted wind and took him back with her to Ireland.

Eithlinn was brokenhearted when Cian left her, but she was comforted when she discovered that she would give birth to his child. In due course the boy was born and she called him Lugh.

When Balor heard the news of his grandson's birth he made up his mind to kill the infant straight away so that the druid's prophecy

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could not come true. He gave orders that the baby be thrown into the sea. Despite the desperate pleading of Eithlinn, the child was snatched from her and carried to the shore. Wrapped in a blanket held in place by a pin, Lugh was cast into a current by Eithlinn's guardians. As the weeping women watched, the pin opened and the baby rolled into the sea, leaving the empty blanket spread over the waves. Balor was relieved to hear that Lugh had been drowned. Once more he felt safe. Now he had no grandson to bring about his end.

But Lugh had been saved. Birog, who had been riding the winds, saw what happened and lifted the baby out of the water and carried him with her through the air, away from the island and back to Ireland. Just as she had carried Cian to Eithlinn, so she carried Lugh safely back to his father. Cian was overjoyed that his son had been saved and fostered him out with a king's daughter who loved Lugh as if he were her own child.

In his foster mother's house Lugh learnt many skills. The craftsmen taught him to work in wood and metal, the champions and athletes performed amazing feats for him and invited him to join them in their training. From the poets and musicians he heard the stories of the heroes and learnt to play on the harp and timpan. The court physician taught him the use of herbs and elixirs to cure illness and the magicians revealed to him their secret powers. He got the name Lugh of the Long Arm and grew up as skilful as he was handsome. Moreover, though he did not know it, he had within him the power to slay his grandfather, Balor of the Evil Eye.

The Reign of Bres

While Lugh was growing up in the house of his foster mother and learning all the arts and crafts that were practised there, another half-Fomorian was king of the Tuatha De Danaan and sat on the throne at Tara. He too was handsome, so handsome that he was called Bres the Beautiful. But he was greedy and cowardly as well.

Before Bres had been made ruler, Nuada had been the king of the De Danaan tribe. Nuada it was who had gained Ireland for his

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people by leading them in battle against the Fir Bolgs. His powerful army had driven the Fir Bolgs out of Ireland, then taken over the island and established the king's stronghold at Tara. In that battle Nuada lost an arm. It was severed from his body by the sword of Sreng and though he won the battle this accident cost Nuada his kingship. The Tuatha De Danaan had a law that only a man in perfect shape could rule them, and without his arm Nuada could no longer be king.

The people then chose Bres the Beautiful to be king of his place. Bres's father was a Fomorian and because of this the Tuatha De Danaan hoped that their new leader would form an alliance with Balor and put an end at last to the fierce Fomorian raids up the rivers and seas of Ireland. As it turned out the reign of Bres was disastrous for the Tuatha De Danaan. The Fomorians *did* form an alliance but their treaty was with Bres alone. Playing on his weakness and greed, they loaded heavier and heavier taxes on the Tuatha De Danaan and Bres added to his subjects' burden by imposing taxes of his own. He stripped the leaders of their wealth and power and made them do menial tasks. Ogma was set to chop wood and the Dagda to build fortifications around the king's stronghold.

As Bres grew greedier and more miserly the court at Tara became a cold and cheerless place. The poets and musicians were silent and the champions and heroes reduced to slavery. The chiefs who came to visit the king were given neither food nor drink and no entertainment was provided for them.

One day the poet Cairbre arrived at Bres's fort expecting the hospitality that poets were accustomed to receiving from their patrons. Instead he was shown into a narrow, mean, dark little house without a bed or a stick of furniture and no fire in the hearth. He was given three small dry cakes on a little plate and that was all. Cairbre was furious at Bres for this insulting treatment and the next morning as he crossed the enclosure on his way out of Tara, he composed a satirical poem against the king. This was the first satire ever made in Ireland, and through it the poet cursed Bres. 'Bres's prosperity is no more!' he cried, and his words came true. From that moment on, Bres's fortunes failed, his wealth dwindled and

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his people became poorer and more oppressed.

But Cairbre's satire had another effect as well; it gave the Tuatha De Danaan leaders the courage to rebel against their king. They made up their minds to depose Bres but their problem was they had no one suitable to put in his place. They would have loved to restore Nuada to the throne but while he had only one arm they could not.

Then something happened to help them. Nuada's arm was restored to him through the skill of two men, Dian Cecht, the chief physician of the Tuatha De Danaan, and his son Miach.

First of all Dian Cecht fashioned an arm out of silver for Nuada. It worked as well as a real arm, the elbow bent, the fingers moved, the wrist was flexible and Nuada was pleased to have the use of his limb again. He became known as Nuada of the Silver Arm.

But he was still not perfect and therefore not fit to be king. So Miach, the physician's son, who had been taught the secrets of medicine by his father, decided to try to replace the silver arm with Nuada's real arm. He got Nuada's severed arm, which had been embalmed, and brought it to him. He removed the silver arm and set the severed arm into the socket. Then he said incantations over it:

'Joint to joint and sinew to sinew!
Sinew to sinew and joint to joint!'

The operation took nine days and during that time Miach never left the king's side. For the first three days he bound Nuada's arm straight down along his side until it had rejoined the body at the armpit. For the second three days he bent the elbow and bound the arm across the king's breast and movement was restored. For the last three days he put a powder made of charred bulrushes on it and the arm was completely healed. It was as strong and flexible as it had ever been. Now Nuada could be king again and the De Danaan rejoiced.

But Miach paid a terrible price for his kindness and skill. His father became mad with jealousy that his student and his son, moreover, was now more powerful and skilled in medicine than he

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was himself. In a frenzy of rage and envy, he slashed at Miach's head with his sword. The first stroke cut into the skin and Miach healed himself on the instant. The second stroke reached the bone but Miach healed himself again. Though the third stroke went through the bone to the membrane of the brain still Miach was able to heal himself. With the fourth stroke, Dian Cecht cut out his son's brain and Miach fell dead.

Dian Cecht buried Miach on the plain outside Tara. By the next day a miraculous growth of herbs had sprung up, outlining Miach's body, every organ and bone and sinew. Each herb had special powers relating to the part of the body from which it had sprung. Airmed, Miach's sister, came to mourn for her brother and she saw the herbs, three hundred and sixty-five in all, growing out of his grave. She spread her cloak on the ground and started gathering the herbs to dry them, sorting them out according to their healing properties. But the jealous Dian Cecht came upon her as she was completing the task. He grabbed the cloak and scattered the herbs, mixing them all up together so that it was impossible to sort them out again, and to this day no one person really knows all the healing properties of herbs.

Lugh Comes to Tara

Nuada was perfect again and deemed fit to be king. The Tuatha De Danaan made up their minds to banish Bres and put Nuada back on the throne.

They went to Bres and, complaining bitterly to him about his cruel and miserly treatment of them, they told him to abdicate and restore the kingship to Nuada who was now whole again. Bres was very angry to be deposed, but he was too cowardly to resist so he agreed, and once more Nuada was king of the Tuatha De Danaan.

Bres was determined to take revenge for his humiliation. He left Ireland for the remote island where his Fomorian father lived to seek help from him.

'Why have you come here?' his father said. 'You were king in

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Ireland and had great power. What happened to bring you down?'

'It was my own fault. My injustice, arrogance and greed brought about my downfall!' Bres confessed. 'I put taxes on the people that they had never paid before, and I reduced them to poverty and hunger. I have only myself to blame for what has happened.'

'That is bad,' his father told him sadly. 'The prosperity of your people should have been more important to you than your own position. Their blessing would have been better than their curses. What do you want from me?'

'I have come to gather an army to take back the land by force,' said Bres.

'What you lost through injustice you shouldn't regain through injustice!' said his father, and though he would not help Bres himself, he sent him on to Balor's island to raise an army there.

When Balor heard Bres's story he rallied to his aid for he knew that without Bres on the throne of Ireland, his own tyranny and extortion would be threatened. He assembled a fleet so big it could form an unbroken bridge from his farthest island across to Ireland. He gathered a great army and started to prepare for war.

Nuada, reigning justly now in Tara, knew nothing of this. With Bres gone, he had restored the kingship to its full glory. The poets and musicians who had been silent in Bres's day now entertained the household. There was plenty to eat and drink, and once more Tara resounded to the noise of feasting and entertainments of all kinds. But Nuada was uneasy, nevertheless, for he knew that Balor's raiders would return.

One day, when a feast was in progress, a young warrior in the clothing of a prince appeared at the gate of the king's fort. He was as beautiful as Bres had been, but was nobler in bearing and he had with him a band of warriors.

As he rode up to the gates of Tara, his troops behind him, the two doorkeepers, Gamal and Camall, challenged him.

'Who are you?' they asked, and 'Why have you come here?'

'I am Lugh of the Long Arm,' the warrior said, 'son of Cian and Eithlinn and grandson of Balor. Tell the king I am at the gates and want to join his household!'

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'No one finds a place in Nuada's household unless he has a special skill,' said Camall. 'So I must ask what skill you have.'

'Question me,' said Lugh. 'I am a carpenter.'

'We have a carpenter already named Luchta and we do not need you,' replied Camall.

'Question me. I am a smith.'

'We have a smith as well. Colum is his name and so we do not need another.'

'Question me. I am a champion, stronger than any other,' said Lugh.

'The king's own brother, Ogma, is a champion and one champion is enough. We do not need you.'

'Question me. I am a harper.'

'We have a harper of our own. He is called Abcan. You are of no use to us.'

'Question me, doorkeeper. I am a warrior.'

Camall answered, 'We do not need you. We have a warrior already. Bresal is his name.'

'Question me. I am a poet who can tell many stories.'

'We have a bard already. We do not need another.'

'Question me. I am a magician.'

'We have many druids and magicians. We need no more.'

'Question me. I am a physician.'

'Still we do not need you. Dian Cecht, our physician, is the best in the land.'

'I will bear the king's cup at table if you will let me in!'

'We have nine cupbearers and that is enough. We do not need you.'

'Question me for the last time! I am a skilled worker in brass and enamelling.'

'Credne is our metalsmith, famous for his skill. We do not need you.'

'Then,' said Lugh, 'go and ask the king if he has in his household any single person who can do all these things. If he has, I will leave these gates and will no longer try to enter Tara.'

Camall left Gamal at the gate and went with Lugh's message to the king.

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'A young man is at the gate asking to be let in. His name is Lugh, but by his own account he is so gifted that he should go by the name Samildanach, that is, master of all the arts. He says he can do by himself all the arts, crafts and skilled work of this entire household.'

'Let us see if he is as talented as he claims,' the king ordered. 'Bring the chessboard out to him and let him compete against our best players.'

Camall ran off and did as he had been commanded. Lugh played against the best chess players in the land and won every game until there was no one left unbeaten.

When Nuada heard this he said to the doorkeeper, 'Let this young hero in! Samildanach is a fitting name for him. He is a master of all arts. His like has never been seen in Tara before.'

Gamal and Camall opened the gates and Lugh entered Tara. He went straight to the hall where Nuada sat, surrounded by chiefs and bards and champions. The four great leaders of the Tuatha De Danaan were there too, the Dagda, the chief druid, Dian Cecht, the physician, Ogma, the champion, and Goibniu, the smith. Lugh passed by them all and sat down on the Seat of Wisdom next to the king.

Ogma, the champion, was proud of his own great strength and annoyed by the young man's arrogance, so he decided to test Lugh and discover if he really had all the powers he had boasted about. He lifted a huge flagstone, one that had taken several yokes of oxen to put there, and hurled it through the thick wall of the fort and out on to the plain. Lugh walked out to where the flagstone lay, lifted it and cast it back through the gaping hole it had made. It landed in the hall and settled in the exact spot where it had been before. He lifted the piece of wall that the flagstone had carried with it and set it back in place so that Nuada's hall was sound again.

Then taking up the harp that was slung over his shoulder Lugh began to play. As he plucked the strings gently and soothingly Nuada and his company fell into a peaceful sleep. When they woke, Lugh played for them slow airs that made them weep. Then the music got faster and happier and, drying their tears, the whole

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company began to smile and laugh. Their laughter got louder and louder until the rafters rang with the sound.

Seeing that Lugh did indeed possess the mastery he claimed, Nuada decided to enlist his aid against Balor and his followers. He told Lugh about the evil of the Fomorians, about the tyranny of their taxes, their piracy round his shores and their cruelty to the captured sailors. He asked the young warrior to help him and Lugh agreed to be an ally. Then Nuada gave him the authority to rule by stepping off the throne while Lugh ascended it in his place.

Lugh was king of the Tuatha De Danaan for thirteen days and then, with Nuada and the four other leaders, he left Tara and went into a quiet place to plan the battle. They were in conference for a full year discussing their tactics and they kept their whereabouts and their plans secret so that the Fomorians would not suspect anything. Then, promising to meet again in three years, they left their hiding place. Nuada and the other leaders returned to Tara and Lugh went to seek the help of Manannan Mac Lir, the powerful ruler of the sea.

One day, nearly three years later, Nuada was looking out across the ramparts of his fort when he saw a troop of warriors coming towards him. His eyes were dazzled by a bright light as if he had looked full into the sun, but then he saw that the brilliant rays shone from the face of the leader of the troop and from his long golden hair. Darts of light came off the young man's armour and off his weapons and the gold-embossed harness of his horse. A great jewel blazed from the front of the golden helmet he wore on his shining hair, and Nuada knew that Lugh had come back to Tara.

This time Lugh was riding Manannan Mac Lir's magic horse that could gallop on the sea as if it were dry land and from whose back no one ever fell. He was wearing Manannan's breastplate that no weapon could penetrate, and in his hand he held Manannan's sword that was so deadly no one survived a blow from it.

Nuada, the king, and the De Danaan chiefs welcomed Lugh and brought him into Tara and they all sat down together. They had barely taken their places when another troop of men appeared on

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the horizon approaching Tara, but they were as different from Lugh and his noble followers as night is from day. Unkempt and surly, they slouched towards Nuada's fort as if they owned it. The doorkeepers who had questioned Lugh so closely when he had first arrived in Tara rushed to open the door for them, and without ceremony the slovenly crew shambled into the room where the king and Lugh were seated. Nuada and his household rose to their feet as soon as they entered while Lugh looked on in amazement and vexation.

'Why are you rising to your feet for this miserable, hostile rabble when you didn't stand for me?' he cried.

'We must rise,' Nuada replied, 'or they will kill us all, down to the youngest child! These are the Fomorians who have come back again to harry us as they did during Bres's rule. They have come to claim their taxes, a third of our crops and our cattle and a third of our children as slaves!'

Lugh was so furious when he heard these words that he drew Manannan's deadly sword and rushed at the Fomorian crowd and killed all but nine of them. 'You should be killed as well,' he told the cringing survivors, 'but I'll spare your lives so that you can return to Balor empty-handed and tell him what happened here!' The terrified messengers fled from Tara like hunted animals and made for the islands of the Fomorians as quickly as they could.

When they arrived at Balor's tower and told him about the fate of their companions, his rage was as great as Lugh's and he was determined to invade Ireland and regain his hold over the country and its inhabitants. He called a council of war and the most powerful Fomorians came to his tower, among them his wife, Queen Ceithlinn of the Crooked Teeth, his twelve sons, and his warriors and wise men. Bres, who had just arrived at Balor's tower to seek allies to regain his throne from Nuada, was there as well.

'Who is this upstart,' Balor roared, 'who dares to kill my men and send an insulting message back to me?'

Ceithlinn answered him. 'I know well who he is from the description these men give of him, and it is bad news for us. He is our own grandson, the son of our daughter Eithlinn, and he is known

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as Lugh of the Long Arm. It has been foretold that he will banish the Fomorians from Ireland for all time and that it will be at his hand, the hand of your grandson, that you, Balor, will meet your end.'

When Bres heard this he said to Balor, 'I came to you here to ask you to help me recover my throne. Now we can help each other. Get ready ships and men and arms for me and pack our boats with provisions and I'll go to Ireland and meet Lugh in battle myself. I'll cut off his head and bring it back to you.'

'Do that if you can,' said Balor, 'but I will come too, and for all his skills I'll overcome my insolent grandson. When that's done, I'll tie that rebellious island to the stern of my ship and tow it back here where none of the De Danaan will dare to follow. And where Ireland once lay there will be empty ocean.'

Then marshalling his fearsome army and accompanied by Ceithlinn and his warriors, he made for the harbour. Every ship in the huge fleet raised a bright sail and, catching the wind, set out for Ireland.

The Battle of Moytura

As soon as the Fomorian messengers had fled from Tara, Lugh and Nuada began to make plans for battle too, for they knew that Balor would seek revenge for the men who had been killed, and would try to gain control over the Tuatha De Danaan and impose the same taxes as before. They called together the magician and cupbearers, the druid and craftsmen, the poet and physicians, all the people who possessed special skills, and Lugh asked each one of them what contribution he would make to the struggle.

The magician told him he would topple the mountains of Ireland and cause them to roll along the ground towards the Fomorian army, but these same mountains would shelter the Tuatha De Danaan during the fight.

The cupbearers promised to bring a great thirst on the Fomorians and then drain the lakes and rivers of Ireland so that there was no water for them to drink. But there would be water

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for Nuada's army even if the war lasted seven years.

The druid said he would send a shower of fire to fall on the heads of the Fomorians and rob them of their strength, but every breath the Tuatha De Danaan drew would make them stronger.

Then Lugh questioned the craftsmen and the wise men in the same way as to what special powers they would bring to battle.

Goibniu, the smith, promised to make swords and spearheads that would never miss their mark and to supply them to the Tuatha De Danaan for as long as the battle raged.

Credne, the worker in brass, said he would provide rivets and sockets for spears and swords and rims for shields as long as they were needed, and Luchta, the carpenter, swore he would make the strongest spearshafts and shields and would do so until Lugh's army was victorious.

Then Lugh questioned Cairbre, the poet who had cursed Bres, about his contribution to the struggle.

'The weapons I use are invisible,' Cairbre, replied, 'but no less strong for that. I attack the mind. At daybreak I will compose a satirical poem about the Fomorians and because of this poem they will be full of shame and will lose heart and their will to win.'

Lugh addressed Dian Cecht last of all and the physician answered, 'My daughter Airmed and I will go to the battlefield each evening and bring back the injured. We will treat their wounds with herbs and bathe them in our miraculous well and unless they have been mortally wounded they will be cured. In the morning they will join the ranks more eager than ever for battle and fight more fiercely than before.'

As he finished speaking, the Morrighu, the fierce goddess of battlefields, appeared in the shape of a crow. She spoke to the leaders of the Tuatha De Danaan and promised them that she would help them when they most needed her, at the hour of their greatest danger, and she foretold a victory for them.

'But you must prepare yourselves immediately,' she said, 'for I have seen the warriors of Balor's mighty army stream off the ships at Scetne. They have already started marching across Ireland towards Tara!'

The Mythological Cycle

Lugh marshalled his troops and told them everything he had heard. He spoke to every man in turn, encouraging them and exhorting them to fight and he filled them full of battle fury.

But Lugh himself was so precious to the Tuatha De Danaan that the king and his advisers imprisoned him behind the lines and left nine champions with him to keep him there. Nuada and the other leaders stayed with Lugh while the battle lines were drawn and the ordinary soldiers made ready to fight. Then the two armies marched towards each other and met on the Plain of Moytura. Though they had been fired for battle by Lugh's encouragement and fought fiercely and bravely, Nuada's army could not overcome the countless men the Fomorians sent out to meet them. Day after day the battle raged and each morning the De Danaan soldiers who had been injured in the action the day before were back in battle file, their wounds healed and their weapons intact. The Fomorians noticed this and were angry at the tactics the Tuatha De Danaan were using against them, but they fought all the more fiercely and held fast. The struggle went on for days with heavy losses on both sides and no side gaining the upper hand. As the troops became more and more war-weary the Fomorians decided to make a final assault.

Balor himself, with Bres and Ceithlinn at his side, went to the head of the Fomorian army, and led the horde, vast still in spite of the losses, on to the Plain of Moytura. Helmeted and well-armed, they marched in their thousands in close formation, men and women side by side.

The Tuatha De Danaan closed ranks and moved against them. Lugh could bear it no longer. Using all his strength he escaped from his guards and raced to the front of the line to lead the De Danaan army. Nuada and the Dagda and all the champions joined him, while the Morrighu, the Battle Crow, hovered above them to watch the battle. Lugh stood facing his troops as the plain behind him grew dark with the Fomorian warriors.

'You must fight now and fight to the death,' he shouted, 'for if we lose this battle we will lose everything and live in slavery for all time!'

The Mythological Cycle: "The Tuatha De Danaan"

OVER NINE WAVES

He turned towards the advancing host and with a great shout the two armies rushed to meet each other. The battle was fierce and bloody. There was no time now for the physicians to heal the wounded or the smiths to repair weapons. The warriors fought hand to hand. Sword clashed against sword, spears whistled through the air and battle-axes thudded against shields.

The warriors roared as they fought and the wounded screamed as they fell. The tumult rolled over the Plain of Moytura like thunder and the ground became slippery with blood. Still the two sides fought on. Face to face they fought and when they slipped and fell to their knees they continued to hack at each other, forehead braced against forehead. The river carried away the dead, friend and enemy side by side. Ceithlinn of the Crooked Teeth hurled a spear at the Dagda, inflicting a terrible wound. Other De Danaan leaders fell, men and women together, and it seemed as if the Fomorians would be victorious. But Nuada rallied his forces and led them afresh into battle. He marched at the head of his troops and at last the two leaders met. Balor raised his sword over his head and felled Nuada with one blow. When the Tuatha De Danaan saw their king dying at Balor's feet a groan of despair arose from them and they faltered. At that instant the black crow shape of the Morrighu appeared above the battle lines screaming the encouragement she had promised them at their darkest hour and fresh courage surged into the De Danaan troops.

Lugh rushed to the side of the dying Nuada and angrily taunted Balor. His abuse drove his grandfather into a rage.

'Lift up my eyelid so I can see this gabbling loudmouth who dares to insult me like this!' he roared. A terrified hush fell over the multitude for everyone knew the dreadful power of the Evil Eye. Ten Fomorian champions pulled on the ropes to raise the heavy lid as those nearest to Balor fell to the ground to escape his deadly stare. Lugh stood his ground, put a stone in his sling, took aim and let fly directly at Balor's eye as it opened. The force of the stone drove the eye back through Balor's head and it landed in the midst of the Fomorian lines. Balor fell dead and hundreds of his followers were killed by the eye's fatal power.

The Mythological Cycle

Then Lugh cut off Balor's head and led the Tuatha De Danaan in a fierce assault against the Fomorians. With the Morrighu hovering above them, they broke through their enemy's lines, and what had been a battle became a rout. The Fomorians were beaten back to the sea by Lugh and his army. They fled to their ships, boarded them in great haste and speedily set sail for their islands, never to return to Ireland. Bres survived the battle and was captured by the Tuatha De Danaan but Lugh, who had become king in Nuada's place, spared his life on condition that he would share with him his knowledge of husbandry and farming. So Bres taught the Tuatha De Danaan when to plough and sow and reap and, when they had mastered these crafts, he too left Ireland for good.

The Tuatha De Danaan survivors cleared the battlefield of the dead who were as countless as the stars in the sky or the grass underfoot, as countless as flakes of snow in the air or Manannan's horses, the white-capped waves of the sea.

When this sad task was done the battle goddess, the Morrighu, declared victory to the Tuatha De Danaan. Then, from the mountain summits and riverbanks and estuaries, she proclaimed peace to the land of Ireland:

'Peace in this land
From the earth up to the skies
And back down to the earth.
Honey and mead in abundance
And strength to everyone.'