

# A great army was mustered

by the Connachtmen, that is, by Ailill and Medb, and word went from them to the three other provinces. And Ailill sent messengers to the seven sons of Mágu: Ailill, Anlúan, Moccorb, Cet, Én, Bascall and Dóche, each with his fighting force of three thousand, and also to Cormac Conn Longas the son of Conchobor, who was billeted with his three hundred men in Connacht. They all came on then until they reached Crúachain Aí

Now Cormac's men were in three companies as they marched to Crúachain. The first band wore vari-coloured cloaks wrapped around them. Their hair was shorn. They had tunics falling to the knee. They carried long shields, and each man bore in his hand a broad, bright spear on a slender shaft. The second band wore dark-grey cloaks and red-embroidered tunics reaching down to their calves. Their long hair hung down behind. They carried white shields, and in their hands they bore five-pronged spears. 'It is not Cormac as yet', said Medb.

Then came the third band. They wore purple cloaks and hooded red-embroidered tunics reaching to their feet. Their trimmed hair fell down to their shoulders. They bore curved shields with scalloped rims, and each man carried a spear as great as the pillar of a palace in his hand. 'This is Cormac now,' said Medb.

So then the four provinces of Ireland were gathered together in Crúachain Aí. Their prophets and druids did not permit them to go thence, but kept them for a fortnight awaiting an auspicious omen. Then, on the day that they set forth, Medb said to her charioteer:

'All those who part here today from comrade and friend will curse me for it is I who have mustered this hosting.' 'Wait then,' said the charioteer, 'until the chariot has turned right- handwise to strengthen the good omen so that we may come back again.'

When the charioteer turned back the chariot and they were about to descend, they saw in front of them a grown maiden. She had yellow hair. She wore a vari- coloured cloak with a golden pin in it and a hooded tunic with red embroidery. She had shoes with golden fastenings. Her face was oval, narrow below, broad above. Her eyebrows were dark and black. Her beautiful black eyelashes cast a shadow on to the middle of her cheeks. Her lips seemed to be made of pearls. Her teeth were like a shower of pearls between her lips. She had three plaits of hair: two plaits wound around her head, the third hanging down her back, touching her calves behind. In her hand she carried a weaver's beam of white bronze, with golden inlay. There were three pupils in each of her eyes. The maiden was armed and her chariot was drawn by two black horses.

'What is your name,' asked Medb of the maiden. 'I am Feidelm, the poetess of Connacht,' said the maiden. 'Whence do you come?' asked Medb. 'From Albion after learning the art of divination,' answered the maiden. 'Have you the power of prophecy called imbas forosna?' 'I have indeed,' said the maiden. 'Look for me then and tell me how it will fare with my hosting.' Then the maiden

looked and Medb said: 'O Feidelm Prophetess, how do you see the fate of the army?' Feidelm answered and said: 'I see it bloody, I see it red.' 'That is not so,' said Medb, 'for Conchobor lies in his debility in Emain together with the Ulstermen and all the mightiest of their warriors, and my messengers have come and brought me tidings of them. O Feidelm Prophetess, how do you see our host?' asked Medb again. 'I see it blood-stained, I see it red,' said the maiden. 'That is not so,' said Medb, 'for Celtchar mac Uthidir is in Dún Lethglaise together with a third of the men of Ulster, and Fergus mac Roeich meic Echdach is here in exile with us with three thousand men. O Feidelm Prophetess, how do you see our host?' 'I see it blood-stained, I see it red,' answered the maiden. 'That matters not indeed,' said Medb, 'for in every muster and in every army assembled in a great encampment there are quarrels and strife and bloody woundings. So look once more for us, and tell us the truth. O Feidelm Prophetess, how do you see our host?'

'I see it blood-stained, I see it red,' said Feidelm and she spoke as follows:

1. I see a fair man who will perform weapon-feats, with many a wound in his flesh. A hero's light is on his brow. His forehead is the meeting-place of many virtues.
2. In each of his eyes are the seven jewel-bright pupils of a hero. His spearpoints(?) are unsheathed. He wears a red mantle with clasps.
3. His face is beautiful. He amazes women-folk. This lad of handsome countenance looks in the battle like a dragon.
4. Like is his prowess to that of Cú Chulainn of Murthemne. I know not who is this Cú Chulainn of fairest fame, but this I do know, that by him the army will be bloodily wounded.
5. I see a tall man in the plain who gives battle to the host. In each hand he holds four small swords with which to perform great deeds.
6. He attacks with his gae bolga and also with his ivory-hilted sword and his spear. He can ply them on the host. Each weapon as he casts it has its own special use.
7. This man wrapped in a red mantle sets his foot on every battle-field. Across the left wheel-rim of his chariot he attacks them. The distorted one kills them. I see that he has changed from the form in which hitherto he has appeared to me.
8. He has moved forward to the battle. Unless heed be taken, there will be destruction. I think that it is Cú Chulainn mac Súaldaim who now comes to you.
9. He will lay low your entire army. He will slaughter you in dense crowds. Ye will leave with him a thousand severed heads. The prophetess Feidelm does not conceal your fate.
10. Blood will flow from heroes' bodies. Much harm will be wrought by the hand of this hero. He will kill warriors; the men of Clanna Dedad meic Sin will flee. Men's bodies will be hacked and women will weep because of the Hound of the Smith whom I now see.

On the Monday after the autumn festival of Samain they set out. They travelled south-east from Crúachain Aí, past Mucc Cruinb, past Terloch Teóra Crích, past Túaim Móna, past Cúil Silinne

i.e. Loch Carrcín", and got its name from Silend daughter of Madchar

, past Fid, past Bolga, past Coltain, past Glune Gabair, past Mag Trego, past northern Tethbab

i.e. Cairpre

, past southern Tethba, past Tíarthechta, past Ord, southwards past Slais, past Indeóind, past Carn, past Ochtrach, past Mide, past Findglassa Assail, past Delt, past Delind, past Sailig, past Slaibre, past Slechta (where they hewed down the trees), past Cúil Sibrinne, southwards past Ochuinn, northwards past Úata, past Dub, southwards past Comur, past Tromma and eastwards past Fothromma, past Sláne and Gort Sláni, southwards past Druim Licce, past Áth Gabla, past Ardachad, northwards past Féraind, past Findabair, southwards past Aisse, past Druim Sálfínd, past Druim Caín, past Druim mac nDega, past Eódond Mór and Eódond Bec, past Méthe Tog[maill] and Méthe Eóin; past Druim Cáemtechta, past Scúap and Imscúap, past Cend Ferna, past Baile, past Aile, past Báil Scena and Dáil Scena, past Ferste, past Ross Lochad, past Sále, past Lochmach, past Ánmag, past Deind, past Delt, past Dubglais, past Fid Mór

i.e. Trúalli"

, past Colptha, past Crond in Cúailnge. From Findabair in Cúailnge the armies of Ireland spread out over the province in quest of the Bull. For they had gone past all these places before reaching Findabair.

Here ends the introductory part. The story in due order now begins.

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Revision #1

Created 11 June 2026 14:47:31 by Admin

Updated 11 June 2026 14:47:31 by Admin