

The Great Battle of Magh Tuireadh

And it was not long after Lugh had got the fine from the sons of Tuireann that the Fomor came and landed at Scetne.

The whole host of the Fomor were come this time, and their king, Balor, of the Strong Blows and of the Evil Eye, along with them; and Bres, and Indech, son of De Domnann, a king of the Fomor, and Elathan, son of Lobos, and Goll and Ingol, and Octriallach, son of Indech, and Elathan, son of Delbaeth. Then Lugh sent the Dagda to spy out the Fomor, and to delay them till such time as the men of Ireland would come to the battle. So the Dagda went to their camp, and he asked them for a delay, and they said he might have that. And then to make sport of him, the Fomor made broth for him, for he had a great love for broth. So they filled the king's cauldron with four times twenty gallons of new milk, and the same of meal and fat, and they put in goats and sheep and pigs along with that, and boiled all together, and then they poured it all out into a great hole in the ground. And they called him to it then, and told him he should eat his fill, the way the Fomor would not be reproached for want of hospitality the way Bres was. "We will make an end of you if you leave any part of it after you," said Indech, son of De Domnann. So the Dagda took the ladle, and it big enough for a man and a woman to lie in the bowl of it, and he took out bits with it, the half of a salted pig, and a quarter of lard a bit would be. "If the broth tastes as well as the bits taste, this is good food," he said. And he went on putting the full of the ladle into his mouth till the hole was empty; and when all was gone he put down his hand and scraped up all that was left among the earth and the gravel.

Sleep came on him then after eating the broth, and the Fomor were laughing at him, for his belly was the size of the cauldron of a great house. But he rose up after a while, and, heavy as he was, he made his way home; and indeed his dress was no way sightly, a cape to the hollow of the elbows, and a brown coat, long in the breast and short behind, and on his feet brogues of horse hide, with the hair outside, and in his hand a wheeled fork it would take eight men to carry, so that the track he left after him was deep enough for the boundary ditch of a province. And on his way he saw the Battle-Crow, the Morrighu, washing herself in the river Unius of Connacht, and one of her two feet at Ullad Echne, to the south of the water, and the other at Loscuinn, to the north of the water, and her hair hanging in nine loosened locks. And she said to the Dagda, that she would bring the heart's blood of Indech, son of De Domnann, that had threatened him, to the men of

Ireland.

And while he was away Lugh had called together the Druids, and smiths, and physicians, and law-makers, and chariot-drivers of Ireland, to make plans for the battle. And he asked the great magician Mathgen what could be do to help them. "It is what I can do," said Mathgen, "through my power I can throw down all the mountains of Ireland on the Fomor, until their tops will be rolling on the ground. And the twelve chief mountains of Ireland will bring you their help," he said, "and will fight for you: Slieve Leag and Denda Ulad, and Bennai Boirche and Bri Ruri, and Slieve Bladma and Slieve Snechtae, and Slieve Mis and Blai-Slieve, and Nemthann and Slieve Macca Belgodon, and Segois and Cruachan Aigle."

Then he asked the cup-bearers what help they could give.

"We will put a strong thirst on the Fomor," they said, "and then we will bring the twelve chief lochs of Ireland before them, and however great their thirst may be, they will find no water in them:

Derc-Loch, Loch Luimnech, Loch Orbsen, Loch Righ, Loch Mescdhae, Loch Cuan, Loch Laeig, Loch Echach, Loch Febail, Loch Decket, Loch Riach, Mor-Loch. And we will go," they said, "to the twelve chief rivers of Ireland: the Buas, the Boinn, the Banna, the Nem, the Laoi, the Sionnan, the Muaid, the Sligech, the Samair, the Fionn, the Ruirtech, the Siuir; and they will all be hidden away from the Fomor the way they will not find a drop in them.

But as for the men of Ireland," they said, "there will be drink for them if they were to be in battle to the end of seven years."

And Figol, son of Marnos, the Druid, was asked then what he would do, and he said:

"It is what I will do, I will cause three showers of fire to pour on the faces of the army of the Fomor, and I will take from them two-thirds of their bravery and their strength, and I will put sickness on their bodies, and on the bodies of their horses. But as to the men of Ireland," he said, "every breath they breathe will be an increase of strength and of bravery to them; and if they are seven years in the battle they will never be any way tired."

Then Lugh asked his two witches, Bechulle and Dianan:

"What power can you bring to the battle?" "It is easy to say that," they said. "We will put enchantment on the trees and the stones and the sods of the earth, till they become an armed host against the Fomor, and put terror on them and put them to the rout."

Then Lugh asked Carpre, the poet, son of Etain, what could he do. "It is not hard to say that," said Carpre. "I will make a satire on them at sunrise, and the wind from the north, and I on a hill-top and my back to a thorn tree, and a stone and a thorn in my hand. And with that satire," he said, "I will put shame on them and enchantment, the way they will not be able to stand against fighting men."

Then he asked Goibniu the Smith what would he be able to do.

"I will do this," he said. "If the men of Ireland stop in the battle to the end of seven years, for every

sword that is broken and for every spear that is lost from its shaft, I will put a new one in its place. And no spear-point that will be made by my hand," he said, "will ever miss its mark; and no man it touches will ever taste life again. And that is more than **Dolb**, the smith of the **Fomor**, can do," he said.

"And you, **Credne**," **Lugh** said then to his worker in brass, "what help can you give to our men in the battle?"

"It is not hard to tell that," said **Credne**, "rivets for their spears and hilts for their swords and bosses and rims for their shields, I will supply them all."

"And you, **Luchta**," he said then to his carpenter, "what will you do?" "I will give them all they want of shields and of spear shafts," said **Luchta**.

Then he asked **Diancecht**, the physician, what would he do, and it is what he said: "Every man that will be wounded there, unless his head is struck off, or his brain or his marrow cut through, I will make him whole and sound again for the battle of the morrow."

Then the **Dagda** said: "Those great things you are boasting you will do, I will do them all with only myself."

"It is you are the good god!" said they, and they all gave a great shout of laughter. Then **Lugh** spoke to the whole army and put strength in them, so that each had the spirit in him of a king or a great lord.

Then when the delay was at an end, the **Fomor** and the men of Ireland came on towards one another till they came to the plain of **Magh Tuireadh**. That now was not the same **Magh Tuireadh** where the first battle was fought, but it was to the north, near **Ess Dara**.

And then the two armies threatened one another. "The men of Ireland are daring enough to offer battle to us," said **Bres** to **Indech**, son of **De Domnann**.

"I give my word," said **Indech**, "it is in small pieces their bones will be, if they do not give in to us and pay their tribute."

Now the **Men of Dea** had determined not to let **Lugh** go into the battle, because of the loss his death would be to them; and they left nine of their men keeping a watch on him. And on the first day none of the kings or princes went into the battle, but only the common fighting men, and they fierce and proud enough. And the battle went on like that from day to day with no great advantage to one or the other side. But there was wonder on the **Fomor** on account of one thing. Such of their own weapons as were broken or blunted in the fight lay there as they were, and such of their own men as were killed showed no sign of life on the morrow; but it was not so with the **Tuatha de Danaan**, for if their men were killed or their weapons were broken to-day, they were as good as before on the morrow.

And this is the way that happened. The well of **Slaine** lay to the west of **Magh Tuireadh** to the east of **Loch Arboch**. And **Diancecht** and his son **Octruil** and his daughter **Airmed** used to be singing spells over the well and to be putting herbs in it; and the men that were wounded to death in the battle would be brought to the well and put into it as dead men, and they would come out of it whole and sound, through the power of the spells. And not only were they healed, but there was such fire put into them that they would be quicker in the fight than they were before.

And as to the arms, it is the way they were made new every day. **Goibniu** the Smith used to be in the forge making swords and spears, and he would make a spear-head by three turns, and then **Luchta** the Carpenter would make the shaft by three cuts, and the third cut was a finish, and would set it in the ring of the spear. And when the spear-heads were stuck in the side of the forge, he would throw the shaft and the rings the way they would go into the spearhead and want no more setting. And then **Credne** the Brazier would make the rivets by three turns and would cast the rings of the spears to them, and with that they were ready and were set together.

And all this went against the **Fomor**, and they sent one of their young men to spy about the camp and to see could he find out how these things were done. It was **Ruadan**, son of **Bres** and of **Brigit** daughter of the **Dagda** they sent, for he was a son and grandson of the **Tuatha de Danaan**. So he went and saw all that was done, and came back to the **Fomor**. And when they heard his story it is what they thought, that **Goibniu** the Smith was the man that hindered them most. And they sent **Ruadan** back again, and bade him make an end of him.

So he went back again to the forge, and he asked **Goibniu** would he give him a spear-head. And then he asked rivets of **Credne**, and a shaft of the carpenter, and all was given to him as he asked. And there was a woman there, **Cron**, mother to **Fianlug**, grinding the spears. And after the spear being given to **Ruadan**, he turned and threw it at **Goibniu**, that it wounded him. But **Goibniu** pulled it out and made a cast of it at **Ruadan**, that it went through him and he died; and **Bres**, his father, and the army of the **Fomor**, saw him die. And then **Brigit** came and keened her son with shrieking and with crying.

And as to **Goibniu**, he went into the well and was healed. But after that **Octriallach**, son of **Indech**, called to the **Fomor** and bade each man of them bring a stone of the stones of **Drinnes** and throw them into the well of **Slane**. And they did that till the well was dried up, and a cairn raised over it, that is called **Octriallach's Cairn**.

And it was while **Goibniu** was making spear-heads for the battle of **Magh Tuireadh**, a charge was brought against his wife. And it was seen that it was heavy news to him, and the jealousy came to him. And it is what he did, there was a spear-shaft in his hand when he heard the story, **Nes** its name was; and he sang spells over the spear-shaft, and any one that was struck with that spear

afterwards, it would burn him up like fire.

And at last the day of the great battle came, and the **Fomor** came out of their camp and stood in strong ranks. And there was not a leader or a fighting man of them was without good armour to his skin, and a helmet on his head, a broad spear in his right hand, a heavy sword in his belt, a strong shield on his shoulder. And to attack the army of the **Fomor** that day was to strike the head against a rock, or to go up fighting against a fire.

And the **Men of Dea** rose up and left **Lugh** and his nine comrades keeping him, and they went on to the battle; and **Midhir** was with them, and **Bodb Dearg** and **Diancecht**. And **Badb** and **Macha** and the **Morrighu** called out that they would go along with them.

And it was a hard battle was fought, and for a while it was going against the **Tuatha de Danaan**; and **Nuada of the Silver Hand**, their King, and **Macha**, daughter of **Emmass**, fell by **Balor**, King of the **Fomor**. And **Cassmail** fell by **Octriallach**, and the **Dagda** got a dreadful wound from a casting spear that was thrown by **Ceithlenn**, wife of **Balor**.

But when the battle was going on, **Lugh** broke away from those that were keeping him, and rushed out to the front of the **Men of Dea**. And then there was a fierce battle fought, and **Lugh** was heartening the men of Ireland to fight well, the way they would not be in bonds any longer. For it was better for them, he said, to die protecting their own country than to live under bonds and under tribute any longer. And he sang a song of courage to them, and the hosts gave a great shout as they went into battle, and then they met together, and each of them began to attack the other.

And there was great slaughter, and laying low in graves, and many comely men fell there in the stall of death. Pride and shame were there side by side, and hardness and red anger, and there was red blood on the white skin of young fighting men. And the dashing of spear against shield, and sword against sword, and the shouting of the fighters, and the whistling of casting spears and the rattling of scabbards was like harsh thunder through the battle. And many slipped in the blood that was under their feet, and they fell, striking their heads one against another; and the river carried away bodies of friends and enemies together.

Then **Lugh** and **Balor** met in the battle, and **Lugh** called out reproaches to him; and there was anger on **Balor**, and he said to the men that were with him: "Lift up my eyelid till I see this chatterer that is talking to me." Then they raised **Balor's** eyelid, but **Lugh** made a cast of his red spear at him, that brought the eye out through the back of his head, so that it was towards his own army it fell, and three times nine of the **Fomor** died when they looked at it. And if **Lugh** had not put out that eye when he did, the whole of Ireland would have been burned in one flash. And after this, **Lugh** struck his head off.

And as for **Indech**, son of **De Domnann**, he fell and was crushed in the battle, and blood burst from his mouth, and he called out for **Leat Glas**, his poet, as he lay there, but he was not able to help him. And then the **Morrighu** came into the battle, and she was heartening the [[Tuatha de Danaan] to fight the battle well; and, as she had promised the **Dagda**, she took the full of her two hands of **Indech's** blood, and gave it to the armies that were waiting at the foot of **Unius**; and it was called the Ford of Destruction from that day.

And after that it was not a battle any more, but a rout, and the **Fomor** were beaten back to the sea. And **Lugh** and his comrades were following them, and they came up with **Bres**, son of **Elathan**, and no guard with him, and he said:

"It is better for you to spare my life than to kill me. And if you spare me now," he said, "the cows of Ireland will never go dry."

"I will ask an advice about that from our wise men," said **Lugh**. So he told **Maeltime Mor-Brethach**, of the Great Judgments, what **Bres** was after saying. But **Maeltime** said: "Do not spare him for that, for he has no power over their offspring, though he has power so long as they are living."

Then **Bres** said: "If you spare me, the men of Ireland will reap a harvest of corn every quarter." But

Maeltime said: "The spring is for ploughing and sowing, and the beginning of summer for the strength of corn, and the beginning of autumn for its ripeness, and the winter for using it."

"That does not save you," said **Lugh** then to **Bres**. But then to make an excuse for sparing him,

Lugh said: "Tell us what is the best way for the men of Ireland to plough and to sow and to reap."

"Let their ploughing be on a Tuesday, and their casting seed into the field on a Tuesday, and their reaping on a Tuesday," said **Bres**. So **Lugh** said that would do, and he let him go free after that.

It was in this battle **Ogma** found **Orna**, the sword of **Tethra**, a king of the **Fomor**, and he took it from its sheath and cleaned it. And when the sword was taken out of the sheath, it told all the deeds that had been done by it, for there used to be that power in swords.

And **Lugh** and the **Dagda** and **Ogma** followed after the **Fomor**, for they had brought away the **Dagda's** harp with them, that was called **Uaitne**. And they came to a feasting-house, and in it they found **Bres** and his father **Elathan**, and there was the harp hanging on the wall. And it was in that harp the **Dagda** had bound the music, so that it would not sound until he would call to it. And sometimes it was called **Dur-da-Bla**, the Oak of Two Blossoms, and sometimes **Coir-cethar-chuin**, the Four-Angled Music.

And when he saw it hanging on the wall it is what he said: "Come summer, come winter, from the mouth of harps and bags and pipes." Then the harp sprang from the wall, and came to the **Dagda**,

and it killed nine men on its way. And then he played for them the three things harpers understand, the sleepy tune, and the laughing tune, and the crying tune. And when he played the crying tune, their tearful women cried, and then he played the laughing tune, till their women and children laughed; and then he played the sleepy tune, and all the hosts fell asleep. And through that sleep the three went away through the **Fomor** that would have been glad to harm them. And when all was over, the **Dagda** brought out the heifer he had got as wages from **Bres** at the time he was making his dun. And she called to her calf, and at the sound of her call all the cattle of Ireland the **Fomor** had brought away as tribute, were back in their fields again.

And **Ce**, the **Druid** of **Nuada of the Silver Hand**, was wounded in the battle, and he went southward till he came to **Cam Corrslebe**. And there he sat down to rest, tired with his wounds and with the fear that was on him, and the journey. And he saw a smooth plain before him, and it full of flowers, and a great desire came on him to reach to that plain, and he went on till he came to it, and there he died. And when his grave was made there, a lake burst out over it and over the whole plain, and it was given the name of **Loch Ce**. And there were but four men of the **Fomor** left in Ireland after the battle, and they used to be going through the country, spoiling corn and milk and fruit, and whatever came from the sea, till they were driven out one **Samhain** night by the **Morrighu** and by **Angus Og**, that the **Fomor** might never be over Ireland again.

And after the battle was won, and the bodies were cleared away, the **Morrighu** gave out the news of the great victory to the hosts and to the royal heights of Ireland and to its chief rivers and its inners, and it is what she said: "Peace up to the skies, the skies down to earth, the earth under the skies; strength to every one."

And as to the number of men that fell in the battle, it will not be known till we number the stars of the sky, or flakes of snow, or the dew on the grass, or grass under the feet of cattle, or the horses of the Son of Lir in a stormy sea. And **Lugh** was made king over the **Men of Dea** then, and it was at **Nas** he had his court.

And while he was king, his foster-mother **Taillte**, daughter of **Magh Mor**, the Great Plain died. And before her death she bade her husband **Duach the Dark**, he that built the Fort of the Hostages in **Teamhair**, to clear away the wood of **Cuan**, the way there could be a gathering of the people around her grave. So he called to the men of Ireland to cut down the wood with their wide-bladed knives and bill-hooks and hatchets, and within a month the whole wood was cut down.

And **Lugh** buried her in the plain of **Midhe**, and raised a mound over her, that is to be seen to this day. And he ordered fires to be kindled, and keening to be made, and games and sports to be held in the summer of every year out of respect to her. And the place they were held got its name from her, that is **Taillten**.

And as to **Lugh's** own mother, that was tall beautiful **Ethlinn**, she came to **Teamhair** after the battle of **Magh Tuireadh**, and he gave her in marriage to **Tadg**, son of **Nuada**. And the children that were born to them were **Muirne**, mother of **Finn**, the Head of the **Fianna** of Ireland, and **Tuiren**, that was mother of **Bran**.

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