

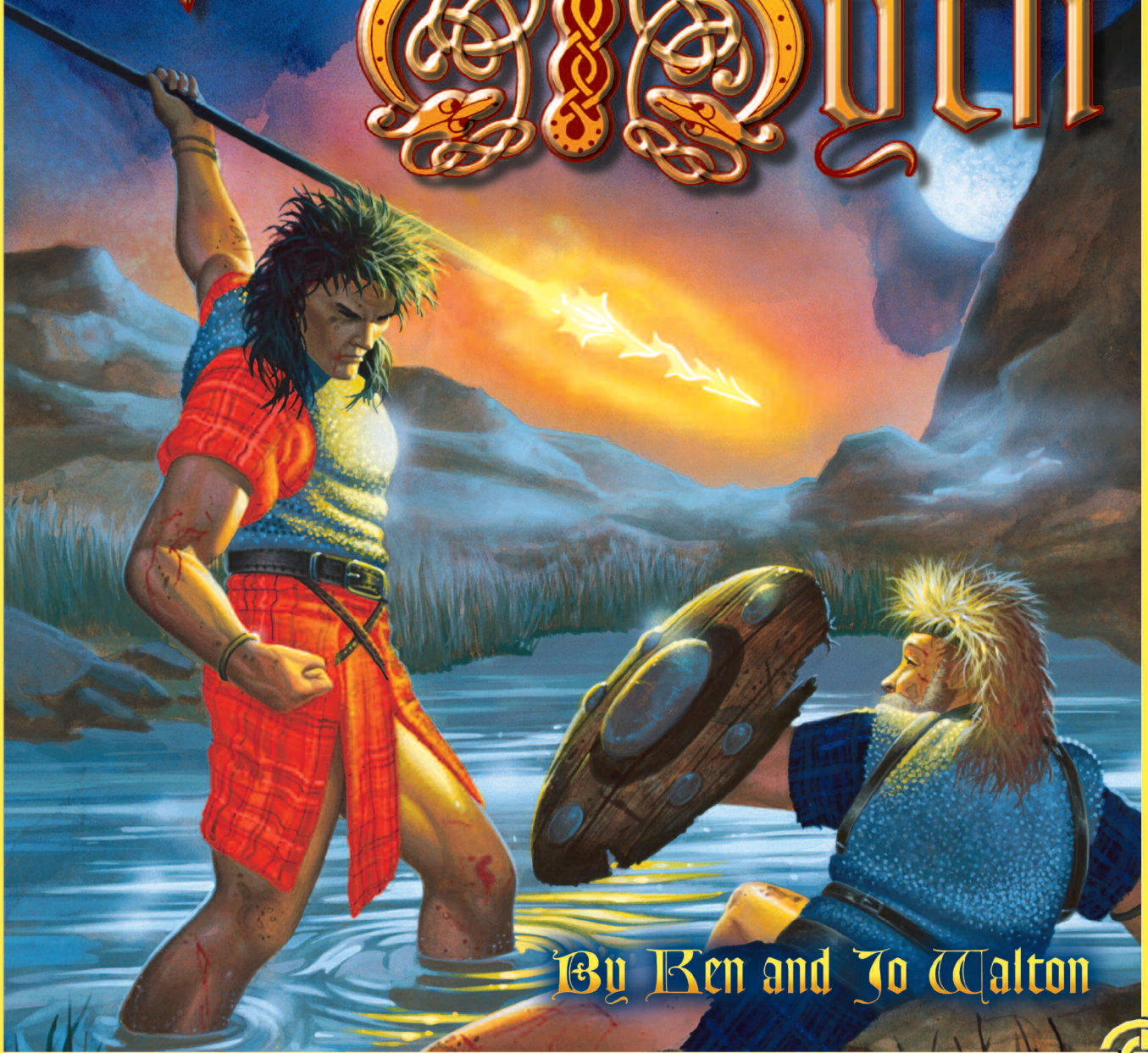
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eltic



Ordnuth



By Ken and Jo Walton








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GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised and *Compendium I: Character Creation* are required to use this book in a *GURPS* campaign. *GURPS Celtic Myth* can also be used as a sourcebook for any roleplaying system.

THE CELTIC WARRIORS:

Written by
KEN WALTON
AND **JO WALTON**

Edited by
SPIKE Y. JONES,
SUSAN PINSONNEAULT,
AND **LILLIAN BUTLER**

Cover by
JOHN ZELEZNIK

Illustrated by
DAN SMITH

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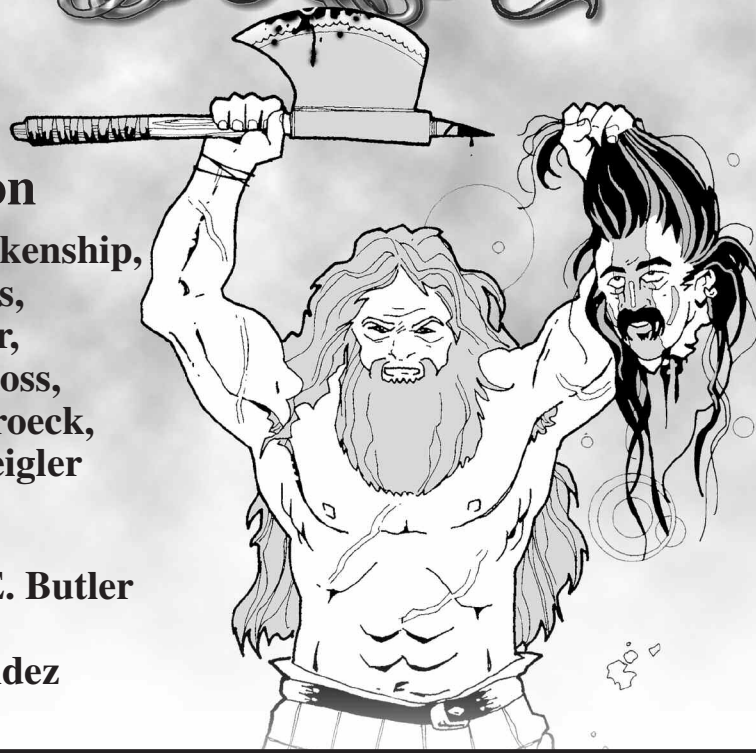
Celtic Myth

By Ken and Jo Walton

Additional Material by Loyd Blankenship,
Graeme Davis, Phil Masters,
Ben W. Miller, Sasha Miller,
Steffan O'Sullivan, S. John Ross,
Beth Savage, Peggy & Bob Schroeck,
Daniel U. Thibault, and Jon Zeigler

Edited by Spike Y Jones,
Susan Pinsonneault, and Lillian E. Butler

Cover by John Zeleznik
Cover Design by Alex Fernandez
Illustrated by Dan Smith



GURPS System Design by Steve Jackson
Scott Haring, Managing Editor
Sean Punch, *GURPS* Line Editor
Page Layout and Typography by Jeff Koke,
Lillian Butler, and Susan Pinsonneault

Interior and Color Production by Jeff Koke
Print Buying by Shawn Haranek
Art Direction by Philip Reed
Claudia Smith, Sales Manager

Playtesters: Cuchullin, Eric Gilmartin, Jez Green, Steve Hatherley, Will Hughes, Badger Jones, Marshall Ryan Maresca, Andrew Morris, Virginia L. Nelson, Horace Pruitt, Paul Raistrick, Marcus Spears, Arlena Stallman, and Mark Whittington.

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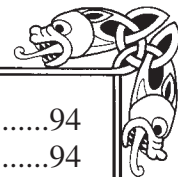
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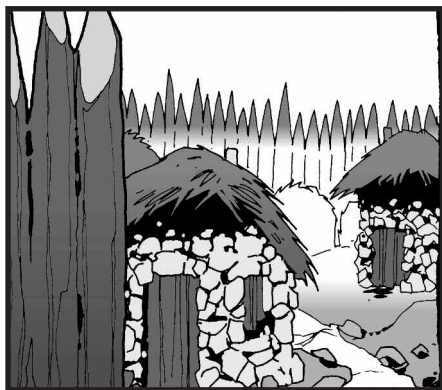
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ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

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PAGE REFERENCES

See *GURPS Compendium I*, p. 181, for a list of abbreviations for *GURPS* titles, or for the most recent list, visit our Web site at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised*. M denotes *GURPS Magic, Second Edition*; G refers to *GURPS Grimoire*; BB means *GURPS Bunnies & Burrows*, S is *GURPS Supers*.

Introduction

Two druids make a woman out of flowers to be a king's wife. A warrior chases a white deer into a green hill and finds himself in another world. A fisherman in a coracle sees a horse riding across the waves, but the rider claims that he sees a plain of blossoming trees.

This book is about roleplaying in the world of the pagan Celts, the people who lived in western Europe before the coming of the Romans, and of Christianity. It is about the mythological and magical lives of the Celts.

"Celtic"

The word "Celtic" has many meanings; in this book it means the lives of the pagan Celts as remembered in their stories and rediscovered by archaeology. Much later "Celtic" folklore (such as leprechauns) has been excluded, and some liberties have been taken with the evidence to provide a world suitable for roleplaying. (For instance, there is little solid evidence about the druids.)

Spelling and Pronunciation

Two Celtic languages, Welsh and Irish, are used for names, places, and objects in *GURPS Celtic Myth*. Welsh is phonetic and is left unchanged, but Irish is far from phonetic (for more on Celtic pronunciations, see *Glossary*, p. 123). Where a standard or familiar Irish form exists, it is used. If there is no commonly recognized form the spelling has been phoneticized.

As for the pronunciation of the word "Celt" itself, the "hard c" is most likely correct (the ancient Greeks reported that these people called themselves the *Keltoi*, and that is the usage found in most modern Celtic lands). People preferring to use the "soft c" pronunciation can make a case for it as well (that's the version used in the Celtic regions of France).



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ken Walton lives in Lancaster, England. He is a full-time RPG writer. He has published in *White Dwarf*, *Pyramid*, *Arcane*, and other magazines. He has projects forthcoming for *Warhammer FRP* and *Heliograph*.

Jo Walton lives in Swansea, South Wales. She is a graduate in Classics and Ancient History from the University of Lancaster. She has just published her first novel, *The King's Peace*, from Tor Books, New York. It reflects her long standing interest in things Celtic; indeed, if she hadn't written *GURPS Celtic Myth*, she probably wouldn't have gone on to write it and its sequel, *The King's Name*, coming out in 2001. She has published a number of short stories in magazines. She has written some roleplaying bits and pieces, on her own and with Ken, for Hogshead, Last Unicorn, and others.



When Lugh came to Tara for the first time in the reign of Nuada he went to Camel, Nuada's doorkeeper, and asked for admission. "What can you do?" asked Camel. "I'm a good carpenter," said Lugh. "We have a carpenter," said Camel. "I'm a good smith," said Lugh. "We have a smith," said Camel. The dialogue continued with Lugh saying that he was a poet, a harper, a healer, and a warrior, only to be answered each time that they had one. Then Lugh asked Camel if they had anyone who was master of all of those skills. Camel asked Nuada, who admitted that they did not, and welcomed Lugh within. Nuada then gave Lugh the nickname "Ildanach" meaning craft-skilled.

Characters in Celtic mythology were a pretty powerful bunch. Even the minor ones were usually famous for some feat or other. (Otherwise they wouldn't be mentioned in the stories!) A realistic campaign should start with 100-point characters, but in a campaign full of the magic and heroism of Celtic myth, beginning characters should be *at least* 150 points, probably more, with 1 level of Sidhe Blood. In a campaign with all Sidhe characters, they should be in the 500- to 1000-point category – Celtic Supers!

Every character should take the Celtic Code of Honor disadvantage (see p. 53) unless he doesn't abide by it, in which case he should take an Odious Personal Habit (-10 points), for being known to be without honor, or the Secret "Has No Honor" (-5 points), in which case he may have to live by much of the Code of Honor in order to protect his secret, anyway.



Character Types

Bard

Bard is the first level of the Druidic Order. A Bard knows many stories, poems, and histories, and has some skill at composing new songs and sagas. Bards don't necessarily have Magical Aptitude; what they must have is a good memory and a talent for riddles. Bards are keepers of history, teachers, and people who can immortalize heroes in song.

Advantages: Useful advantages for a bard are Eidetic Memory, Extra Fatigue, Musical Ability, and Voice. Bards are Status 3, and must have Literacy (Ogham) (p. 52). A harper is an appropriate Ally.

Disadvantages: The Odious Personal Habit (Arcane) is suitable. Since a Bard must have spent seven years as an initiate, Youth is inappropriate.

Skills: A Bard must have Consonant Tree Lore (p. 57), Bardic Lore (p. 57), and Poetry, all at 11+. A Bard will certainly know the Tree Talisman spells, and must be able to play the harp, although he may have a harper to play for him. Most Bards also have skill in Satire (p. 57). Bard and Performance skills would be useful.

Some people are content to remain Bards throughout their lives; others are training to be Ollaves. Those in training may well be working on Vowel Tree Lore (p. 58). As the Ollave ordeal is religious in nature, many Bards wander from sacred grove to sacred grove in preparation.



Gesas: Gesas on members of the Druidic Order are likely to be obscure and related to their work: "Must always rise before dawn," "Cannot praise a man to his face," or "Must play the first song in the dun every day."

Blacksmith

A blacksmith works with iron to make weapons and armor. This is a respected craft in Celtic society, as are all crafts. Because of the magical nature of iron, blacksmiths are regarded as partly magicians and people to be wary of. Not every village has a blacksmith, so some wandering smiths do the work as they pass through, shoeing horses and mending swords, for example. This is a profitable job and one that fits well with adventuring and moving from place to place.

Advantages: A blacksmith has Status 1, and a good one may have a Reputation. A good smith has ST 13 or higher, and may well have high DX if he does much artistic jewelry work. A Sidhe smith almost certainly has the Sidhe advantage Bellows Breath.

Disadvantages: A blacksmith may be Hard of Hearing from banging an anvil all day.

Skills: Blacksmith/TL2 and Armoury/TL2 are musts. A Celtic armorer can specialize in Hand Weapons; bows and arrows are likely to be made by individuals needing them. A more artistic blacksmith may also have Sculpting and Jeweler. Weapon skills are required, since a good smith needs to be able to use a weapon to know whether it's a good one or not. Merchant and Fast-Talk are useful.

Gesas: These are likely to be connected to metal-working, such as: "Must never work metal with my back to the forge," "Must light the forge before dawn," "Must make a horseshoe every day," or "Must never make a spear point."

GESA IDEAS

These are just indications; GMs and players are encouraged to think up their own, unique gesas.

Clothes

- 5 Must never remove boots
- 5 Must never remove helmet
- 5 Must keep head bare
- 10 Must keep feet bare

Strangers

- 10 Must not give name to strangers
- 10 Must ignore strangers until they touch him
- 10 Must insult strangers
- 15 Must attack strangers

Food

- 5 Must not eat pig
- 5 Must eat with door open
- 5 Must not drink alcohol alone
- 10 Must not eat when others are present
- 10 Must not eat alone
- 15 Must not drink anything alone

Death

(Note: these will not prevent injury.)

- +5 Can only be killed by a spear
- +5 Can only be killed on a rainy day
- +10 Can only be killed in the sunshine (Point costs may be different in other climates.)
- +10 Can only be killed by a man in red armor
- +10 Cannot be killed by sharp metal
- +15 Cannot be killed by a man
- +15 Can only be killed with own sword while in bed with own wife
- +25 Can only be killed out of doors on a Tuesday by someone wearing red boots
- +30 Can only be killed halfway up a hill during a thunderstorm by a naked man bearing a 40-foot spear made of solid gold. (A GM who wants to worry a PC with this gesa should note that on any stormy day the person should often glimpse naked men who always turn out to be about to erect a maypole, or to have a gold-plated spear, or a bronze one!)



Gesas

The gesa (sometimes spelled geas, geis, or geasa) was one of the central ideas of Celtic life, not to be confused with the Geas spells in *GURPS Magic*.

Gesas were magical limitations or compulsions set by fate or powerful personalities – individual taboos. Possession of a gesa was a sign of being marked out by destiny, and was often what distinguished a hero from an ordinary person. A gesa was not like a vow, which could be broken at the expense of honor; death or disaster would inevitably follow the breaking of a gesa. They were not impossible to abide by, but they could make life difficult.

Most gesas were usually formulated as “Must” or “Must not,” ranging from the apparently harmless, “Must not eat swan,” to the dangerous, “Must not draw a sword without drawing blood.” Even the simplest gesa could cause unlimited trouble. Some create Odious Personal Habits (e.g., Must sleep with door open), while others are 40-point disadvantages in their own right (e.g., Must kill a man every day) Other gesas governed the conditions under which one could be killed.

The GM, and the enemies of the party, can use even the most harmless gesas against heroes, as in the story of Fergus Mac Roy. Fergus’ gesa was that he could never refuse a drink. He promised to escort Noisi and Deirdre safely to Connor but was waylaid and invited for a drink. He therefore had to let them go on alone. This led to their deaths and his exile.

SETTING A GESA

While many gesas were inborn, some were set on heroes by other Celts. Setting a gesa wasn’t like casting a spell, nor did it require Magical Aptitude. Every Celt had the ability to give gesas, but it wasn’t done lightly. Some





Glossary

Celtic Languages

There are two main Celtic language families, Goedelic (Q-Celtic) and Brythonic (P-Celtic). Goedelic languages are spoken in Ireland, Scotland, and on the Isle of Man, and Brythonic elsewhere in Britain and in Brittany. Gaulish, spoken over most of Europe before the Roman conquest, was also a Brythonic language. They can be distinguished by the use of P and Q and by Gw and F (e.g., Brythonic Gwynn and Goedelic Finn: both mean fair-haired).

In the stories nobody had any problem understanding anyone else. In reality Welsh and Irish Gaelic are very different, with no default to each other.

Most Irish spellings in the text are either reasonably phonetic or familiar to give people unfamiliar with the names at least a chance at the pronunciations. Below, the names are listed both as spelled in the text and in their most common variants. Genuine Gaelic pronunciation should only be attempted after at least 21 years of study!

Welsh pronunciation is phonetic, but with differences from English. *C* is always pronounced as *k*. *G* is always hard as in *gate* (never as *j*). *F* is *v*. *ff* is *f*. *R* is always rolled; *rh* is aspirated *hr*. *Ch* is a throaty sound as in German *Bach* or Scottish *loch*. *Dd* is a soft *th* as in *these*, not as in *thin*. *Ll* is a unique sound, *kl* or *hl* is close. If you don't know it never say *l*. *W* is a vowel pronounced *oo*. Vowels are mostly as in English, with the following exceptions. *U* is *i* as in *in*. *Y* is a vowel pronounced variously *ee*, *i* (as in *in*), or *uh*. As a word (meaning "the") it is always pronounced *uh* – *Ynys y Bwl* is pronounced *Uhniss uh Bool*. *Oe* is pronounced *oy*; *Coed* is *Coyd*, not *co-ed*.

The High Speech

Celts had a reputation for a very flowery style of speech, which can be encouraged in a campaign. This is far more important and fun than putting on

an accent, which would not be noticeable in the original language. Introductions between two heroes with impressive lineages could be a test of endurance and memory as each attempted to tell his entire life story (and that of his ancestors) in an unending stream of heroic feats and improbable events. Useful things to bear in mind are: description at all costs, massive exaggeration, and use of elaborate simile piled upon simile.

One of the great things about this style is that one can say absolutely nothing and take a long time doing it, thus confounding questions: "*And never a word did she speak, no, she was as silent as a babe in arms asleep who listens to her mother's heartbeat and does not wake; as silent as the grass on a windless day, a day of calm before the great winds that shake the trees and lift the roofs of duns and poor men's huts alike. No, she spoke not a word, and we know nothing of the matter.*" While GMs insisting on doing this in other settings might be lynched, in a *Celtic Myth* campaign, this can be great and acceptable fun.

Adna: Chief poet of Ulaid until his death.

Alba: Scotland.

Amairgen: Conall's father, a poet, satirist, and druid.

Angus Og: Another son of the Dadga, called Og, "The Young," because his mother bore him after what seemed only a single night.

Anluan Mac Maga: Cet's brother, killed by Conall Cearnach just before the Feast of Mac Da Tho's Pig.

Ardan and Ainly Mac Usli: Noisi's brothers; good fighters.

Arianrhod: Daughter of a Sidhe,

Bard: The first level of the Druidic Order, requiring a minimum of seven years of study.

Beann Mac Connor: A son of Connor with ambitions toward the kingship.

Beltain: The first of May; Great Festival. (Beltine, Bealtin)

Bérila na filed: Secret language of poets.

Bran ap Llyr: High king of Prydain, a giant, killed on an expedition to Mumu to avenge an insult to his sister, Branwen. His head was buried at Dinas Lludd.

Brehons: Judges.

Bricriu "of the Poisoned Tongue": Delighted in causing trouble.

Brythonic: P-Celtic language group.

Cael: A great warrior and poet.

Cailte: Last surviving member of the Fianna, also spoke of St. Patrick..

Cairell Mac Finn: Killed by Goll Mac Morna.

Caswallon ap Beli: High king of Prydain (in this form in the *Mabinogion*, he appears in Roman sources as Cassioveillaunus).

Cathbad: A very powerful Druid, father of Connor.

Canary Mor, Conaire Mor: A high king of Eriu with many strange gesas.

Conan Mac Morna: Known as Conan the Bald, he was a coward with a bitter tongue.

Conchonbar: See Connor.

Connachta, Connaght: One of the four *cui*ga of Eriu.

Conall Cearnach: "Conall of the Victories." Second only to Cuchulain as a champion.

Connla: Son of Cuchulain.

Connor Mac Nessa: King of Ulaid in the Red Branch period.

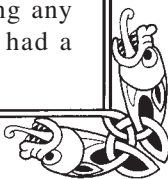
Creidne: The greatest woman warrior of the Fianna.

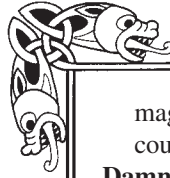
Crimmal: Finn Mac Cool's uncle.

Cuchulain: The Hound of Ulster, greatest champion of Ulaid and hero of the *Tain*. (Pronounced *Cuh-HOO-lan*.)

Cuiga: Country; one of the kingdoms making up Eriu.

The Dagda: "The Good God," the Dagda was surpassingly good at everything, and was a druid of great abilities. He had a magic cauldron which was capable of feeding any number of people. He also had a





magic harp, a Willful Weapon, which could move and sing on its own.

Damnar: Cornwall.

De Danaan: See *Tuatha de Danaan*.

Dermot, Diarmuid: Member of Finn's Fianna who stole away Grania, Finn's intended bride.

Druid: Loosely, any member of the Druidic Order. Specifically a Druid, the highest of the three orders, requiring a minimum of 21 years of study.

Duns: Forts.

Eriu, Erin: Ireland.

Ferdiad: Cuchulain's best friend, killed by him in single combat.

Fergus Mac Roy: Ex-king of Ulaid. Had a gesa never to refuse hospitality.

Fianna: War band, group of heroes sworn to defend Eriu against her enemies.

Filid: Class of learned men; includes judges and druids.

Finn Mac Cool, Fionn Mac Cumhal: Greatest leader of the Fianna of Eriu.

Fomor: A race similar to the Sidhe in power but hideously deformed and almost all evil. They ruled Eriu in early times but were driven to some small islands between Eriu and Alba after their defeat at the Second Battle of Moytura.

Gae Bolga: Belly spear. Cuchulain's great Willful Weapon.

Gesa, geas: Taboo, limitation set by destiny.

Glam Dicin: Druid Ban, sets a criminal outside society.

Goedelic: Q-Celtic language group.

Goll Mac Morna: The killer of Finn's father Cool and leader of the Fianna while Finn was a child.

Govan: The smith of the Tuatha de Danaan, an unsurpassed craftsman.

Grania (Grainne): Finn's intended bride.

Gwydion: Son of Don and Beli, druid, hero of the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogion*, foster-father of Lleuwlaw Gyffes

Hiraeth: A mood of longing, pleasant nostalgia, memories of what is lost beyond regaining. Welsh.

Imbolc: February 1; Great Festival.

Kilt: Tartan skirt worn by men of the highlands of Scotland since the 18th century A.D.

Laeg Mac Riagabur: Cuchulain's charioteer.

Leary Buadach or Leary Mac Ugaine: "Leary the Triumphant." Third champion of Ulaid.

Lagin, Leinster: One of the four *cuiga* of Eriu.

Llew Llaw Gyffes: Son of Arianrhod; married a woman made of flowers.

Lòg-n-enech: "Honor price," compensation for a wrong.

Lugh of the Long (or Skillful) Hand: One of the greatest warriors of the de Danaan; later a sun god for the Celts. Father of Cuchulain.

Lughnasa: August 1; Great Festival.

Mabinogion, the Four Branches of the: Name given to the Welsh stories mentioning Pryderi.

MacRoth: Maeve's steward and messenger.

Maeve, Medb: Queen of Connachta in the Red Branch period.

Manannan Mac Llyr, Mac Lir: Very powerful person who makes his home in Inish Manannan half way between Alba and Eriu. Eventually god of the sea.

Manawydan Mac Llyr: Brythonic version of the name of Manannan.

Math ap Mathonwy: Very powerful druid and ruler of Gwynedd.

Miach Mac Dioncet: A Tuathan druid, like his father a specialist in healing.

Morrigan, The: Sidhe or goddess who loved war and could turn herself into a raven.

Moytura: A plain in central Eriu. The First Battle of Moytura was fought between the Tuatha de Danaan and the Firbolg; the Second was the decisive victory of the Danaans over the Fomor.

Mughain Mong Eochaid: Queen of Ulaid, Connor's wife.

Mumu, Munster: One of the four *cuiga* of Eriu.

Nessa: Fergus' wife, mother of Connor by Cathbad the druid.

Noisi Mac Usli, Naoise: A great fighter and a very beautiful man.

Nuada of the Silver Arm: King of the de Danaans until he lost his arm at the First Battle of Moytura, fighting the Firbolg.

Ogma: Ogma was a son of the Dadga who possessed great gifts of eloquence. He invented the Ogham

alphabet and the way of ordering the tree magic.

Oisín: Son of Finn, who traveled to the Otherworld and returned to meet St. Patrick.

Ollave, Ollamdh: The second level of the Druidic Order, requiring a minimum of 14 years of study. (The Latin translation *Ovate* is, oddly enough, used by some modern neo-pagans.)

Oscar Mac Oisín: Son of Oisín and Evy, Oscar was the mightiest warrior among the Fianna, a berserker with *riastradh*.

P-Celtic: The family of Celtic languages that includes Welsh, Breton, Gaulish, and Cornish. (Brythonic).

Prydain: Mainland Britain, "The Island of the Mighty."

Pryderi ap Pwyll: King of Dyfed.

Pwyll: King of Dyfed, head of Annwn. (Pronounced *Poo-eehl*)

Q-Celtic: The family of Celtic languages that includes Irish and Scottish Gaelic and Manx. (Goedelic)

Rhiannon: A Sidhe associated with horses and wife of Pwyll.

Riastradh: Battle frenzy, or the distortion that accompanies it. (Pronounced *ri-astra*.)

Saltuf Mac Roy: Cuchulain's mortal father.

Samain, Samhain: October 31st/November 1st; Great Festival.

Sencha: A highly-regarded druid and judge.

Sidhe: The race of super-powerful Celtic "elves" also known as Tuatha de Danaan. Sidhe literally meant "mound-dwellers" and was applied to them after the Tuatha de Danaan moved to the Otherworld. (Pronounced *shee*.)

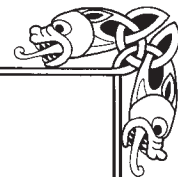
Tain Bo Cuailgne: "The Cattle Raid of Cooley," the tale of Queen Maeve's attempt to steal a valuable bull and of Cuchulain's heroic defense.

Tara, Teamhair: The dwelling of the high king and the most important dun in Eriu.

Tathlums: "Brain balls," magical sling stones made from human (or Sidhe!) brains.

Tuatha de Danaan: See *Sidhe*.

Ulaid, Ulster: One of the four *cuiga* of Eriu.

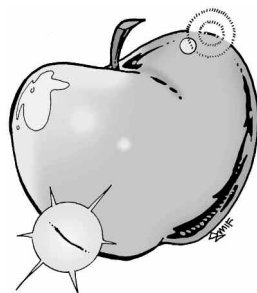


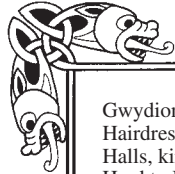
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