

## Ogma's Tale: The Dagda and the Morrigan at the River Unius

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A tale you've asked, and a tale you shall have, of the Dagda and his envoy to the Morrigan. I've been tasked with the telling: lore-keeper of the Tuatha de Danann, champion to two kings, brother to the Good God, and as tied up in the tale as any... Ogma am I, this Samhain night.

It was on a day just before Samhain that my brother and the dark queen met, he on his duties to our king, Nuada, and Lugh his battle master (and our half-brother besides). But before I come to that, let me set the stage.

The Fomorians were a torment upon Eireann and a misery to we Tuatha, despite our past victory over the Fir Bolg. Though we gained three-quarters of Eireann at that first battle of Maige Tuireadh, we did not cast off the Fomor who oppressed the land. Worse, we also lost our king, Nuada, when the loss of his hand disqualified him from ruling. Instead, we accepted the rule of the half-Fomorian king, Bres, through whom the Fomorians exerted their control.

Bres ruined the court of the Tuatha, stilling its songs, emptying its tables, and banning all competitions of skill. None of the court could perform their duties. I alone was permitted to serve, and that only to haul firewood for the hearth at Tara.

Our first rejection of the Fomor was to unseat Bres, once Nuada was whole again, his hand restored. The deposed king ran to his Fomorian kin and demanded they return him to power. The cruel Fomorian king Balor was only too happy to agree and was joined by others, among them, King Indech mac De Domnan.

War was brewing again, but for a time, Nuada and his court bore the insults of the Fomor. That changed when Lugh Samildanach came to Tara, as another champion told you at Lughnassadh. When he became master of battle, Lugh gave us each tasks. To the Dagda, he assigned the work of scouting the enemy, reporting on their numbers and strengths, to help create a plan of battle.

So, we come to the promised moment. Before Samhain, the Dagda was called near his northern home in Glen Etain, to meet a woman who said she had information. He met her at the banks of the River Unius. She was at the river bathing, nude except for her black hair hung down in nine plaits, with one foot on either bank. It seemed that the water flowed from her body... and perhaps it did, for this was the Morrigan, the dark queen herself.

They spoke, and she offered her aid in exchange for a service: that the Dagda should couple with her, there and then, at the river. My brother agreed and served her well indeed. In return, first she gave him a secret: the Fomorian hosts would land at Mag Scetne and could be met there before they marched inland. Better, the Morrigan would join with the magicians of Eireann and face the foe at Scetne herself, at the ford of the Unius. Last, she promised personally to stand against king Indech, “to draw out the blood of his heart and the valor of his kidneys.”

With these fine promises, the Dagda went on about his duties. He returned in time to Tara and planned the battle with our king, our champion, myself, and other leaders of the Tuatha. When the time came, he gathered us around and asked us to recall what services we had promised.

I told him, “I am a match for the king and can hold my own against twenty-seven of his friends. I will deliver a third of the battle for the men of Eireann.”

The Morrigan was present, too, and answered: “I have stood fast; I shall pursue what was watched; I will be able to kill; I will be able to destroy those who might be subdued.”

The Dagda said, “I will fight for the men of Ireland with mutual smiting and destruction and wizardry. Their bones under my club will soon be as many as hailstones under the feet of herds of horses, where the double enemy meets on the battlefield of Maige Tuireadh.”

When the battle was joined, the Morrigan did as she swore, joining with the magicians of Eireann to weave a powerful spell, which strengthened the Tuatha as it weakened the Fomorians:

“Arise, kings, to battle here!

Seizing honor, speaking battle-spells, destroying flesh, flaying, snaring, seizing battle... ..seeking out forts, giving out a death feast, fighting battles, singing poems, proclaiming druids collect tribute around in memory.

Bodies wounded in a rushing assault, pursuing, exhausting, breaking, prisoners taken, destruction blooms, hearing screams, fostering armies battle, occupants moving, a boat sails, arsenal cuts off noses.

I see the birth of every bloody battle, red-wombed, fierce, the necessary battlefield, enraged.

Against the point of a sword, reddened shame, outside great battlements, preparing towards them, proclaiming a line of battle.

Fomorians in the chanted margins, drive forward a reddened vigorous champion, shaking hound-killing warriors together, bloody beating, ancient war band towards their doom.”

Her only lapse in her promises was not her fault, as it fell to me to meet Indech on the field, in single combat. We fell indeed, both together, but only I rose again. And the Morrigan did take the valor from his kidneys... and the blood from his heart, quite literally, bearing two handfuls of it away to pour into her River Unius.

Before Indech and I met, Lugh had already slain king Balor. With their leaders dead, the Fomorians sued for peace, retreating from Eireann. There were many negotiations and other deeds done before the land was fully freed, but those are tales for other times.

When all was done, the Morrigan herself proclaimed our victory, sounding through every river and stream and brook:

Peace to the sky,  
sky to the earth,  
earth beneath sky.  
Strength in everyone,  
a cup very full,  
a fullness of honey.  
Honor enough,  
summer in winter.  
Spear supported by shield,  
shields supported by forts,  
forts fierce eager for battle.  
Fleece from sheep,  
woods grown with antler-tips.  
Forever destructions have departed.  
Nuts upon on trees,  
a branch drooping-down,  
drooping from growth;  
wealth for a son,  
a son very learned,  
A bull's neck in yoke,  
a bull from a song.  
Knots in woods,  
wood for a fire,  
fire as desired.  
Palisades new and bright,  
salmon their victory,  
the Boyne their home,  
a home with great size.  
New growth after spring,  
in autumn, horses increase.  
The land held secure,  
land recounted with excellence of word.  
Be eternally mighty, excellent woods,  
peace to the sky,  
be it nine times eternal.

Praise to the Morrigan, maker of kings! Praise to the Dagda, king after Lugh! My brother gained us a much-needed ally with his diplomacy, that past Samhain eve.

The Fomorians failed to appreciate Her. Their might was squandered in pride, greed and abuse, then overthrown by lesser force put to better use. Though She revels in the battlefield, its chaos and its gore, a static, tyrant's empire is as evil as a war.