

MYSTERIOUS

WORLD

I R E L A N D

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P R E S S

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Foreword



“St. Columba at Iona” © 1999, Jim Fitzpatrick.



Welcome to *Mysterious World: Ireland*, the first in a series of travel guides to be published by Mysterious World Press™, a division of Mysterious World® (<http://www.mysteriousworld.com>). Mysterious World is an online travel site that has been in publication since 1998, offering a variety of travel and related information including a quarterly journal with articles about exotic travel destinations around the world. Our journal is by far the most popular part of our site, and since 1998 *Mysterious World Journal* has grown in size from a handful of travel articles generating a few dozen visitors per week to close to a hundred articles with thousands of visitors per *day* as the size and quality of our journal continues to grow. The combination of quality of research, writing and design to be found in *Mysterious World Journal* makes us stand out head and shoulders above the competition, and we are increasingly setting the standard for knowledge and innovation in the fields of travel, history and ancient mysteries for all others to follow.

Over the years, the quality of our articles has led many of our loyal readers to express an interest in subscribing to a print version of our magazine. However, I have found that print magazines have a shallow and transitory quality about them that makes them unsuitable as a serious publishing medium. Academic journals are somewhat better, as they are non-commercial in orientation, but precious few libraries keep many journals in storage, and as a result much knowledge has been lost to obscurity. My own experiences in performing research for many of our articles has forced me to explore many dusty, dungeonlike basements and decipher the labyrinthine coding systems of numerous libraries, cracking open countless books and bound journals, many of which had not seen the light of day since well before I was born. Moreover, with the advent of the Internet, printing magazines and journals has become an inefficient and redundant means of publishing, often requiring the same information to be processed and published in two entirely different (and expensive) media. For my part, I find leafing through stacks of magazines and journals to find “that one article” to be a time-consuming and unnecessary chore that the Internet was specifically designed to eliminate. To this end, we will continue to publish *Mysterious World Journal* as an online-only publication that can be easily accessed by absolutely anyone in the world who has an Internet connection, and an open mind.

However, though *Mysterious World Journal* covers a variety of subjects, some of which are only peripherally related to travel, it is still essentially a travel journal. As such, it occurred to us that our readers may have a need to take *Mysterious World* on the road with them — “off the beaten path” — where Internet connections and other aspects of postmodern civilization are few and far between. To this end, we have devised a means of putting *Mysterious World* in print in a format that is truly useful — as a new type of travel guide, the *Mysterious World Travel Guides* series. But our travel guides are not merely dispassionate listings of sights to see, places to eat, and so forth; i.e., “just another travel guide”, though they will include a great deal of useful travel information. They will be more like a form of travel journal in that they will include not only useful travel information, but also the personal story of one man’s journey throughout each country, written in a language and terminology that is readable and interesting to any reader, from the hard-core adventurer to the armchair traveler.

Also unlike most travel guides, the *Mysterious World Travel Guides* series offers an in-depth look into the history and ancient mysteries of every country that we will be exploring. From the most ancient historical and archaeological records we will explore the myths and legends, deities and demigods, kings, queens, warriors, wizards and creatures great and small that populate the histories and mythologies of each country and give it its distinctive character. As such, our travel guides should interest a wide variety of readers, particularly those interested in books on travel, history, and/or ancient mysteries, and those who like all three should find our books very satisfying indeed. That, combined with our unique, full-color format replete with hundreds of photographs and illustrations by top artists from around the world should make each *Mysterious World Travel Guide* something that you will use and cherish for years to come.

So kick back, relax and spend some quality time with *Mysterious World: Ireland*, the first in our *Mysterious World Travel Guides* series, and experience the ancient mysteries, history, and one man's journey to rediscover mysterious Ireland.

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Introduction



“Tuan: The Coming of Nemed” © 1992, Jim Fitzpatrick.

*I am Tuan
I am legend
I am memory turned myth.*

I am the story teller. Warriors and young boys creep away from the hearths of wine halls to hear me. Greedy for tales of honor and history they watch my lips with bright eyes, for I give them what is more precious than gold: treasure unlocked from my heart.

My words burn like flame in the darkness. I speak and hearts beat high, swords warm to the hand; under my spell boys become men.

But I know both the pain as well as the brightness of fire. I am the story teller who cannot find rest. The peace of death will never be mine. I am condemned to watch and to speak; my hand reaches in vain for the warrior's sword.

Once I, Tuan, was a man, the chieftain of a great race, the Cessair. My warriors sat on wolf skins; they raised golden goblets to me brimming with wine. Neither evil nor harm dared cross the threshold where I sat, my throne studded with jewels, inlaid with ivory.

But the gods envy the happiness of men; flood and sword combined to destroy my people. Now the wine hall stood empty, ruined; doorway and roof gaped wide to receive the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air. It was ordained that I alone should be saved to bear witness to my people's fate. I watched helpless while the fair land of Èireann was ravaged by the scavengers and foes. The golden cities I once loved lay fathoms deep beneath gray seas.

For many years I wandered as a man seeking shelter in caves and the depths of the forest; but when at last the noble race of Nemed came to reclaim their homeland I was barred from greeting them as either chieftain or warrior. Another fate was mine; to watch unseen, keeping the secrets of time close in heart and brain. The gods had singled me out for a strange fate, unfamiliar pains and pleasures, for as the years passed, they bound me within the bodies of beast and bird so that I might watch and keep the history of Èireann unnoticed by men.

The first transformation came upon me unaware. I had grown old as a man. The years had left my body naked and weak; my joints ached and my hair fell gray and matted over my bowed shoulders. One day a great weariness came upon me. I sought shelter in my cave certain that death had claimed me. For many days and nights I slept. Then at last I awoke to the sun. My limbs felt strong and free. My heart leapt up within me for I had been reborn as Tuan, the great-horned stag, King of the deer-herds of Èireann. The green hills were mine, the valleys and the streams.

As I ran free across the heather-covered plains, the children of Nemed were driven from their homeland. Only I remained, grown old as a stag, their story locked in my heart. Then the great heaviness of change again weighed me down; again I sought shelter in my cave. Wolves eager for my blood and sinewy flesh howled to the moon. But I slept, floating loose in dream-time. Through the heaviness of sleep I felt myself grow young again. When the low rays of sunrise touched me I awoke.

The wolves still sniffed about the entrance to my cave. But now I was young and strong; fit to face them. I, Tuan, with joyful heart, thrust my sharp tusks out of my lair and the wolves fled yelping like frightened dogs. I was fresh, lusty with life; I had been born again, a black boar bristling with power, thirsty for blood. Now I was a king of herds; my back was sharp with dark bristles; my teeth and tusks were ready to cut and kill. All creatures feared me.



“Tuan above Moy Tura” © 1977, Jim Fitzpatrick.

But while I had lain locked in dreams a new race of men had come to disturb the silence of mountain and valley. They were the Fir Bolg and they also belonged to the family of Nemed. These I did not chase and when they chased me I fled, for their blood was mine also. The Fir Bolg divided the island into five provinces and proclaimed the title *Ard-Rí*, that is High King, for the first time in Éireann.

As I roamed the purple hills I would often leave my herd and gaze across to the High King's hall and remember with sadness the time when I also had sat in council, with warriors at my feet, and felt the bright eyes of women gaze upon me.

Once again the ache of change drove me back to my lonely cave in Ulster. After three days fasting, another death floated me beyond dream-time. Nights circled from summer into winter until one morning I woke and soared high into the clear sky.

*I was reborn
I was lord of the heavens
I was Tuan the great sea-eagle.*

I, who had been king among the heather and scented woodlands, became lord of the heavens. From the highest mountain I could see the field-mouse gathering wheat husks — nothing escaped my sharp eye.

Motionless, feathering the air, riding the wind, I watched as another tribe of the children of Nemed came to Èireann. Known as the Tuatha dé Danann they sailed down over the mountains in a magic fleet of sky riding ships until they came to rest among the Red Hills of Rein led by Nuada, their king.

Rather than fight their own flesh and blood the Tuatha Dé offered to share the island with the tribes of the Fir Bolg. But on the advice of his elders Eochai, their High King refused, and the battle lines were drawn up.

I, Tuan the eagle, watched that fratricidal struggle; that terrible slaughter of kinsmen known as the First Battle of Moy Tura. I saw the same green plain across which I had, as a stag and boar, led my herd, drenched in blood. There I saw for the last time the Fir Bolg in their fullness and their pride, in their beauty and their youth, ranged against the glittering armies of the Tuatha Dé Danann. The battle was fierce and ebbed and flowed like waves on a sea of fortune and price.

The circles of my eyes were rimmed with bitter tears as I watched that dreadful carnage of kinsmen, for all who fought were bound by a common bond, the blood of Nemed the Great. The battle raged for many days; death cut down the flower of youth on both sides.

At last the Tuatha dé Danann took the sovereignty of Èireann from the Fir Bolg and their allies. But in that First Battle of Moy Tura, Nuada, King of the Tuatha Dé, had his arm struck off, and from that loss there came sorrow and trouble to his people. For it was a law with the Tuatha dé Danann that no man imperfect in form could be king. So it happened that Nuada, who had led his people to victory, had to abdicate his throne and hand the royal crown over to the elders of his race.

I, Tuan, the sea-eagle, wept secretly with Nuada over the loss of his crown, for he was a noble king and a just ruler who had won back the land of Èireann for his people. His mutilation and his loss were the result of his bravery in battle. For he was a great warrior, skilled and courageous and as one with his god, the sun.

When the noise of battle and the wailing of women had faded into silence, when the earth had soaked up the blood, when the plain of Moy Tura had become a sad, spirit-haunted place marked by pillars and

cairns, I, Tuan, still sailed high above it. I knew that that same force of history that governed the fortunes of men had made me the winged bearer of myth. I knew that the pattern of change is never completed until the world's end. Still I would have to bear the burden of man's triumph and grief.

*I am Tuan
I am Legend
I am memory turned myth.*

*I have lived through the ages
In the shape of man, beast and bird
Mute witness to great events,
Guardian of past deeds.¹*

On the surface, Tuan Mac Carrill appears to have been a very long-lived man indeed, a man whose life was mysterious beyond easy reckoning. However, Tuan was not a man, nor an eagle, but instead a very clever literary device that had been invented by the early Christian monks as a means to help them organize the ancient history of the land that they themselves would name "Ireland".

Using the "Tuan" narrative device, the Irish monks were able to knit together a comprehensive history of Ireland. Tuan, a mythical chieftain of the tribe of Cessair, the first known civilized people believed to have ever inhabited the lonely isle, starts his narrative with how he had seen his people destroyed by the Great Flood of Noah, and by the great world war that had immediately preceded it. Yet he himself was saved by God for greater things, to be a witness to the entire history of Ireland, even up to the present time.

The use of this narrative device was necessary because, before the Christian monks had intervened, there was no "Ireland" as we understand it today. The history of the land now known as Ireland up to that time had been, save for a few periods of relative stability, primarily a series of chaotic upheavals caused by the constant invasions of numerous peoples, some of whom were merely looking for plunder and con-

quest, and others who were sailing to the lonely isle of green west of civilization in hopes of finding a fresh start. In that sense Ireland was the first true “melting pot” of the ancient West, preceding America in that role by thousands of years.

In this isolated land each new wave of immigrants managed to hold on to their ancient customs and traditions, and many of the earliest invaders who had been defeated in battle by succeeding waves of invaders never left the island entirely, but instead were restricted to certain isolated sections of the country where they continued to worship their own tribal deities and develop their own unique histories and traditions. Christianity, which arrived over a thousand years after the Partholónians had first set foot on Ireland’s Flood-washed virgin soil, came to be the first lasting, unifying force for the lonely isle, due largely to the Christian monks who worked tirelessly to preserve, organize and make sense of the vast amounts of ancient, and largely oral, traditions of the various ancient peoples that still populated the land. And contrary to the stereotype of Christian missionaries, these monks not only did not erase the ancient and typically pagan history of Ireland, but are, by their tireless work in preserving the old myths and legends, most likely the sole reason much of it still survives to the present day.

For this reason, to help preserve and defend the history and traditions of Ireland to pass on to future generations, we have chosen to follow in the footsteps of the ancient monastic traditions and take the same objective, unbiased look at all of Ireland’s history, both pagan and Christian, in all its glory — and contradictions. Also like those ancient scholars, we will continue to employ Tuan the Eagle as a narrative device, setting him aflight once more to oversee and help explain all that Ireland has to offer to all who earnestly seek to explore her history, and her mysteries. To this end, we have developed a design that incorporates the image of an eagle adapted from the famous *Book of Kells* that we will use to represent “Tuan the Eagle” in the top outer corners of every page hereafter. In the third and largest section, “The Journey”, there also will be a special section on every page: an emerald-green bar on the outer margins that will contain not only comprehensive and context-relevant travel information, but also special comments labeled “Tuan’s Notes” that will refer the reader back to the first two sections, “The Mystery” and “The History”, for more information on selected topics.

“The Journey” is also further divided into four major sections, one for each of the four ancient provinces — Leinster, Munster, Connaught and Ulster — that Ireland has been formally divided into since ancient times (now they are only informal, regional divisions). Each of these sections is indicated by characters adapted from each of the four Gospels in the Four Gospels page from *The Book of Kells*: the man, from the Book of Matthew, which is used for Leinster; the lion, from the Book of Mark, which is used for Munster; the bull, from the Book of Luke, which is used for Connaught, and the eagle, from the Book of John, which is used for Ulster (see p. 382 for the complete folio). These characters all appear in the emerald margin, and also serve as handy thumbmarks on the edge of the pages that allow you to locate the four subsections of The Journey more quickly.

So, now that we have set the context, let us take wing with Tuan and begin our journey to rediscover mysterious Ireland in Section I: The Mystery.



Notes

¹Tuan narrative from Jim Fitzpatrick's *The Book of Conquests* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978).