

From Utopia to the Fall

For millennia, the faerie had remained interlocked in a precarious balance of power between the Seelie, the Unseelie and their respective Courts, and the wild faerie caught between them.

In the Fourth World, the fae moved freely about the realms, unfettered by their respective rulers to use magic as they saw fit, never realizing that mana was, in fact, a non-renewable resource. This Age of Legend, to the fae, is known as the Era of the Gilded Rose; their ballads sing only of a golden, honeyed harmony maintained by all. Reveling in this utopia, the faerie did not realize that mana had been slowly leaking from the earthly plane for some time.

Though there is no way to prove otherwise, it is believed that the denizens of faerie, including the residents of Tír na nÓg, did not realize what was happening until it was too late. Or, as is more likely, those who did learn that mana was depleting rapidly were powerless to stop it. It is known that the dawning of the Fifth World was slow and agonizing for the fae worldwide, and as magic eroded from the fabric of the earthly plane at a terrifying rate, terror struck the various courts and their families. None, however, was believed to have been hit harder than the Tuatha de Danaan.

The Rule of Many

With all eyes focused on the Seelie Court's emissaries, humans (and some metahumans) have mistakenly assumed that Tír na nÓg contains the faeries' sole ruling body. From the kappa to the aziza to the wendigo, the fae are not unique to the Tír nations, and though the truth of their origins may never be exposed or understood, a mounting pile of evidence points to other politically active courts and dignitaries. Whether they rule from their own meta- or astral plane or not, metahumans—which includes the fae—are a global phenomenon. Not only are they as culturally rich and diverse as the Tuatha de Danaan themselves, they are also just as enigmatic and cautious, too. Perhaps even more so.

The dearth of magical energies affected the fae in many ways, and the knowledge that mana was not an eternal, abundant resource shocked them into action. Despite the evidence provided by theorists and scholars, mana was not drained evenly from the earthly plane—its disappearance was uneven and unpredictable. Thus hundreds, if not thousands, of fae were stranded in fields, glens, and mountaintops devoid of mana, only to transform into the bodies of humans, animals, and plants within hours. In their terrible grief, the surviving royal families blamed each other for the loss of their kin, their shortsightedness at their inability to control and monitor mana, and their forced separation from the humans. Each surviving family and faction—Seelie, Unseelie, and Wild—plotted against one another until their anger begot a terrible, decades-long conflict called the War of Sorrows.

The War of Sorrows may have taken place long ago at the beginning of the Fifth World, but its significance reverberates. What began as a battle of misplaced grief drew in fae from all over the world to fight against their own extinction. Some of those fae survived, trapped within the heart of faerie, while many others died by the hands of an enemy they never fully understood. Hundreds, if not thousands, of faeries died, and over half of the original Tuatha de Danaan were wiped out. As the war escalated night after night, the shadows of the dead eventually ripped through the gossamer-thin magic of the faerie realm, and an echo of their fading essences spilled onto the earthly plane.

Humans have witnessed the epic battles that pitted family against family and wiped out entire faerie clans—though they do not know what they were seeing. Those humans who witnessed the spectacle believed they were watching a Great Hunt that occurred once every fortnight; their stories weaved tales of luminous ghosts battling over rivers and streams, in forests and in glades under pale moonlight, hunting an invisible prey. But by the time the spirits of the fae bled through to the earthly plane, humans had already forgotten magic was once real. So, when the brassy horns of battle were heard from one end of a village to the other, the humans misunderstood the faerie's bloodlust, and proclaimed the fae to be sinful demons who had declared humans to be their enemy. This is how the roots of bigotry against elves and orks and dwarves and trolls dug deep into the psyche of humans, only to bear fruit centuries later in the Sixth World. This is another repercussion from the War of Sorrows.

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Eventually, the War of Sorrows ended as it began: in dark and desolate grief for all those who'd been lost. The fae who hailed from distant lands were welcome to remain in the heart of Tír na nÓg, and its true inhabitants settled in for a long winter, waiting for the dawn of the next age.

Despite their reputation to the contrary, the faerie did not hate the humans of the Fifth World—at least at first—for they understood what mortals did not: humanity did not control the cycle of magic and, due to their limitations, did not cause the deaths of their many relatives. As the Tuatha de Danaan slaughtered each other on one plane, however, their brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, loved, lost, and died on the other—and those earth-bound souls never returned home. Many of the fae would now be horrified to admit it, but because they had murdered so many of their kind in their mystical lands, those terror-stricken souls could not properly be recycled, and the disruption of this cycle—and not the depletion of mana—is what rent the fabric of their metaplane beyond repair. This is why the Fifth World is considered by many faeries to be the Era of the Corpse-Lily, as it is a time of unspeakable grief and bloodshed, for the surviving fae of Tír na nÓg almost destroyed not only each other, but their very plane reality.

As time passed, and the veil between the planes grew so thick neither the descendants of those early fae nor their true kin were able to see, feel, or hear one another, proof that Tír na nÓg and the Tuatha de Danaan ever existed could only be found in epic ballads and laments for the dead. Forgotten and left to their own devices, a grim and silent peace eventually fell over the Courts and their fractured lands; worrying that what happened on the earthly plane might also happen in their homes, too, many faeries channeled their energies into artifacts and relics, like the Sixth World Tarot, to conserve mana for the next generation. Some of the surviving fae fell into a deep, mystical slumber, vowing only to wake when the curtain between the planes came crashing down, when mana returned and the Sixth World would heal their sundered lands, not knowing how many suns would have to rise and set before a new era would begin.

The rare few who survived the passage of time find that their home is not what they remember it. Those faerie who have yet to rise remain sleeping in their sealed crypts until someone—or some thing—dares to enter those hallowed grounds.

The ruling families of the Tuatha de Danaan never slept, however, and worked tirelessly to restore the Seelie Court and prepare it for the new age that would eventually arrive.

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A Realm of Broken Hearts

The Tuatha de Danaan remember the Year of Chaos like it was yesterday, for the mana that began to flow in the Sixth World shrouded their mystical lands, too, filling in the gaping wounds that had existed since the beginning of the Era of the Corpse-Lily. This sudden rush of mana fractured their fragile realm further, for much of the damage caused by the War of Sorrows was irreparable. As the magical energies shifted, these forces began to rupture the physical shape of the faerie kingdoms. Though no one is certain how or why or when it happened, whole sections of Tír na nÓg manifested in the reality of the earthly plane, while other lands—the mystical heart containing the Seelie Court, Unseelie Court, and surrounding glens containing wild fae and ruins from the Third World—never fully materialized, and remained as the “space between spaces” on a metaplane accessible by those who know the way in.

As the planes shifted and changed in the early days of the Sixth World, so did the fae. Some remained in the Seelie Court, while others blended in with their newly birthed metahuman relatives, to help form the Tír nations of Tír Tairngíre and Tír na nÓg on the earthly plane. Keeping their origins secret, the original fae—or True Fae—experienced first-hand how humans were repulsed by their existence. The peace that humans and fae once enjoyed, long, long ago in idyllic years of the Fourth World, had been replaced by revulsion and bigotry that escalated quickly to paranoid rants and riots. Human who once described the legendary fae using words of wonderment and delight, like “enchanting” and “otherworldly,” quickly turned to slurs such as “dandelion eater,” “sewer pixie,” and “mana-waster” once they stood beside them. (The frequent lack of distinction between elves and fae among the masses caused additional problems and prejudice.)

Word of the growing human vs. metahuman crisis quickly reached the ears of the Tuatha de Danaan, who struggled to make sense of this news. Had they not always treated the humans fairly? Did the humans not traditionally enjoy their blessings? Though precious few fae have survived the ending of the Fourth, the Fifth, and the dawn of the Sixth, none could remember what the Age of Legend was truly like, and they stumbled on, bewildered and frightened, hiding in their respective Courts to plot against one another like they’d always done.

It is commonly believed that the bigotry against metahumans is the primary reason why the Seelie Court has operated in secret, accessible to the True Fae and no other. This is only partly the cause, as their need to remain mysterious and undiscovered is also due to their widespread, internalized fear that the War of Sorrows might happen again. While the Tuatha de Danaan—and Lady Brane Deigh herself—understand the havoc humans can wreak, they do not believe their biases will result in the destruction of the Tír nations. In truth, their location remains a secret because the fae face much greater threats than the ignorance of a few bigots: greedy megacorporations intent on dissecting and collecting every inch of their mystical realm, immense dragons who desire nothing more than to swallow them whole, and the biggest danger of all, the Unseelie who want nothing more than to destroy the fae and the metaplane they call home. Should their borders be open to all, or so the Seelie Court’s courtiers claim, the Unseelie would no longer be filled with spies and thieves—their ranks would swell with racists, too.

Defending themselves on all sides, Lady Brane Deigh and the fellow members of her Seelie Court struggle to balance the needs of the court and their realm against the many forces that seek to end or change them.

The Impossible Gate

The Seelie Court

The Unseelie Court

The Court of the True Fae

Dragons of the Court

The Daily Struggles

Forms of Magic

Playing in the Seelie Court

The Flow of Time

Many humans grew up listening to fairy tales, and they think that the fae are immortal. This is a half-truth wrapped in a legend and a lie. The river of time flows at different speeds in the faery metaplane, and this is what led to the mistaken belief that they live forever. The Tuatha de Danaan can be hurt—and killed—like their metahuman relatives on the earthly plane, but they age at a much slower rate provided they remain close to the heart of Tír na nÓg. The vagaries of this time flow are mysterious; sometimes, time is slow in the Court; other times, it is fast.

Though no one knows for certain, many of the fae believe that “time gone wrong” is not a natural or accidentally occurrence, that this is either the ripple effect of a protective spell no longer working properly, or a security measure to protect rare and powerful artifacts of varying degrees of magical abilities. Some courtiers whisper that controlling the flow of time would be something the Tuatha de Danaan would want to do. It is more likely, however, that mana does not act uniformly and doesn’t permeate this realm evenly throughout. Thus, mana might be gathering—for whatever reason—within the Seelie Court itself, forming a pool of pure magic.

Travelers should take note that the flow of time can be measured within the fae realm; clocks and timekeeping devices will accurately display how fast (or how slow) time is moving. Too, the effects of time are not necessarily felt by its visitors because, just like the belief that the fae are immortal, there is some truth to the fairy tales. For the most part, time will move slower in the Court than it does in the Sixth World; generally speaking, a month spent in the Court is equivalent to a day passing in the Sixth World. There is, however, the mysterious effect of faerie food and drink. While not everything prepared in the Court has this effect, the specialties of the Queen’s kitchen, honey cake and leann daerg (red ale) will slow time, so that the effect is reversed—one day will pass in the Court for each month in the material plane. Visitors to the Court, then, need to be careful about what they eat.

Visitors will naturally question how people experiencing time differently can co-exist within the same Court. This simply joins the ranks of the mysteries of the Court and its ability to make seemingly immutable laws of time and space into a toy, or perhaps stretched taffy.



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