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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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How Finn McCool became the leader of the Fianna

In Ireland long ago, there were kings, chiefs, lawyers, merchants, farmers and warriors just like there are now. However, there was also a group of men known as the Fianna who were not tied to any specific profession. They were known for being mighty hunters and warriors who would fight for the High King of Ireland when necessary. The Fianna lived mostly in the outdoors, in hunting-booths they made in the woods where they would hunt deer and wolves. At the time, Ireland had vast forests and many beautiful lakes and rivers.

The Fianna were led by a great chief, Cumhal, but a tribe within the Fianna called the Clan Morna, under the rule of Goll, rebelled against him out of jealousy for his power and wealth. They defeated and killed Cumhal at the Battle of Cnucha and took the Treasure Bag of the Fianna which contained valuable jewels, magic weapons, and strange things that had come down from far-off days when the Fairy Folk and mortal men battled for the lordship of Ireland.

Cumhal's wife, Murna, had two sons, the older of whom, Tulcha, fled the country in fear of the new leader and went to serve the King of Scotland. The younger son, Demna, was born after Cumhal's death and was hidden in the wild woods of the Slieve Bloom Mountains by a

Druidess and another wise woman of Cumhal's household to protect him from the sons of Morna. They trained him to hunt, fish, and throw a spear and he grew strong and beautiful as a child of the Fairy Folk. The Druidess also taught him about his heritage and his right to become the captain of the Fianna.

One day, while he was still a boy, Finn was wandering through the woods when he stumbled upon the mansion of a wealthy lord. There, many boys, the sons of prominent men in Ireland, were being trained in various physical activities and exercises. They invited him to play a game of hurling with them. He did so, but the side he was on won too easily, so they divided again, and yet again, giving fewer and fewer to Demna's side, until at last he alone drove the ball to the goal. This was much to the dismay and jealousy of the other boys. They turned on him and tried to kill him, but he fought them off and left. When the boys told what had happened, the wealthy lord asked them who it was that had defeated them single-handed. They said: "It was a tall, strong lad and he had fair skin." From then on, Finn was known as "Finn, the Fair One."

As he grew older, Finn gathered a group of loyal followers who were drawn to his strength, bravery, and kind heart. He and his band went hunting in the forests and caught the attention of the Fianna, the group of elite warriors under the High King. The Fianna, led by Goll and the sons of Morna, began to hear tales of him and his exploits, and they sent trackers to inquire about him, for they had an inkling of who this wonderful fair-haired youth might be.

Finn's foster mothers warned him of the danger and urged him to leave, because they knew Goll and his men would kill Finn if they found him. So he set out on his own, armed only with his hunting gear and weapons. He was sad to leave his foster mothers, but excited for the adventures that lay ahead.

Now, after the death of Finn's father, Cumhal, his brother Crimmal and a few others of the older warriors of the Fianna fled to a remote forest in Connacht, where they built a small shelter and lived off the land and where they hoped the conquerors would never find them. One day, they were startled by the sound of voices and hounds approaching. They feared the worst, but were relieved to find that it was only a company of young men coming towards their hut, with one in front who seemed to be their leader. He was taller than the rest, broad shouldered, and was carrying a bag.



The young man stepped in front of his group and shouted, "Who among you is Crimmal?"

One of the elders responded, "I am Crimmal."

The young man, moved to tears, knelt before the older man and took his hands. He introduced himself as Finn, son of Cumhal, and announced that the day of revenge

had arrived. That night, the group celebrated and had a feast. Crimmal explained that it had been predicted that one day the blood of Cumhal would be avenged and his descendants would rule the Fianna again. He recognized Finn's bag as the Treasure Bag belonging to Cumhal. Finn recounted his tale of how he had obtained these treasures, including defeating and killing the Lord of Luachar who was a cruel man and finding the Treasure Bag in his basement.

Finn also asked about his own mother's whereabouts, to which Crimmal replied that she had remarried and was living with her new husband, having not been troubled by the sons of Morna since his father's death.

Finn believed that he needed to become wise and learn more before he could become the leader of the Fianna. So, after leaving the old men in the woods, he went to learn from Finegas, a bard who lived by the River Boyne near the village of Slane. After several years Finegas told Finn that he could teach him no more and wished him blessings and victory.

Now we will tell the story of how Finn became the leader of the Fianna of Ireland.

At this time, Ireland was ruled by a powerful king named Conn, who was known as "Conn of the Hundred Battles." He held a yearly assembly at Tara where all the lords and princes of the Gael gathered, and it was an inviolable law that no fighting was allowed at this assembly so that every man who had a right to come to that Assembly could come there and sit next his deadliest enemy in peace.

At this assembly, a young man named Finn, who was tall and fair, was seen for the first time. Conn noticed him and sent him a horn of wine, asking him to declare his name and lineage. Finn introduced himself as the son of Cumhal and said he was there to serve the king in war as his father had. Conn accepted his offer and set him beside his own son, Art.

At this time, the people of Tara were being terrorized by a goblin from the fairy folk who would come at nightfall to harm people and their property. He was able to do this because he played a magic harp that would put anyone who heard it into a trance. The king offered a great reward to anyone who could save Tara from the goblin. Finn decided he would be the one to do it, and asked the king if he would be given the rightful heritage as captain of the Fianna of Ireland if he killed the goblin. The king agreed and swore it by the sureties of all the provincial kings of Ireland and the druid Kithro and his magicians.

Finn was given a spear by one of the king's followers, Fiacha, who had been a friend of Finn's father. The spear had a head of dark bronze with glittering edges and was fastened with thirty rivets of Arabian gold. Fiacha told Finn that this spear was enchanted and would be the weapon he needed to defeat the goblin. At nightfall, Finn walked around the ramparts of Tara with the spear and heard the fairy harp being played. As the music got louder and the goblin approached, Finn took the cover off the spear and held it to his forehead. With the energy of the spear, he was able to defeat the goblin and save Tara.

The king kept his promise and made Finn the leader of the Fianna of Ireland and he said: "Here is your Captain by birth-right and by sword-right. Let who will obey him come forward, and who will not, let him go in peace." Many men stepped forward and that's how Finn McCool became the leader of the Fianna and he ruled the Fianna for many years until he died in battle.