

From Concept to Creation: Making Fea's Gown

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The *Gown of Fea the Soul Weaver* is an art project designed to combine storytelling with costume making. The project's scope includes developing the concept of a character and storyline, designing the garment, researching materials and construction methods, and constructing the gown. Nestled within the holes of Irish myth, Fea's story is a combination of carefully chosen elements from the historical legends of the Tuatha De Danann. Even the mythological figure Fea, who's name is based on the Gaelic word for "weave", is chosen to support the initial character concept. Where Fea's traditional history lacks content, a new story is created: During the Tuatha De Danann's battle against the Fomorians, Fea saves the spirits of the dying by weaving their souls into her garments. Designing Fea's gown then becomes an illustration of a moment in her newly created history. To further support the character concept, materials and construction methods are selected to emphasize Fea's action of weaving souls. Materials like hand-dyed wool are sculpted into faces and felted into a base garment. The felting process, like Fea's weaving, knits the individual wool fibers into the weave of the base fabric. Costume construction and materials also include making weft-fringe of human hair, fabric appliqué of Celtic patterns, and hand-sewn beading. The final results of the project should be an art piece that explores elements of shape, materials, and construction that best represent the concepts behind a character's story.

Fea the Soul Weaver: The Story of Her Gown

Stories of the Tuatha De Danann have become euhemerist legends, myths based on the glorified accounts of historical people and events that took place during the Bronze Age in Ireland. Possibly built from the actual events of the Tuatha De Danann's settlement of Ireland, the stories of their history have transformed the greatest of their people into mythological gods and their conflicts for territory into epic battles. Three major battles defined the presence of the Tuatha De Danann on Ireland. The first marked their arrival as they fought against the already established Fir Bholg. The second, the Battle of Mag Tuired, was to keep their territorial hold against the invading Fomorians. In a final battle, the Milesians defeated the Tuatha De Danann, driving them to live forever underground.

The Battle of Mag Tuired against the Fomorians was a critical event within the Tuatha De Danann history. For seven years the leaders, considered gods of the Tuatha De Danann, made preparations for a great battle against the Fomorian invaders. The *Trí Déa Dana*, gods of the arts, worked continuously gathering resources to build up a stockpile of superior weapons. Dian Cecht, the god of healing, anticipated a need for his skills and blessed the Well of Slane so it would heal the wounded. Most importantly, Nuada, the King of the Tuatha De Danann, made a pact with the *Morrighu*, a collection of goddesses that had an influence over war. Neamin, Badb and Fea were three of the *Morrighu* women who agreed to help King Nuada.

Known as the Weeping Washer Woman, Neamin could be seen prior to battle at the banks of a river, washing the armor or clothes of warriors that would be slain. Her tasks offered omens of death and mourning for those who were destined to fall in battle. During the battle, Badb would spend much of the time in the form of a crow, flying around and within combat, hopping from spear tip to spear tip. Badb's presence could inspire the turning point in any battle, inciting the bloodlust and intensity found in the fiercest of conflicts. The third woman, Fea, was a subtle presence usually not found until after the battle. She would use her skills as a weaver to knit together the stories of combat's wins and losses. Evidence of Fea's craft would be found after the dust had settled, coming from the mouths of bards and in the recordings of artisans. Fea would plait together strategies and heroics into tales of great legends forever woven together by names and deeds. At the Battle of Mag Tuired, however, when the war against the Fomorians was at its worst, Fea found another need for her weaving craft.

The war against the Fomorians finally came and was tremendously bloody and brutal. Each of the Tuatha De Danann who aided in preparations did their part: the *Trí Déa Dana* weapons were plentiful and held true, Neamin produced her omens and washed away the sorrows for the dead, Badb hovered over and inspired the bloodiest of skirmishes, and Dian Cecht delivered his magical spring water to the injured. The battle, however, turned badly for the Tuatha De Danann when the King of the Fomorians took the field.

Similar to a Cyclopes, King Balor of the Evil Eye, had a single enormous eye. When open the eye would unleash a deadly poison directed at anyone Balor looked upon. Prophecy had declared that as long as the King's eye remained closed he would rule the Fomorians. Badb's battle-lust had touched all at Mag Tuired, and the Fomorians demanded that they benefit from their king's gruesome power. Normally kept closed, the great eye required four of Balor's strongest men to pry the lid open. Suddenly the Battle of Mag Tuired turned to the Fomorians favor. Thousands of soldiers fell screaming to the ground, doubled over with the crippling effects of Balor's poison. Unable to continue fighting, the forces of the Tuatha De Danann were decimated. Even Nuada, King of the Tuatha De Danann, was not immune to the eye's poison and was struck down by Balor's devastating blow. Dead and dying Tuatha De Danann warriors

littered the battlefield. Dian Cecht and his healers navigated through the fallen, desperate to treat the poison with the magical well water. Too many however had been inflicted and the healers could not deliver the cure fast enough.

Observing the events from high on a hilltop, plaiting together the omens of Neamin and the conclusions of Badb's touch on the battlefield, Fea was suddenly pulled from the trance of her craft by an unbearable sound, the cacophony of a thousand souls all crying out for salvation. Fea could no longer work through the din of anguish and she paused to watch the two forces prepared to aid the fallen navigate the battlefield, Dian Cecht with his healing waters and Bilé, the god of the dead. Drawn to the carnage of war, Bilé had already opened a path to the Otherworld and began the task of escorting the dying to *Tir na Nog*. The poison from Balor's eye was an unbearably painful toxin and those affected called out to both Dian Cecht and Bilé to relieve them from their pain. Looking out across the battleground, observing both Bilé and Dian Cecht, the Tuatha De Danann's need for help became obvious. If the souls of the poisoned were kept from Bilé's reach, Dian Cecht may have enough time to save them. The pact for aid made between the *Morrighu* and King Nuada had to be honored. If Fea could help, she was honor bound to do so.

Down from the hilltop, Fea raced out into the middle of the battlefield and began gathering up the souls of the stricken warriors. She collected as many as she could hold in her hands, but it was not enough. She pulled up the hem of her gown to pool more of the spirits into the folds of her dress. More and more she added but there was not enough room to hold them all. Hundreds of stricken souls were still left within the grasp of Bilé. As soon as Bilé approached the souls, they would give into the agony of the poison and relinquish themselves to the god's embrace. Dian Cecht could not reach the poisoned fast enough to offer an alternative to death, and Fea was desperate to gather more of the poisoned souls and ward away the god of the dead. Needing a way to bind more of the spirits to her, Fea turned to the skills of her craft. One by one, she began to manipulate the essence from each of the souls, winding them into threads fine enough to weave into the fabric of her dress. Beginning at the hem, Fea's deft hands began filling the cloth with the mystical substance. Inch by inch she slowly maneuvered through the carnage, finding the worst of the injured and binding the individuals' soul to the fibers of the fabric. As she worked, the surface of Fea's gown began to fill with a swirling mass of spirits. Fea's weaving had already reached her knees when Dian Cecht recognized what she was doing and began directing his healers to work towards her. Heavily laden with the spiritual tapestry, Fea continued thread by thread to harness each soul, keeping them safely from Bilé's reach.

Past her waist, Fea's weaving had stretched up towards her shoulder by the time Dian Cecht finally arrived with help. The blessed waters from the Well of Slane worked quickly, and as Fea unwound each of the souls, the healers neutralized the toxin. With the poison treated, the souls released, and the warriors made strong again, the Tuatha De Danann retook the field. A restored vigor from Fea's craft and the healer's efforts was enough to win the war. Badb flew high above the conflict, her inspiration no longer needed, and Neamin wept tears of joy for an assured victory. Fueled by revenge for his fallen King Nuada, a young Tuatha De Danann warrior named Lugh concluded the King of the Fomorians' prophecy. Lugh shot a sling stone through Balor's open eye, cracking open the skull, killing the Fomorian instantly. Their moral broken, the remaining Fomorians were driven into the sea in defeat. Lugh was recognized for his valor and made the new king of the Tuatha De Danann. Completing the pact of the *Morrighu*, Fea returned to her hilltop, where she crafted the legends of the Tuatha De Danann and their victorious Battle of Mag Tuired.