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The Drúedain

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The Druedain

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In Part Four of Unfinished Tales (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) appears for the first time an essay on the Druedain people, like other stories and essays in that volume a sketch never completed. Tolkien's highly original concept of them as men "of a wholly different kind" (p.377) from any that he had visualized before seems to have developed in his mind late in life. Certainly it never appears in the First Age Silmarillion or in the Second Age history of Numenor.

Chronologically, the Druedain make their earliest appearance near the end of The Lord of the Rings (III, 105-09), where they are called "The Wild Men of the Druadan Forest", who guided the Rohirrim on their ride to the Pelennor Fields. And the only individual of their race whom we actually see then is their chief, Ghan-buri-Ghan, who seems to have been also their prototype in Tolkien's invention. However, it turns out that the stone Pukel-men which Aragorn and his company encountered along the road to Dunharrow were also self-portraits carved by the Druedain long before.

As Christopher Tolkien remarks in his General Introduction to Unfinished Tales (p. 12), after completing The Lord of the Rings and "towards the end of his life my father revealed a good deal more about the Wild Men of Druadan Forest ... and the statues of the Pukel-men" This revelation is made in the essay entitled "The Druedain", now to be discussed, together with its many explanatory notes and comments, some written by the editor, others by Tolkien himself. These summarize the history, character and customs of the new race during the First and Third Ages.

The essay opens with a long paragraph picturing the isolated woodland life of the Haladin in contrast with the more civilized ways acquired by the House of Beor and the House of Hador, the two other chief tribes of Men with whom they entered Beleriand from the east. This may seem to be a needless digression, but Tolkien's point is to show how and why the even stranger and more isolated Druedain chose to live near the Haladin rather than near the people of the other two Houses.

The Haladin, writes Tolkien, preferred to keep their distance from their companion tribes, remaining always in the Forest of Brethil, slow to change their sylvan ways, slow even to learn the Sindarin language, by means of which they must speak with other Men and with the Elves. Although they were brave warriors, few of them ever left their forests, which they defended so well that Orcs seldom dared to enter. Many of these warriors were women, as was their Amazonian chieftain Haleth, whose bodyguard consisted wholly of others of her sex.

Alongside this Folk dwelt a few hundred



Druedain who came with them into Beleriand yet still lived apart "in families or small tribes but in friendship", speaking their own language and known to the Haladin as Drug (p. 377). Unlike all other Men in physical appearance, they were broad, squat and heavy, with short, thick legs which rendered them only about four feet tall. Their faces were wide, their noses flat, and although they had sparse, lank hair on their heads they had none elsewhere on their bodies. Usually their features were expressionless, their eyes wary, their voices deep and guttural. But their laughter was rich and frequent and joyous, always innocent of scorn. Yet they could be angry, slow to cool. Orcs they hated implacably above all others. On his ride with the Rohirrim to save Minas Tirith, Merry observed many of these characteristics in Ghan-buri-Ghan, their living embodiment.

Apparently fearing that his readers might confuse the Druedain with Hobbits, Tolkien took pains "to emphasize the radical difference" between them, says the editor in a separate note (p. 382). "The Druedain were taller and of heavier build." And of course there was the great contrast in hair. Besides, although they could be joyous at times, the Druedain on the whole were grimmer, sometimes even sardonic and ruthless, and they had what looked like magical powers. Notably, the Druedain did not eat much, and drank only water. In many respects they looked physically less like Hobbits and more like Dwarves, with whom they shared a skill in carving stone. But "the Dwarves were far grimmer" and lived longer. The Druedain did

not usually live as long as other kinds of men.

Where did the Druedain come from in the first place? By combining several more of Tolkien's scattered notes, the editor is able to provide an outline of their history (pp. 383-84). Those who accompanied the Folk of Haleth into Beleriand in the First Age were only an "emigrant branch" which separated from the main body of Druedain. The tribe as a whole came from somewhere in the east (presumably Hildorien, where the first Men awoke) and joined in the westward movement of all tribes of Men away from the depredations of Morgoth, towards the light of Aman.

Circling south of Mordor, the main body of the Druedain turned north into Ithilien and, after crossing the river Anduin, settled in the vales and wooded foothills of the White Mountains (Ered Nimrais). Long harried by other Men, they had become "a secretive people, suspicious of other kinds of Men."

In the Third Age they seem to have penetrated the mountains of Andrast, even to their western outposts. In fact, in that Age they took part in the Battles of the Fords of Isen, sallying forth from their mountain caves to attack remnants of the Orcs of Saruman which had been driven southwards (p. 387). Soon afterwards they warned the Rohirrim riding to Minas Tirith of Orcs waiting in ambush for them. The stone Pukel-men of Dunharrow, the Druedain self-images, were very ancient and badly weatherworn.

This talent for carving in stone or wood the Druedain seem to have developed as early as the First Age under the influence of the higher culture they found in Beleriand. Long years before, however, they had already known how to derive pigments from plants, which they used to draw colored pictures on flat surfaces. With the acquisition of more sophisticated tools, they enjoyed producing solid figures of men and beasts, to which their artisans could give "vivid semblance of life", some of them fantastic and fearful (p. 379). For example, they made figures of Orcs fleeing in terror, which they set at the borders of their territory. And they made carvings of themselves sitting on dead Orcs, which they placed at the entrances to forest trails as "watch-stones". Orcs dared not destroy these or even pass by, believing that they would notify the Drugs of their presence.

Drugs had the power to sit quite motionless, not visibly breathing, for many days during times of grief, or meditation, or planning, or when they sat on guard. Though they might seem tranced or dead, they missed nothing that went on about them. This awareness in itself frightened away most intruders and, if it did not, a sudden shrill whistle did. Consequently Drugs, or watch-stones made to look like them, were much in demand as guards. And the Folk of Haleth told many tales of their weird powers. Of these Tolkien gives two short examples.

One tells how, a Drug having died, his son made an image of him beside which he sat, silently remembering. A forester passing by wished them both good day but, getting no reply, looked closely at them and concluded that both were skilfully carved images. Returning three days later and sitting down to rest, he leaned back against one of them and fell asleep. Only when the figure on which he leaned asked him politely to move over to the other, who would never tire again, did the forester apprehend that one Drug was alive. What better example of a Drug's "capacity of utter silence and stillness"? (p. 379) This little tale might have seemed ghoulish had not Tolkien contrived some humor by his use of the element of surprise.

A second, somewhat longer tale entitled "The Faithful Stone" stress the Drugs' "uncanny and magical powers" (pp. 380-82). It begins like a fairy-tale: "On a time there was a Drug named Aghan", famous as a doctor. Having become a close friend of a forester named Barach living nearby, he used to guard his friend's home and family by night against marauding Orcs. But Aghan received a call to come and heal his wounded brother some distance away. To ensure the safety of Barach's house and family during his absence he brought a watch-stone shaped like a Drug, which he placed under cover near the doors. And laying his hand on it he said to Barach, "See, I have left it some of my powers". Three nights later the forester heard the stone's warning whistle and, looking out, saw Drug running up, who killed one with his fist and drove the other away. The Drug stamped out the flames with his bare feet and disappeared. The dead Orc also vanished.

At daylight Barach discovered that the watch-stone was no longer in place. Later that day Aghan returned, smiling, to report that he had healed his brother. He was wearing high boots customary for travelers in rough country. Barach told him of the Orc attack by fire and the disappearance of the watch-stone. Searching about, Aghan found the stone in a thicket, sitting on the dead Orc, "but its legs were all blackened and cracked, and one of its feet had split off". Aghan grieved but remarked, "better that his legs should trample Orc-fire than mine."

Then Aghan unlaced his boots and Barach saw that his legs were bandaged. The Drug explained to his friend that on the previous night he woke to find his legs painfully burned; he guessed what had happened. For Barach he drew the moral of the tale, again like that of a fairy-story: "If some power passes from you to a thing you have made, then you must take a share of its hurts." In a note at this point the editor quotes Tolkien as saying that tales like this "remind one in miniature of Sauron's transference of power to ... the Ruling Ring" (p. 387). Or of the medieval concept of sympathetic magic, perhaps?

These tales belong to the First Age, when the emigrant branch of the Druedain

lived among the Folk of Haleth. A note by Tolkien states that in the Second Age they were allowed to sail to Numenor with their friends (pp. 385-386). They took no part in its wars on the mainland, "for they dreaded the sea". Indeed, those of them who served in the household of King Aldarion the Mariner begged him to make no more voyages, "forbidding the evil that would come of them". When he and his successors refused, the Druedain on the island began to beg passage on vessels bound for the coasts of Middle-earth, saying the Numenor "no longer feels sure under our feet". The last of them left when Sauron was brought over to it from the mainland and soon caused its downfall.

The attractiveness of Drug individual characters and Drug society is elusive but nonetheless real. Some of their qualities make them seem mere primitives, scarcely above the beast, but others reveal a mixture of practical wisdom with helpful kindness which the most civilized would do well to envy.

The Druedain were ill at ease except in wild places--forests and mountains. In the woods their dwellings were "tents or shelters, lightly built round the trunks of large trees" from which they retreated into caves only during storms and bitter cold. In the mountains they chose caves, which served also as their storehouses, where not even their closest friends were welcome. When tracking game or Orcs they used not only their keen eyes but a sense of smell which enabled them to sniff out scents like a hound that hunts. Their self-taught knowledge of all growing things was surpassed only by that of the Elves.

Put a family of Drugs into a forest unknown to them and within a short time they knew "all things that grew there ... and gave names to those that were new to them, discerning those that were poisonous, or useful as food" (p. 378). They never bothered to learn the runes and scripts of the Elves but invented, instead, their own practical writing in the form of simple signs which they posted to mark trails and inform travelers of their condition. Thus the Drugs were not interested in abstract thought but in the concrete and useful. Nor were they much concerned with language beyond their own crude tongue. 'Drughu' they called themselves. It was the Elves of Beleriand who contracted the name to 'Dru' and then added 'edain' to mark their essential humanity and the kinship to the Edain, the three Houses of the Elf-friends.

With their keener senses and their willingness to help their friends, "the services of the Druedain as guards was much esteemed by the Folk of Haleth" (p. 380). In fact, the Folk loved and trusted them. Their tale of "The Faithful Stone" bears out this trust in its very title. It represents Aghan the Drug as friendly and protective to the forester Barach and all his family in time of peril. Having acquired painfully burned

legs, Aghan was cheerfully philosophical about them, since the law of justice required him to share in these hurts. The Drug sense of justice also makes them formulate "a law against the use of all poisons for the hurt of any living creatures, even those who had done them injury", save only the Orcs who used poisoned darts against them (p. 386).

If the Druedain were good haters, at least their feud was with the right enemies. During the First Age in Beleriand they had nothing to do with Morgoth, whom they called the Great Dark One, nor did they ally themselves with Sauron in later Ages. Indeed, they "hated all invaders from the East. From the East, they said, had come the tall Men who drove them from the White Mountains, and they were wicked at heart" (p. 383). This reference is probably to the Easterlings or the Wainriders, allies of Sauron.

The concepts of Eru and the Valar may have been too high for the Druedain. But the just and generous precepts taught by these Powers took strong hold by some means in the Drug conscience, making them good neighbors loved by those among whom they lived.

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