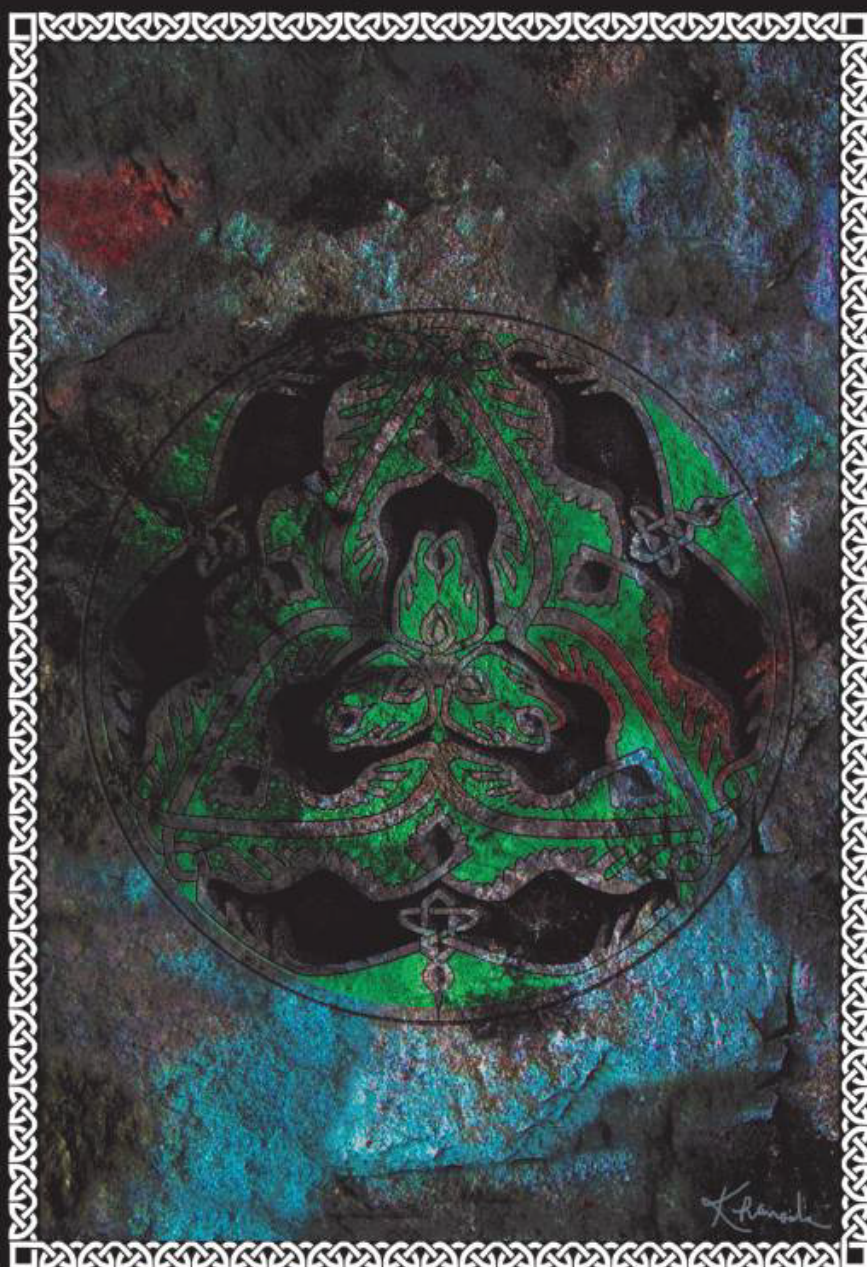




Morrigan's Brood



Heather Poinsett Dunbar
& Christopher Dunbar

**The following excerpts
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by

Heather Poinsett Dunbar

and

Christopher Dunbar



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Journal I (Pages 11-16)

 he gave me gall ink, quills, and several sheets of vellum today. Finally, I have a chance to record my past, what I can remember of it.

However, the legend remains forefront in my mind. So this is my first entry, the Legend of the Dearth Du. It is the story of my line, my people, and the Goddess who created us. The sun rises soon, and the fire is dying. Here is the tale.



Morrigan, the Tuath Goddess of blood, battle, justice, destruction, and rebirth gazed upon the expanse of the impending battle below. To Her south, She could see the massive army of Milesians disembark from their crude, yet seaworthy, vessels. The Iberian invaders wanted to try conquering the rich land of Eire again.

She exchanged glances with the others of Her family, The Tuatha dé Danann. Her consort, Dagda the All-Father, moved to Her side as they assembled for the battle.

Morrigan licked Her lips in anticipation. Soon spilt blood would mix with the green grass, causing a myriad of delightful scents. Soon Her ravens could feast again. This time, She would join them.

"Remember what Lady Dana, mother to us all, told us, Morrigan."

"Dearest, how could I forget?" Morrigan felt Her lips turn up into a grimace. Dagda always wanted to be fair, even to His enemies.

"I know that look," Dagda whispered into Morrigan's ear. "You are the Great Balancer. Practice some restraint."

"They are our enemies," She hissed in reply.

"Do not allow your anger at the invaders to overwhelm you. They are our mortal brethren, after all."

Morrigan sighed, drawing Her blade. While Her consort provided for Her and loved Her, Dagda's little rules about peace and harmony always proved to be highly annoying. Life always involved highs and lows, even for immortals. Tipping the great balance toward good or evil always caused ripples in nature. Such ripples made Her duties more difficult.

Morrigan tilted Her head to the side to study the advancing Iberians.

"Just another group of invaders," Morrigan chuckled to herself. "They never learn. Perhaps it is time for these rash Milesians to learn not to tread on our lands."

As soon as the Milesians gathered into some semblance of a formation, their leader shouted out a blood-curdling battle cry.

Morrigan peered into the leader's dynamic, diamond-blue eyes and could see no fear. Oh, how She would love to see fear in those eyes of his. Perhaps, She would have that opportunity soon.

The roar of the Tuath chariots echoed through Tara as they galloped over the hills to engage the enemy.

"Hold back!" Dagda shouted, pointing to the running Milesians.

An itch to plunge Her blade into a mortal heart made Morrigan twitch. The enemy charged full force. Every warrior's heart beat faster and faster. The scent of blood created by each beating heart became an aphrodisiac to Her bloodlust. Her resolve to stand still and wait for the order to charge dwindled in the face of Her hunger to enact vengeance. The Balance had to be maintained. Finally, Her hunger for rash action won.

"I can wait no longer," She hissed. Morrigan pushed Her way past the other swordsmen.

She could hear Dagda's grumble of discontent as He and the others joined Her as they ran toward the waiting swords.

Morrigan lost herself in the tide of redness that overwhelmed the green sloping hills of Tara. Spears whooshing through the air, swords clanging on other swords and shields, and the sounds of men and women grunting and screaming created a sweet song to Her ears.

One had to admire the Milesians for their fighting skills and bravery. They cut down many immortal warriors. Flush with victory, they continued striking down the Tuaths, unaware of the invincibility of their foe.

Fear flooded the ranks of the remaining Milesians as they realized that the dead Tuaths returned to life after being hacked into pieces. The mortal warriors screeched in horror as the Tuaths impaled them with spears. Sleeting rain hit the Milesians, pummeling the warriors into submission.

Morrigan's pleasure tripled as the majority of the remaining Milesians took flight, heading back to their ships on the beach and calling on their Druid Amairgin for assistance.

The ships pushed away from the shores, leaving behind the dead and wounded Milesians.

"Come," She called to the others. "We will show them what we do to our enemies."

"Peace, Triple-One, we shall ask Dana first," Dagda replied.

"They are invaders, Dagda," She muttered.

"The Iberian Invaders have no home, remember? The sons of the King Míl left for a new horizon after their enemy took their lands and cattle," Dagda said, leaning up against an oak. "Have mercy, and let them come forth. Perhaps they will wish for a truce, now. Perhaps they will want to join forces with us against the Fir Bolg. We could use such a worthy, mortal adversary to our benefit. Tara and Eire will remain in our hands."

Morrigan sighed. "Fine, work out a truce with our enemies." She thrust Her sword in the ground and stomped away, watching the other Gods and Goddesses clear out of Her path. They formed a circle and discussed what terms they should offer. They would allow the Iberians to join them, leave peacefully, or drown in the cold ocean.

A fury inflamed Her as She remembered the other invasions. If the others wished to be peaceful, they could. However, She would enjoy tipping the balance against these warriors any way She could. Morrigan cawed as She transformed into a raven and took to the sky, leaving the others behind. A burning hunger grew within.

Morrigan watched the cold flecks of snow fall as the Tuaths left the battlefield, leaving the dying Milesian warriors behind on the hillside of Tara. The remaining ice transformed into slush as mud and blood mixed with the sleet. Deep red pools of vitae spilled from the dead and dying Milesian warriors.

The raven flew over the carnage. She paused mid-flight, seeing a pair of limbs flail about as a warrior tried to pull a spear from his own torso. Intrigued, She moved in for a closer look.

The leader of the Milesian force lay staked to the ground. A spear pierced his stomach and held him to the land.

Morrigan watched the warrior's blood escape from his lips, and He ceased shivering. Great warmth surrounded his soul as his spirit prepared to depart for the Otherworld. Then the cold chill of Her shadow shattered the warmth, and the skies turned as black as Her feathers.

She landed on his chest and stared at the prone figure in the snow. Morrigan hopped to the ground and returned to Her previous form.

Morrigan leaned forward, smelling the blood, and closed Her eyes. She licked away the reddened trails, losing herself in the fear exuding from the blood. His fears immersed in Her consciousness, pushing aside the other concerns of battle. She continued to partake of the man's spilled blood.

These new invaders were full of life, their memories sweet and intoxicating. The coast of Iberia, home of the Milesians, became clear in Her mind. Then, exhilaration swallowed Her whole when another emotion emerged from the warrior, utter fury. So delicious.

Morrigan opened Her eyes again. The dark skies signaled the time to return home with the others, back to Dagda. She rolled Her eyes, thinking of Dagda's displeasure at Her blood thirst. She pulled back a lock of Her hair and turned back to the dying enemy.

She kneeled and slid Her tongue across his cold mouth, licking away the remaining blood. As his death drew near, the warrior shook again and turned to face the woman. She pulled out the spear pinning Adhamdh to the ground, watching him wince and cry out in agony. She tossed the spear aside.

"Who?" he whispered, confusion and anger covering his face.

She snorted a laugh and shook Her head. "I have many names," She whispered. "Some call me Badhbh, Macha, or Neman. For simplicity, most call me Morrigan. You may call me Phantom Queen. I reign over battle, death, destruction, creation, justice, and revenge. I am She Who Maintains the Balance."

Morrigan paused and then continued. "I watched you during the battle. You were magnificent, Adhamdh," She purred his name. "Just not good enough to survive my immortal clan."

His ire sweetened his blood as he stared at Her. "I call you by your true name, Witch," he whispered. "Stop taking my essence."

Morrigan's battle apron flapped in the cold winds as She sprawled next to him. She leaned over, tracing the remnants of blood surrounding his lips with Her index finger, and then raised it to Her own mouth. She exhaled as the fury leapt from his blood into Her body. Morrigan leaned forward and whispered into Adhamdh's ear, "I will do as I please." His annoying impertinence grew tiresome.

"You are nothing but a witch, trying to snatch my soul away to keep me from joining my brethren in the Otherworld."

Morrigan snarled and then regained Her senses. "Fine," She hissed. "I will show you that I am no mere witch." Morrigan sat up and tossed aside the bracer on Her right wrist. She brought Her teeth to Her bare arm, tearing away at Her flesh. She crawled over towards Adhamdh, raising Her hand over Adhamdh's face.

"Now, watch a Goddess heal," She whispered, watching him stare up at Her.

"You bleed as I do," he hissed, "and now I will take your essence back with me to the Otherworld."

He seized and latched onto Her mending wrist with his own teeth.

Adhamdh drank some of Her blood, and then he rolled over to his side, clutching at his stomach, gagging. His eyes glazed over as he began to giggle

and then laugh.

Morrigan gasped, horrified. She needed to take care of this mistake and send Adhamdh to the Otherworld. At first, She experienced annoyance at finding Adhamdh within Her mind. However, She soon felt a wordless acceptance and gratitude from him.

Morrigan relished that the former mortal understood Her motives and the reasons behind them. He knew, and yet he did not flee like the mortals or turn away like the Tuaths.

She never realized that sharing Her essence could be so satisfying. For once, calm settled over Her. The warrior Goddess closed Her eyes, enjoying the understanding between Herself and the former mortal about the need for balance and the hunger for bloodshed, destruction, and creation.

Adhamdh turned back to Her and began licking away Her bloody wound.

Morrigan watched Adhamdh's wounds close as the harsh reality of what She did grew clear. A mortal man had ingested Her immortal blood. Her family, the Tuatha dé Danann, would be furious that She had permitted a mortal to share in Her essence, even though it was an accident. She could still terminate him, but he seemed to fill a void She did not know She possessed. She could not destroy him now. She manipulated mankind for Her own satisfaction.

Adhamdh looked at the Goddess with his newly changed, glowing green eyes. Morrigan turned to watch him, and She felt Her face smooth into a small smile.

Morrigan clasped Adhamdh's cold hand. "We must go now. There is much for you to learn," She told him.

They flew far from the battlefield to the hills where the Tuaths held dominion.

The Gods, Goddesses, and fae-folk turned away from Adhamdh. They found him unnatural, but Morrigan enjoyed Her newfound child. Adhamdh's thirst for blood matched Her own. Adhamdh understood Her bloodlust, unlike Dagda or the others.

The Tuaths and faeries called Adhamdh the Dearth Du. He spent his days hiding from the killing sun, and he hunted with Morrigan at night, feasting on the blood of men and the wild creatures of Eire.

The years passed, and soon others of Adhamdh's kind stalked the night. Morrigan's brood became legendary, forever caught in the world of mortals with the blood of a Goddess in their veins.

Beautiful, immortal, deadly.



My friend, the young druid, leaves me again to rejoin her teachers.

Despite her offers of friendship, there is something in her eyes that chills me to my bones. Still, she offers me the secrets of our race, and I long for the friendship of a companion, even a mortal one. I only fear that my hunger will rise again one night, and she will become my victim.

She promises to teach me more tomorrow night. Perhaps then the thick fog of the past century will clear.

- M.G.P.H.

Chapter Five (Pages 105-106)

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A lightning flash over Marcus' left shoulder drew his attention. A tree burst into flames following the lightning strike. More lightning strikes began to hit surrounding trees. The thunder that resulted was almost unbearable. Despite the ringing in his ears, Marcus could still hear someone call his rank.

Marcus looked over to where one of his soldiers stood. The soldier waved for Marcus to look further to the east where he caught a glimpse of the ancient druid and a few others fleeing from the grove. Before he was out of sight, the elder druid turned around and cried in Latin, "Raven feeder, feast on the blood of our enemies!"

Marcus started to run after the escaping druids, but he stopped when he heard screams and crashing trees around him. He looked about and saw some of his men hit by lightning. A dark cone pulled the others into the sky. Marcus blinked, unsure of the visions.

All of a sudden, the lightning and the wind ceased. All grew quiet. Marcus looked around at the grove and noticed that everyone, the druids and his men, were gone. He was alone. With a little trepidation, he surveyed the grove, trying to find any hint of the living. He dared not walk along the tree line in case an ambush waited, so he looked with his eyes. He could see dead druids and some of his slain men, but he saw no one living.

Then he finally heard them.

Thousands of cawing ravens swarmed into the grove, shattering the silence with their cries. They blocked the moon for a moment as they all gathered in front of Marcus. He watched, awestruck, as their bodies began melding to form a solid, black shape.

Marcus backed away from the amorphous form that coalesced from the unkindness of ravens. Brilliant light erupted from the center of the black form, forcing Marcus to cover his face with his arm. As the light dimmed, he could see a silhouette of a woman standing in front of him. The blinding light of the moon washed out her features, but he could see her pale skin shimmer with the luminosity of pearls.

The woman began to step outside of the glare, and Marcus was able to see her true appearance. Her lovely features made his heart waver for a moment. She stood as tall as he did. Except for a red cape that cascaded behind her from her shoulders, she wore no clothing. She wielded a tall, ornate metal shield, a long spear, and a short sword that

hung in a scabbard at her waist. Marcus found himself lost in the intricate swirling tattoos covering the warrior woman's body. Her long, blood red hair seemed to float, defying the pull of the earth.

The warrior woman walked closer to where Marcus stood. Marcus tightened his grip on his shield and sword and prepared to do battle with this woman. He paused for a moment as he stared into the depths of her black eyes. Distracted, he did not notice her heft her spear. The missile shot through the air over his shoulder. Marcus turned to follow the flight of the spear only to catch a glimpse of it plunging through the chest of one of his men who had found his way back to the grove.

Marcus snarled as he turned his attention back to the warrior woman. She merely stood without drawing her sword. The Praetor wasted no time. He stepped into her and slammed his shield against hers, knocking her defense aside. Marcus followed up with a quick thrust of his short sword into her ribcage. The blade sunk to the hilt within her flesh.

The Praetor looked into the woman's eyes, expecting to see the life running out of them. Instead, those black pools of oblivion stared back at him. Fear rose within as he witnessed a small smile slide over her face.

Marcus tried to step back while pulling out his sword. Before he could dislodge the weapon, the woman pushed out with her shield in a seamless movement that propelled him with tremendous force backwards into a tree. His body bounced against the tree and fell to the ground. His weapons landed on either side of him. Pain shot through his body as he tried to breathe. Marcus realized through wheezing pain that she had knocked the wind out of him and broken a few of his ribs.

The warrior woman stepped closer to Marcus' prone form. When she was within a pace of the Praetor, she drew her sword from her scabbard. Beautifully etched patterns and symbols reflected brilliantly in the moonlight as the warrior woman pointed her sword at Marcus.

In a beautiful, singsong voice, the woman asked, "Are you responsible for the desecration of this grove and the land?" The grove echoed her words in a sharp whisper.

Marcus stared at her, not knowing how to respond. She stood as still as a statue, poised as if she could wait forever for his answer. As he began to regain his breath, Marcus tried to reach for his weapons without letting her see his movements. He was able to slide his hand onto the grip of his shield.

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Books of the Morrigan's Brood Series

Book One – Morrigan's Brood

Dec 2009

Eire is invaded by a race of blood-drinkers seeking an artifact they believe will restore them to power. Yet the Dearth Du, the protectors of Eire, are not prepared to defend the island. Only with the help of a Roman general from an earlier time can they hope to rise up against the invaders.

Book Two – Morrigan's Brood: Crone of War

July 2010

The Lamia expeditionary force has gained a foothold in Eire and has formed an alliance with a powerful Irish chieftain and his malevolent mother. To reinforce them, a massive Lamia army, which is departing Rome, will soon give them enough power to conquer Eire and find their lost treasure. Will the Dearth Du and their newfound friends be able to protect Eire from the invaders, or will the Dearth Du's suspicion of other blood-drinkers allow their enemies to be victorious?

Book 3 – Morrigan's Brood: Dark Alliance

TBD 2011

A new menace threatens the Balance within the Holy Roman Empire as vicious murders of both mortals and blood-drinkers spread throughout the empire like wildfire. Can a hastily formed alliance between archenemies thwart this new menace, or will festering hatred bring about the empire's doom?

Book 4 – Morrigan's Brood: Curse of Venus

TBD 2011

The Strigoi, the Cursed of Venus, have spread through the Holy Roman Empire and parts beyond like a plague. In response, Pope Leo III takes advantage of the scourge to settle an old score with the man he placed on the throne: Charlemagne. Will their bitter rivalry send the Empire further into chaos and destruction, or will their Dearth Du "angels" save them from themselves and from Venus' Cursed?

Book 5 – Morrigan's Brood: Shards of Light

TBD 2012

Many sets of eyes peer through the mist, watching events unfold as the dark alliance seeks out an ancient device that they hope will uncorrupt the menace that has nearly brought the Holy Roman Empire to its knees. However, not everyone beyond the mist is content merely to watch.

More titles to follow, including [Odin's Chosen](#) and [Dynasties of Night](#).

About the Authors

Heather Poinsett Dunbar

Born in Houston, Texas, Heather began writing her first book at age eight. While her grammatical structure left much to be desired, she continued to hone her writing and storytelling skills. During a college internship in London, England, her curiosity about ancient cultures and mythology intensified. She backpacked through Europe, fell in love with Scotland, cried at the retelling of part of Ulster cycle, garnered ghost stories from the Beefeaters at the Tower, wandered the Roman ruins in Bath, and danced around the stones in Avebury.

After spending all her spare time studying these new interests in many libraries and on the road, she began working on her masters in Library and Information Science at the University of North Texas. She now resides in the Houston area with her husband and three cats. She loves exploring the local culture as well as the many Celtic festivals and events in Texas. She works in the Houston Public Library system and her favorite authors include Morgan Llewellyn, Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, Evelyn Vaughn, Alison Weir, and Randy Lee Eickhoff.

Christopher Dunbar

Chris Dunbar was born in Greenport, Long Island, New York and then moved to Texas as soon as he could, at least that is the story he tells to native Texans, such as his wife. Chris keeps searching for ways to leave Houston, like moving to Auburn Alabama, Dallas, and even San Antonio, but Houston just keeps reeling him back. Chris' day job is performing Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery, but his night job is coming up with creative ways to wound and maim the characters he and his wife Heather created. For fun, Chris enjoys the occasional novel and video game, but he also likes to delve into his Scottish ancestry and tool leather. When he can find the time, Chris pretends to play the Bodhran and the didgeridoo, much to the chagrin of his cats Lucius, Ophelia, and Clyde, not to mention his wife Heather.