

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

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The Shining Land

BRIAN CULLAN had flown the big Army amphibian plane almost halfway back across the North Atlantic to America, when he saw the sign in the sky.

Every mile that had slipped behind them had lessened a little the war-weariness that had sagged Cullan's lean shoulders and put premature lines of age in his dark, worn young face. The war was over, and they were going home, and he felt dull, tired relief.

An odd darkness was gathering in the sunlit sky around them, an increasing obscurity as of coming storm. Cullan and his co-pilot, squat, merry Jeff Lewis, had been

watching it. Then suddenly, lightning flared through the obscurity—lightning that for a moment seemed to take the form of a flaming, spinning circle.

"Lugh's wheel!" exclaimed Cullan, an uncanny thrill jerking him bolt upright in his seat. "The sign of Tir Sorchal!"

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Lewis.

Cullan saw that freak of curving lightning vanish as he spoke. The queer thrill of eeriness left him.

He smiled a little shamefacedly. "An old Celtic superstition. My people came originally from Ulster, you know. I still

*There is a strange, unseeable Elysium that exists out in the western sea,
home of a great pre-human race!*



*By EDMOND
HAMILTON*

have kinsfolk there, and I was talking to one of them before we left Belfast. She gave me this."

He held out his hand to show the ring he wore. It was a worn, ancient hoop of gold set with a curious prismatic crystal.

Cullan stared at it in sudden surprise. The crystal was glowing. Little flashes of light, tiny spears of radiance, scintillated in it. The tiny rays seemed to form a shining, wheel-shaped sign!

"That's funny—it didn't glow like that

Heading by **BORIS DOLGOV**

before," Cullan murmured, puzzledly. "Maybe electric influence of approaching storm—"

He suddenly remembered what his old kinswoman had told him when she gave him the ring, back there in her little cottage in the low green Ulster hills.

"The ring goes always to the oldest male in our family. And since my other grand-nephew was killed in the war, it must be yours. It comes down in our family from Cuchulain himself."

"Cuchulain?" Cullan had smiled at mention of the great hero of Celtic antiquity. "You don't really believe that he was our ancestor, Aunt Maeve?"

"And how could I believe otherwise when the pride of our lineage has been handed down to us these two thousand years?" the old lady had retorted. "Isn't your name Cullan and wasn't the great Cuchulain the Hound of Cullan? Isn't that the very ring that he called the Unlocker, and that Cuchulain brought back with him from the Shining Land?"

Brian Cullan had grinned. "I've flown the Atlantic a good many times during the war, and I never saw any trace of Tir Sorcha."

"And how could you see the Shining Land when it's invisible to the eyes of man?" she had demanded stoutly. "Wasn't Cuchulain himself almost the only man who ever entered it, and didn't even he almost fail to come back from it to his waiting wife?"

Cullan had taken the ring. He knew his great-aunt's seriousness where the old legends were concerned.

He too had learned those stories when he was a child in faraway America—the great tales of the Ultonian cycle, of the heroes of the Red Branch and of the dark warrior among them who had blazed out in battle as Cuchulain, the Celtic Achilles.

His old kinswoman's firm belief made the tales seem almost real. The unquenchable romance and mystery in the Celtic soul gave her firm belief in even that cardinal tenet of Celtic legend—Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land, the strange, unseeable elysium that somehow existed out in the western sea and was home of the great, pre-human race, the Tuatha De.

Cullan was abruptly snatched back from memory by the impact of shrieking winds on the flying plane. Startled, he looked around.

"We've got to get out of this mess quick!" Jeff Lewis yelled.

Cullan stared. "I never saw a storm come up like this!"

The whole sky around them had swiftly deepened in obscurity, and the dark haze was boiling up in terrifying thunderheads

CULLAN tried to swing the plane around. But howling winds hurled the ship on like a toy into the lightning-split darkness. The left aileron was suddenly crumpled by an inconceivable fist of wind.

"That does it—we're going downstairs now for sure!" cried Lewis.

Cullan's hands fought the controls, trying to keep the plane out of an instant plunge. He noticed startledly that the crystal on his finger was now glowing like a tiny, flaming sun.

Abruptly came a wrenching shock. The plane seemed to drop with sickening rapidity as though in a terrific downdraft. Yet for all their sudden nausea, the altimeter registered no change.

Darkness, lightning and howling winds were suddenly gone! They were surrounded by mists that glowed with wonderful, golden radiance, a glowing, unearthly haze.

Cullan, looking out into that golden mist through which the plane was slanting downward, gasped his incredulous amazement.

"Tir Sorcha! The Shining Land!"

"What do you mean?" Lewis demanded impatiently. "What—"

His voice trailed to silence and his broad red face was a frozen mask of incredulity as he looked downward through the window.

The golden mists were thinning as the crippled plane slanted lower. They made out beneath the tawny yellow swell of an ocean far different from the gray-green Atlantic.

There was an island below them! A big, whale-shaped green land, miles long, rimmed by surf-whipped white beaches. And in the misty distance beyond they could glimpse other islands, clustered near and far.

"There's no islands in the North Atlan-

tic!" choked Jeff Lewis. "There just *isn't*."

"Atlantic? That's not the Atlantic!" flashed Cullan. His black eyes flared with excitement. "It's not our world at all but Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land."

Stunned bewilderment made his co-pilot's voice savage. "Will you stop mouthing silly superstitions and—"

"I tell you, it's the Shining Land just as legend described it!" cried Cullan. "Tir Sorcha, the other world, the world of Lugh and Dagda and Mannanan and all the others of the old gods, the Tuatha De."

His voice raced on with his thoughts. "It must be an interpenetrating world, Jeff! A world congruent with Earth, on a different plane of vibration. The legends always said that Tir Sorcha was locked close to Earth but that neither world was visible or tangible to the other. Yet a few passed from world to world, and somehow we've done it too."

Lewis tried to voice disbelief and could not. The island looming up below was flat rejection of all his arguments.

Brian Cullan's mind was thrilling to wild surmise. He remembered how the crystal of his ring had pulsed with blinding radiance.

"The crystal did it somehow, Jeff! Cuchulain himself is said to have brought it back from the Shining Land, calling it the Un-locker. Somehow, it tuned our plane and us to the vibration of the other world—"

"Forget that and try to get us down without cracking up!" exclaimed the dazed co-pilot."

Instincts fostered by long discipline took over Cullan's mind to the exclusion of all else, as the crippled amphibian sagged toward the running yellow waves. He noted a little boy on the island's shore.

"It's calmer there—I'll try to make the beach."

THE ship struck the water and skimmed forward like a giant surf-board toward the white beach of the whale-shaped island.

It rolled up through the yellow waters onto firm sand. Cullan cut the motors and they scrambled out, stood staring wonderingly.

The island was silent except for the distant boom of surf. The yellow sea, and the golden mists that hid the sun, and the

strange scents of alien flowers that freighted the balmy air, held them transfixed.

"God, look at that!" exclaimed Lewis hoarsely, pointing.

Black, monstrous-winged shapes of size incredible were winging up from a distant part of the island. They were dragon-like birds of dimensions enormous, huge as the rocs of Arabian fable.

They flapped away in a direction away from Cullan and Lewis, vast wings shadowing the golden sky, uttering startled, squawking sounds.

"I know now what place this is," husked Cullan. "The Island of Great Birds. Maeldun touched here when *he* voyaged through the Shining Land centuries ago, says the story. And those other islands—"

Those other isles that rose vaguely through the distant golden mists were the isles of the Celtic elysium exactly as legend described them!

The Island of Giant Flowers whose blooms towered higher than tall oaks; the Island of Silver whose beaches and rocks glittered as if of solid metal; the Island of Fire that blazed a red beacon through the golden mists; Cullan dazedly named them from legend as he stared.

"How are we going to get back—to Earth?" Jeff Lewis demanded, his broad face still wearing a stunned look.

"Others—a few—entered this world in the far past and yet got back," muttered Cullan. "Cuchulain, and Maeldun, and—"

"Cullan, look what's coming!" yelled Lewis, pointing suddenly to their right.

Long, slim boats of burnished metal were racing toward them at great speed, oarless and sailless vessels that came obliquely across the yellow sea toward the beach on which they stood.

Cullan glimpsed the crews of the high prowed metal boats as they hit the beach and tumbled ashore with a fierce, high yell. They were tall, fair-haired men in silver mail and helmets, carrying swords that were like brands of living flame as they charged toward the airmen.

"Back into the plane!" Lewis was yelling hoarsely, tugging at his arm. "We can taxi it out of here—"

Brian Cullan remained frozen for a fatal minute of delay, transfixed by the appear-

ance of those towering silver-armored warriors.

"The Tuatha De!" he whispered. "The great race of the old gods who ruled Earth once—"

"Wake up!" yelled Lewis, his face livid. "They've cut us off now!"

The warriors were between them and the beached amphibian. They were rushing toward the two pilots with obvious murderous intent, brandishing those weird flaming swords and yelling fiercely as they came.

CULLAN partly recognized the language in which they shouted! It was a language closely akin to the ancient Gaelic of the Celts, that Gaelic which he had learned from his race-proud father as a child.

Desperately, Cullan threw up his hand and shouted to the charging warriors in Gaelic. "Wait! We are friends, not enemies!"

The warriors stopped, seemingly amazed. "These men speak the tongue of us Tuatha!" exclaimed one.

"Nevertheless, they are outworlders," rang a clear, commanding voice. "They have broken the law, have somehow opened the Portal and entered Tir Sorcha. You know the penalty. Kill!"

"The Princess Fand has spoken—kill!" roared a captain.

Cullan's eyes flashed to the source of the order. It was a woman, slim in silver armor and helmet, a sheathed sword at her belt.

Fand! He knew that name! Princess of Tir Sorcha, wife of Mannanan—fairest of the Tuatha De, the old tales had said.

A white, lovely face, merciless in every chiseled feature, met his gaze. Sea-green eyes under straight dark brows flared at him and then suddenly those eyes widened, stared wildly at Cullan.

"Wait!" cried Fand. "Do *not* kill! Oh, fool—blind fool! It is he!"

They stood on the white beach, incredible group of dazed two airmen and puzzled ominously Tuatha warriors, all looking at her.

Fand's green eyes were dark with sudden wild tears, and her gaze had not left Brian Cullan's dark, haggard face. She ran forward, swiftly as a sea-bird.

Her bare white arms flashed around his neck. Cullan, incredulous, felt her sobbing on his chest.

"Cuchulain!" she cried. "Cuchulain!"

II

BRIAN CULLAN, his pulses thudding, found his arms around her. Dazed as he was, a wild thrill shot through him. Beneath the flexible tunic of silver chain-mail, her body was pliant and yielding. Stray strands of dark, perfumed hair brushed his face.

No elfin queen of faery legend this—but a girl, a woman, warm and living. Blood hammered in his temples as she turned her eager eyes up to him.

"I—I am not Cuchulain," he said stammeringly, in the Gaelic. "Cuchulain died two thousand years ago."

Fand's white face was stricken by a swift, terrible hopelessness as she scanned his face.

"Two thousand years?" she whispered. "Of course—I forgot, for the moment when I first saw you, that time is different on Earth."

Cullan felt a shock of discovery. This was the explanation, then, of the Shining Land—an interpenetrating world whose time even was at a different pace than Earth's?

If that were so, it explained why everything here in Tir Sorcha was still exactly as described by the few men of Earth who centuries ago had claimed to have visited here. Centuries had passed on Earth, but it had been a vastly shorter period in the time of *this* world.

Fand had stepped back a little, but her wide green eyes still searched his face. "But you are Cuchulain, in every feature!" she gasped. "And you wear the crystal that I gave him when he left here six of our years ago—the Unlocker that would enable him to return through the Portal. Where got you that?"

Cullan looked at the ring upon his finger. "It came down in my family for a hundred generations. It was supposed to come from our remote ancestor—Cuchulain."

"Then you are of his blood?" cried Fand. "I should have known it. For you are the mold of him as he was."

They were interrupted. The tall Tuatha

captain had stepped forward, and now spoke with impatient fierceness.

"Shall we not kill them now, Princess?" he asked.

Little storm lightnings flared in Fand's sea-green eyes as she turned on the man. "No! These two do not die."

The Tuatha warriors looked shocked. "But the Law says that none of Earth may enter this world and live. And when the Portal opened so strangely but now, did you not summon us to follow you and slay whoever might have entered it from the out-world?"

"Will you argue my order?" flamed Fand. "I command the Portal, do I not?"

"Under Lugh and the other lords, you do," grumbled the captain. "But if Mannanan hears of this—"

She silenced them with an imperious gesture of her hand. "No more! We take them to Ethne with us."

She motioned toward the metal boats. Lewis, interpreting her gesture, looked anxiously at Cullan. "We can't leave the plane!"

Fand understood his objection when Cullan translated. "You wish to take that clumsy craft of yours along? Well, then you can follow our boats."

She gave brief orders to her Tuatha warriors. They followed her back toward the slim metal craft, while Cullan and Lewis re-entered the amphibian.

The metal boats skimmed rapidly away across the yellow sea. Cullan started the motors and kept their plane taxiing over the smooth swells after them. But the plane could hardly keep up to the slim, speeding craft ahead.

He saw no sign of propulsion machinery in the boats except a square box at the stern of each, and a continuous flash of white fire or force that jetted back underwater. Startled, he realized that that and the queer force-flaming swords he had seen indicated a mastery of energies unknown to Earth science.

Jeff Lewis was pouring a torrent of questions on him. "Who is she? Why did she seem to know you? Cullan, what in the devil's name does it all mean?"

Cullan strove to order his own seething thoughts. "We've come into an interpen-

trating world that men have entered before, though long ago. Cuchulain, my ancestor, was one of them. He was here—two thousand years ago by our time, six years ago by the time of this world!

"For time runs far more slowly in this world. A day here is a year in our own Earth. As to the girl, she is Fand, wife of Mannanan, one of the lords of the Tuatha De. She knew Cuchulain when he was here, it seems, and gave him this crystal so he could return. And I must look like him, for she thought for a moment that I was he."

Jeff Lewis whistled. "She must have known your ancestor pretty well, judging from the reception she gave you."

THE co-pilot reasoned feverishly. "We've got to get back to our own world, and maybe she can help. If she could fix it for your ancestor Cuchulain to come and go, she can do it for us. Maybe that crystal would work both ways?"

Cullan did not answer. He didn't want to think of returning to Earth, in this moment. His blood was tingling with a heady excitement as they raced on over the yellow sea beneath the golden mists, past the dim green islands.

This was the Elysium of his race, found real and tangible by a freak of fate. Straight out of war-worn old Earth he had been plunged into the wonder and loveliness of Tir Sorcha, the Shining Land. He almost felt that he had been here before, as he drank in the haunting beauty of the weird land. But that, he knew, must be because legend had made him familiar with it for so long.

A bigger island was taking shape in the mists ahead. They could see it only dimly at first, for the sun was invisible above the radiant haze. Then they cried out in astonishment as they saw more clearly the island of Ethne, their goal.

The isle was not really large, a green hillock in the sea with a deep bay in its nearer coast. Around this bay clustered the shimmering structures of a city. But greatest wonder of Ethne was the gigantic geyser of water that sprang into the air from some pit or blow-hole on its farther shore.

That colossal waterspout sprang obliquely

across the whole island, like the solid jet of a stupendous hose—a glittering, solid rainbow of water that arched across the isle and fell into the sea just outside the harbor of the city.

"The Island of the Waterspout!" Cullan whispered raptly. "Maeldun was here, long ago—and Cuchulain—"

The boats ahead was racing straight toward the harbor. The plane taxiing after them, breasted big waves that came from the point where the gigantic jet fell into the sea.

Like a Niagara falling from high heaven was that incredible jet! The thunder of it was deafening as they struggled past it, and the spray it flung high into the golden mist painted the air around it with dazzling, changing rainbows.

Then they were past it, following the boats into the harbor. Before them lay ancient docks of yellow stone, fringed with a row of large and small metal craft. Beyond rose the city Ethne.

The golden mists were darkening, as though the sun above the haze was now setting. In the darkening mist, Ethne stood out like the faery city that legend had made it.

Brian Cullan's eyes climbed its structures—shimmering spherical buildings massed like congeries of iridescent soap-bubbles. City unreal as a dream and as beautiful—elfin city built beneath the titar arch of that eternal rainbow of water across the sky!

Fand's warriors pulled the amphibian up onto a worn stone ramp. The Tuathan princess met them when they emerged from the plane.

"You go with me to my palace," she said. And then, noting Jeff Lewis' dazed face, "And fear nothing."

Ethne's streets were darkening, and lights were shining inside the semi-transparent spheres of the soap-bubble buildings. Tall Tuatha lords and ladies in silk and silver stared incredulously at Cullan and Lewis as they climbed the winding yellow streets behind Fand's guards.

Perfume freighted the air from gorgeous gardens that laced the city. There were many slaves or servants here, a race other than the Tuatha De, dark-faced and stocky.

Fand's palace loomed before them against the darkening haze, a piled, fragile-seeming

mass of solid bubbles standing on the highest ground of the city amid the foliage of gardens. They followed her into a wonderful, pure-white hall that was like the interior of a pearl.

Fand stopped suddenly. Facing them was a Tuatha lord, a tall, fair, handsome young man. His gray eyes slitted as he stared at them.

"Then the warrior who came ahead of you to me told truth, Fand," he rasped. "You *have* spared two outworlders who came into Tir Sorcha."

He uttered an oath as his eyes lit on Cullen's face. "Now I understand! That outworld dog Cuchulain whom you loved—come back again!"

His hand went to the hilt of his sword. Fand's voice lashed like a whip of silver.

"You forget, Mannanan, that two thousand outer years have passed since Cuchulain went from here."

Her husband glared. "That is true. But why then did you spare this one who so closely resembles Cuchulain? They must be slain at once."

"I am keeper of the Portal, not you!" she flared. "The outworlders do not die."

"The Law—," began Mannanan.

"Do you cite the Law to me?" retorted Fand scornfully. "You who these many years have desired to break it, who have wished me to open the Portal to the outworld for your own evil schemes?"

Mannanan hissed, "If I tell Lugh and the other lords of your transgression, you'll not long be keeper of the Portal."

"Tell them," Fand answered serenely, "and I'll tell them of the plans you've long hatched to invade the outworld."

III

MANNANAN'S handsome face became deadly. He turned on his heel, strode out of the pearl-hall followed by a few Tuatha captains.

Cullan looked after him worriedly. "If our coming has made trouble between you and your husband—"

Fand laughed mirthlessly. "Mannanan has been my husband in but name, since Cuchulain came here six years—two thousand years!—ago."

Her vibrant green eyes softened on his face. "Go now and rest, and fear nothing from Mannanan. Soon I will talk further with you."

Dark-faced servants escorted Cullan and Lewis up a coiling, narrow stair that climbed from the rear of the pearl-hall to the upper levels of the bubble palace. They were taken into an azure chamber that seemed hollowed out of sapphire.

Windows in the curving, translucent blue wall gave outlook on the darkening gardens below the palace, on the bubble-domes of Ethne and the harbor. The golden mists had changed to silver, the hazy sunlight now replaced by the light of hidden moons above the mist. The stupendous arc of the waterspouts was like a silver sword across the sky.

"I *think* there's something to drink in this thing, and I hope to God it's strong," muttered Lewis, picking up a silver flagon. He poured and tasted a yellow liquid. "It is—and I need it!"

Then he came over and grasped Cullan's arm. "Cullan, stop staring out that window and come to life! What are we going to do!"

Brian Cullan turned reluctantly from his rapt, bemused contemplation of the other-worldly scene. "Do about what?"

"About getting out of this world and back to Earth!" Lewis exclaimed. "What were Fand and her hard-eyed boyfriend arguing about?"

Cullan related the conversation. And Jeff Lewis' broad face grew worried.

"Then there's danger here, not only for us, but for Earth. If Mannanan and his crowd are planning to go through into our world—"

He paced restlessly to and fro. "These people have powers. Those boats and shining swords imply control of atomic energy. The very fact that they can open a Portal between two interpenetrating worlds argues great science and power."

His face hardened. "We've just spent years of toil and blood to whip Earth back into decent shape. And if there's an invasion now from outside—"

Cullan spoke slowly. "Even if Mannanan and his followers represent a menace, they can't enter Earth while Fand guards the

Portal. It was apparent that she has long refused to open it for him."

"But she could open it for *us*," Lewis said eagerly. "We could get back, then." He continued urgently. "You can get her to do it, Cullan. I saw the way she looked at you. Earth or Tir Sorcha—a woman's still a woman."

Brian Cullen was troubled. "I'm not so sure that I'd want to leave here and go back to Earth."

"Not to carry a warning of possible danger?" Lewis prodded. "Not even for that?"

Cullan felt a chill. Lewis was right. The danger to Earth might be vague, potential—but it was real.

A servant interrupted his thoughts. "You are to dine with the Princess," he told Cullan deferentially. "I will conduct you."

"Cullan, now's your chance!" Lewis said when he understood the invitation. "Induce her by any means to let us go back!"

Cullan nodded silently. But as he followed the servant down the curving corridors and the coiling stair of the softly lit palace, he felt a strong inner unwillingness.

LEAVE this? Leave the wonder and beauty of Tir Sorcha to go back to war-exhausted Earth? Leave—Fand?

"None of that," he told himself roughly. "You're nothing to her—just someone who reminds her of Cuchulain. And she's not quite human—"

Not human? When he stepped out onto the silver-lit terrace where Fand awaited him, he had to concede that in her long, star-embroidered white gown, her elfin beauty was more than human.

"We shall dine here," she said. "I wish to talk more with you of Cuchulain."

He looked around. She interpreted his glance. "Mannanan is not here. He sulks with his captains in his own palace."

Black and silver dreamed the gardens below them, in the diffused mists of moonlights. Lights softly starred the bubble domes of Ethne, and gliding lights crossed the harbor.

From the great scimitar of the waterspout, shining across the sky overhead, came a steady whispering that could be heard even above the low, distant thunder where the cataract plunged into the sea.

Fand, slim fingers around a wine-glass, looked out over the supernally beautiful scene. "Your ancestor Cuchulain sat here thus with me the night before he left Tir Sorcha, only six years ago."

"Why did he ever go?" Cullan could not help wondering aloud.

"He said that loyalty to his king, Conor mac Nessa, demanded that he return to Earth until the wars of his people were won. Then, he said, he would come back to Tir Sorcha and to me. But he did not come back."

"He was killed fighting the foes of his king," Cullan told her. "He died, terrible in battle, tying himself upright to a tall stone so that he could strike still one more blow as he died."

Fand's green eyes flashed. "Aye, that would be the way that Cuchulain would die!"

She asked, a moment later, "What of the wife he told me of, the Earth girl Emer who had been mother of his son?"

"Legend has it that Cuchulain never loved Emer in the same way after his return from Tir Sorcha," admitted Cullan.

"It would be so," Fand said broodingly. "He would remember me, as I remembered him and kept hoping for his return even though hope died when I realized the centuries that had passed in your other world."

"Nor could I go into Earth after him," she continued somberly. "Long ago, my people the Tuatha De first went from our world into yours through the Portal my ancestors had learned to open. They first peopled your Earth! But their subjects there in time revolted against their wise rulers and so—it seems but a few score years to us!—Lugh, greatest of the Tuatha, and Dagda, and the other great ones came back into Tir Sorcha and decreed that no one should ever pass through the Portal again."

"Yet Cuchulain and a few others of Earth took advantage of chance openings of the Portal to come into this world. Cuchulain won my love, and Mannanan's hate, and then left promising to return. And when he did not return, I could not transgress my duty as keeper of the Portal to go after him. I could only wait and hope that somehow he would return. And now he *has* returned!"

Cullan was startled. He stood up, and

Fand too had risen and was swaying toward him. Her eyes burned him, her face breathless.

He was only human. He found his arms around her, his lips against the intoxicating perfume of her mouth. Then he stumbled back.

"Not me," he said thickly. "Not me you love, but Cuchulain that's dead two thousand years."

Fand's small white hands clutched his shoulders almost fiercely. "You *are* Cuchulain! Time has worked its cycle in the outworld, and you are the Hound reborn again, and come back again to me."

Crazy, impossible delusion of a brooding woman? Be it what it might, the fierce kisses of Fand were sweet!

"Tell me, have *you* an Emer waiting for you in the outworld?" she whispered, white arms still around his neck.

Cullan thought of the girl in America who had given him a half-promise, but she was faraway and unreal now as a dream.

"I'll not be loved for my chance resemblance to a long-dead man!" he said violently. "I'm not Cuchulain, I'm Brian Cullan, and—"

A servant came plunging out onto the terrace and Fand turned angrily at the interruption.

The man's swarthy face was livid. He cried, "Mannanan and his captains attack—"

Death-shriek rang eerily from inside the dreaming bubble-palace at the same moment. Wolf-fierce yells of shouting men and the rushing of feet and clashing of swords exploded in the silver silence.

Fand whirled, her face a white flame of wrath. "He dares! For years, Mannanan and his plotters have coveted the Portal to the outworld, and now he dares attack openly—"

She grasped Cullan's wrist. "This way, and quickly! They must not reach the chamber of the Portal!"

The whole palace, all of Ethne, was now a hideous clamor as Mannanan's armored soldiers poured through the silver-lit gardens in swift onrush.

Cullan raced with the Tuathan princess, around the base of the palace and into it by another door. They entered the back of the shining pearl-hall.

Cullan glimpsed Mannanan and his men pouring in against Fand's guards. Swords were flashing—swords that flamed with charges of destroying force. The merest touch of those swords sent men falling in dead, blasted heaps!

"Retreat up the stair!" Fand's voice cried to her guards like a silver trumpet. "Guard the chamber of the Portal!"

There was a mad, scrambling confusion across the cool loveliness of the shining hall, as the outnumbered soldiers of Fand gave back toward the stair.

Cullan reached and snatched up a sword from a dead man's hand. The weapon was light as a rapier, its blade shining with that deadly force.

"Kill that outworlder!" roared Mannanan's voice through the fight. "Seize Fand!"

A sword struck like a lightning-bolt toward Cullan as he swung Fand behind him to the stair.

CULLAN parried and struck with the half-forgotten skill of fencing taught him at his university five years before. His blade slithered past the opposing rapier and touched his Tuathan enemy's arm.

The man dropped without a groan, his whole side blasted and withered by the destroying touch of the charged sword.

"Up the stair!" Fand cried. "Mannanan has suborned my soldiers—we have only this palace guard."

There began a crazy retreat up the coiling stairway, past level after level of the palace. Fand's few guards were holding the steps stubbornly, barring the narrow way to Mannanan's hordes.

"The Tuatha possess other and more powerful weapons than these swords, but Mannanan dares not use them lest he destroy the palace and the Portal with it," Fand was crying to Cullan. "If we can hold them—"

Jeff Lewis' wild face thrust between them. "Cullan, what is it? What's happening?"

"Mannanan and his bunch are trying to seize the controls of the Portal, whatever it is," Cullan rasped.

"My God!" exclaimed Lewis. "If that happens—"

Cullan heard no more, for one of Fand's soldiers had fallen directly below him on the stair. He leaped in to fill the gap.

Deadly, shining blades clicked and clashed on each other all across the stair. Men touched by them fell as though struck by lightning. Cullan felt old fencing skill coming back to him in the desperate fight.

But they were being forced back upward despite the blasted corpses with which they had strewed the steps. Up past level above level of the palace, until behind and above the defenders lay the end of the stair.

The stair opened up onto the roof of the topmost bubble-dome of the palace! Sunken in that roof was a round recess open to the misty moonlight, a windy, lofty enclosure containing a great mechanism which flashed and glittered.

The thing was a giant crystal similar in shape to the tiny crystal in Cullan's ring. But this one was huge, mounted in massive framework and gimbals of gold, and surrounded by an intricate pattern of similarly mounted smaller crystals.

Fand cried wildly to Cullan, as Mannanan's triumph-shouting hordes pressed them back at the narrow entrance of this chamber of the Portal.

"The Portal is lost unless I call for help! But the only ones whom I can call to aid will deal death to *you*!"

"Do anything, to save the Portal from that devil!" husked Brian Cullan.

Mannanan yelled fiercely from back in the press of the attackers. "Slay that outworlder, quickly!"

Cullan stabbed and struck. The light, deadly sword was almost exactly like the rapiers he had once used in fencing. And the supernal necessity of holding the attackers nerved him.

He parried thrusts of blades whose touch was destruction, and loosed destruction himself by the swift flash and dip and stab of his shining weapon. Blasted bodies now choked the narrow doorway.

Yet another of Fand's guards went down, and now only three of them were left to fight beside him, with Lewis standing ready behind him to replace the next who fell. He caught a glimpse of Fand, standing by the edge of the great crystal machine with her white arms raised toward the night, her face strange and masklike in the silver light.

Another of the men beside Cullan went down. Triumphant roar of voices broke

from the attackers as they surged forward for a last onrush. They would break through, this time—

Something clicked in Brian Cullan's brain. Something made the sword in his hand suddenly flash with a swiftness and skill of which *he* had never been capable.

And as though from remote distances he heard his own voice roaring battle-challenge to the attackers before him. That terrible battle-cry rose raving above the din of the fight.

"Who comes against me?" Cullan heard his own voice roaring. "Who comes to kill the Hound of Cullan, the champion of the Red Branch, the slayer of Ferdia and the Calatin Clan? Who comes against *Cuchulain?*"

For he *was* Cuchulain now, as he fought. Except for one corner of his brain that watched wonderingly, he was another man—a man berserk with battle, a man who took fierce delight in slaying.

"I am Cuchulain the Hound and I've killed Tuatha before! Come meet me, Mannanan!"

NEVER later would Cullan be able to decide whether ancestral personality had come out of the dim chambers of memory to dominate his body, or whether it was merely knowledge of the old legends that obsessed his mind in this supreme moment.

Red battle-madness was rocking his brain and he never could remember more than a glittering net of swords weaving death around him but not quite touching him, as he held Mannanan's warriors back. And then, suddenly, the warriors before him recoiled, staring wildly past him.

"The sign!" yelled a hoarse voice among his attackers. "The sign of Lugh!"

The crimson mists cleared somehow from Cullan's brain. He glanced and saw that around and above the whole palace a wheel of *silent* lightnings were playing. A wheel of fire, sign of Lugh, greatest of the Tuatha De.

The wheel narrowed, and bolts darted from it toward the roofless chamber of the Portal. And in that blaze of silent lightning suddenly stood men, tall, grave, unhumanly calm.

Men? No men could have appeared thus

magically. Cullan's twentieth-century knowledge told him that he was seeing merely images projected from a distance in answer to Fand's telepathic call for help.

But dread images, these! Lugh, tall, grave, solemn, his somber, wrinkled face and his form wreathed with silent little lightnings, and giant, terrible-eyed Dagda, and a half-dozen others—gods of the old Celts, lords of the Tuatha De, the science-kings of two worlds once.

Lugh—or the projected image of Lugh—spoke in deep voice to the frozen attackers. "What evil is it ye do here, following Mannanan in lust for conquest of the out-world? Know ye not that such has been forbidden since I ordered closed the way between the worlds?"

Lightnings from the flaming wheel around the palace flashed threateningly toward the warrior hordes in the palace and gardens.

"Flee—Lugh's vengeance strikes!" went up the mad cry, and Mannanan's warriors turned frantically in flight.

But Mannanan darted forward, handsome face blind-mad with hate, his shining sword stabbing at Brian Cullan.

"At least *you* will perish, outworlder!"

Cullan turned—too late to parry that deadly blade. But a sword stabbed past him and ripped into Mannanan's throat. The Tuathan lord fell, face blackening and blasted.

Cullan whirled. Fand, shuddering, dropped the sword. "He would have slain you, Cuchulain!" she choked.

"Too much of slaying has there been because of these outworlders whom your faithlessness let enter Tir Sorcha!" rang Lugh's stern voice to her. "The men must die, before they cause more evil."

Fand swung herself in front of Cullan. "No!" she cried. "If you kill them, you must kill me also! Or I will shatter the Portal you gave me to guard, and open the way once more!"

A STIR went through the Tuathan lords. Astonishment and anger rang in Lugh's voice. "Are you mad, Fand? The men are outworlders and they cannot stay here."

"Then let them go back through the Portal to their own world!" she pleaded desperately.

Lugh frowned. "It is not well for the outworld to learn of Tir Sorcha from them."

"They would not be believed if they told," she insisted. "Two thousands out-world years have passed since we Tuatha De left Earth, and all is but myth and legend now."

Lugh finally made a sign of assent. "So be it, then. But they must go at once, Fand. Open the Portal and send them forth."

Fand turned. Wide, brilliant green eyes looked up into Cullan's face as for a moment she clung to him.

"Cuchulain—twice found, twice lost," she whispered. "You must go. It is that, or death."

"I'll come back," he said hoarsely. "Some-day, somehow, I'll find a way back in spite of all their Laws."

"Let the outworlders go, Fand," rolled Lugh's command, stern and urgent.

She thrust Cullan from her, with shaking hands. "Go quickly to your flying boat. When the Portal opens, the crystal on your finger will take you through."

She turned and blindly touched a control-stud by the side of the great machine. The giant crystal began slowly to turn in its gimbals, and the smaller stones around it turned also, faster and faster.

It was Lewis who nudged the dazed, agonized Cullan down the death-littered stair of the palace, by main force.

"We've got to get to the plane quickly! Our only chance to get back!"

Palace and streets of Ethne were deserted as death, as the people cowered in fear

from the flaming sign of Lugh over the palace.

The amphibian was still drawn up at the edge of the stone ramp. As they scrambled inside it, the ring upon Cullan's finger had begun once more to glow like a tiny, spinning sun.

Abruptly, everything dissolved in swirling mist. They felt a shattering shock. Then the plane rocked wildly, battered by big waves.

Sunlight—normal yellow afternoon sunlight streamed upon them through the cabin windows. The amphibian was floating in the gray-green Atlantic beneath blue sky. They had come back through the Portal to Earth.

Cullan looked about them, dazedly. "Tir Sorcha—and Fand—here a moment ago! Here, right beside us!"

Shining Land, lost elysium, moon-misted Ethne and princess of the old gods, gone, gone—

"Months must have passed in the half-day we were in there!" Lewis was exclaiming excitedly. "We'll have to tell people that we've been floating all that time. They'd never believe the truth."

His eyes gripped Cullan's. "Was it true, Cullan? I'm beginning to doubt already that it was only a dream!"

Cullan looked down at the crystal on his finger, Fand's gift to Cuchulain of old and to him. Tears blurred his eyes.

"It was no dream. Someday, even if it means death, I'm going to find my way back to her."

