

the **LEGEND** of **Faile O'Ryen** and how he became

Leader of the Red Branch Warriors

Let us tell the tale of Faile O'Ryen Son of Konan and the mightiest of the Red Branch Warriors. Faile was born Liam and given the name Faile when he was a lad. He defended himself against a pack of wolves and earned the name "Faile" which means "Killer of Wolves".

Liam was born of farmer folk in the south of Meath during the later age of the Irish. He was a strong and ambitious lad and much loved by his mother and Da. One day his uncles, Olin and Reif, took young Liam on a hunt for deer in the hills of Roscrea. He lad was but six years of age and struggled to keep up with the pace of his elder uncles. By noon, young Liam was quite tired and lagged a bit behind the hunting party. As his uncles turned north into the hills, young Liam wandered eastward into a lea in search of water to quench his thirst. But when he stopped to drink from a pool of cool water, he was confronted by a pack of ugly wolves. The pack circled the young lad and though to themselves, "Now we have found our dinner!"

But young Liam had another thought in mind as he was not about to be devoured by the ugly wolves. He grasped a dead sapling and wrenched it from its roots. When it broke free, Liam had a club of over seven feet, which he swung in a circle over his head. With a yell, he screamed at the wolves, "Come for I will vanquish you!"

As his uncles strode to the top of the ridge to the north, they realized that the young Liam was not with them. They feared that he had fallen behind and was lost. But then, they heard a great rowel arise from the valley to the east. A pack of wolves were howling as if death had fallen on them. The uncles ran down the ridge with swords drawn fearing the terrible site they would find when they overtook the wolves. But when they arrived, they found a heap of bones and hides and but a few animals clinging to their lives. In the midst of the pile stood Liam still clinging to his bloody club.

With a smile, Liam greeted his uncles and said, "It is my fault that no animals remain for your sport. I ask your forgiveness." The uncles fell to their knees with relief and praised young Liam as a mighty hunter. From that day, Liam was known as Faile.

When Faile was twelve, his life was changed by a terrible occurrence, which shaped the remaining years of his life. He was away in the fields when his sister, Elaine ran to him in tears. "Oh brother!" she cried, "the Englaish lords are upon us and your dear da is in peril." Faile ran to his home to find it in a full blaze. The English overlords had come for rent and had hung his beloved mother and dragged his father behind their carriage in order to make an example of him of their superiority. His dear da was dragged for four miles before he was forced to give up his soul. Upon finding his home in flames, his Mother and Da dead, Faile was enraged. He grabbed his father's sword and vowed to flay the English.

He ran after the villains and after two days, he found them making camp upon a hill near the Shannon. As darkness fell, he ran down upon them swinging his sword round his head. The English were caught off guard and before they could make a defense, Faile was amongst them slashing and stabbing all. Within minutes, nothing but a flood of blood was running down the hill. Faile stood victorious but knew in an instant that he was now marked man.

When they learned of the massacre, his remaining family feared for the young lad's life. Faile was secreted away to Southern Scotland to fight with the Border Reavers against the English and there he gained great renown in battle.

Now it came to pass some years later when Faille had gained his twentieth year and mastered great battle skills that he decided to return to his homeland. It was the custom of the Irish to hold a great faire at Tara each spring. Immense games of skill and bravery were presented to display the talent of the young warriors who sought to make a name for themselves. It was to these games that Lord McFionn and his Red Branch Warriors would assemble to pick amongst the greatest of the contestants to be warriors with their mighty band. And so it came to pass that Faille would capture the attention of the great Lord McFionn.

On the first day, archery was the primary contest and Faille was able to supplant all comers. He hit the mark with each flight and gained points more than double that of the next best competitor. But, on the second day, when swordplay was contested, Faille was even greater than all others. Both on foot and on horseback, his accuracy and power was far superior to any that the Great Lord had witnessed in previous faires. Faille was able to split an acorn in two while riding horseback at a full gallop. On foot, he split a two-foot wide log in twain with one stroke. And when he confronted the other contestants in melee, his opponents dropped one by one with each of his mighty swings.

At the end of the contests, the great Lord McFionn called Faille to him and proclaimed, "Never have I seen a greater warrior with more soul or skill. I would have you for my sergeant and you will build for me a great army."

And so Faille was made the leader of the central group of the Red Branch Warriors and has been at the side of the great Lord McFionn to this day.