

The earliest known example of the beheading-game legend appears in the Irish story *Fled Bricrend*, written down about the year 1100 but probably a good deal older (see Appendix A). It tells how a terrifying ogre enters the hall where the Ulaid heroes are gathered, carrying a huge club in one hand and an enormous axe in the other. He explains that he is searching for a man who will deal with him fairly, and that the reputation of the Ulaid has brought him there in the hope of finding one. The terms of fair play that he proposes are that he will cut off the head of one of the heroes, who on the following night will decapitate him. This arrangement is not accepted, and the ogre agrees to reverse the conditions by standing a blow forthwith and returning on the next day to give one in return. One of the heroes accepts the challenge and cuts off the ogre's head, filling the hall with blood; but the ogre rises, picks up his head and the axe, and leaves the hall, still bleeding profusely. When he returns on the following night his opponent shirks his undertaking to stand the return blow. Two further heroes take up the challenge with the same result,