

**Sharing Stories Sharing Cultures**

# **Stories influenced by Landscape**



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# Ireland



**Crom Dubh**

Crom Dubh ("Dark Crom" or "Black Bent One") is a mysterious figure from Irish folklore and mythology associated with harvests, ancient pagan traditions, and the festival of Lughnasa.

He appears in old Irish stories as a dark chieftain, god-like figure, or supernatural being connected to fertility, cattle, and the land.

## Crom Dubh & St. Patrick

There is a sea stack at Down Patrick Head, near Ballycastle, Co. Mayo that has many legends associated with it.



Long, long ago, so the legend says when the mountains whispered secrets to the waves, there stood a mighty Celtic chieftain known as **Crom Dubh**, the Dark One.

His name was whispered in fear by the villagers who lived beneath the great cliffs of the Céide Coast.



He wasn't just any man—he was a powerful leader and believed in the old ways of the world. His people thought he had magical powers, and they looked up to him like a king.

In the days of Crom Dubh, the land was wild and untamed, and the world was ruled by those who held sway over the elements. Crom Dubh's people worshipped him as a god, and they feared him as a being who could command the very winds and storms that churned the sea.





He ruled over the land, and he didn't want to listen to anyone who talked about new things. He liked the old ways and didn't believe in anything different.

One day, a kind man named **St. Patrick** arrived in the land. He wasn't like the other people Crom Dubh knew—he didn't have a sword or a big army. Instead, he had something much stronger: a heart full of love and kindness.



St. Patrick travelled from village to village, teaching everyone about a new way to believe—a way filled with love and peace, where everyone could be kind to one another.



But when St. Patrick reached the cliffs of **Downpatrick Head**, he found Crom Dubh standing tall and proud. Crom Dubh did not want to hear about the new way of living, and he didn't want to listen to St. Patrick.

He thought his old ways were the best and didn't believe in the power of kindness.

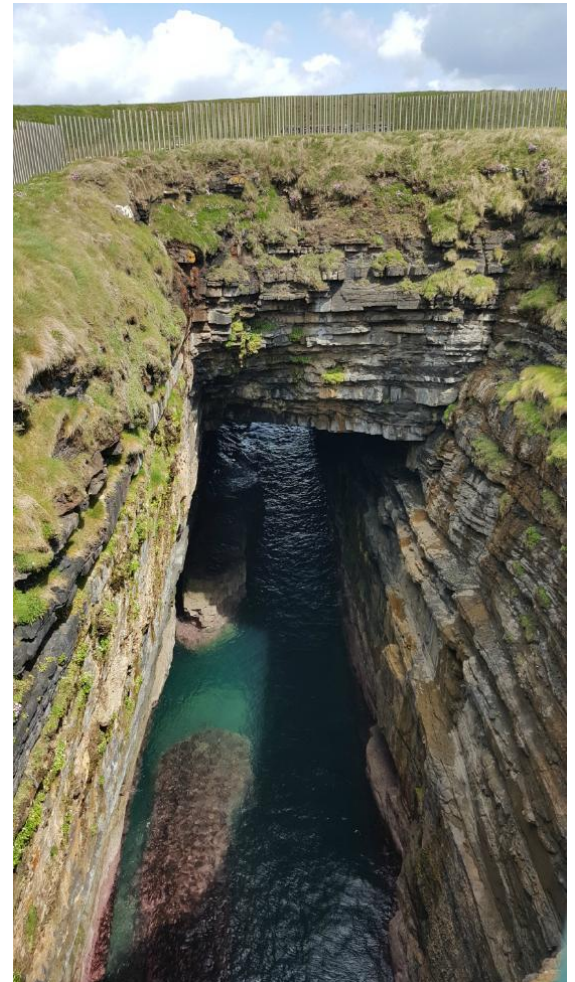




St. Patrick tried to talk to Crom Dubh, but the mighty leader was stubborn. He didn't want to change. He set his dogs on St. Patrick but when the fierce dogs reached Patrick they wagged their tails and were happy to see him.

Later he set the ground on fire to burn Patrick. But St. Patrick picked up a rock and threw it into the fire. With a loud bang it landed in the middle of the fire. The fire was quenched but it left behind a large hole.

Today visitors can see this blowhole and it is known as 'Poll na Sean Tine' - the hole of the old fire.. You can look down to the sea below.



St. Patrick continued to speak to him and reason with him but he wouldn't listen . So, St. Patrick, with a smile and a kind heart, spoke a special prayer, asking the earth and the sky to help him. He called upon the forces of the heavens, and with a mighty strike of his staff. A great rumble was heard and the ground beneath them began to shake!



The cliffs cracked open, and with a loud crash, a huge piece of land broke away from the rest, leaving Crom Dubh standing all alone on a small rock in the middle of the sea. **Dún Briste** (meaning the broken fort) the sea stack—was born, and Crom Dubh was stuck there, far away from the land and the people.

From that day on, Crom Dubh stayed on his lonely rock, surrounded by the wide, deep ocean. He couldn't hurt anyone anymore, and he couldn't stop St. Patrick's message of kindness from spreading. Worst of all he was plagued by the midges!



And so it was, that **Crom Dubh**, the mighty chieftain, the dark god of the old ways, was forgotten by time, his power shattered by the light of St. Patrick. The cliffs of Downpatrick Head, where once his shadow loomed, now stand as silent witnesses to the great battle of light and dark.



Now, if you visit **Downpatrick Head**, you can see **Dún Briste**, the tall sea stack that stands all alone. It's a reminder that kindness and goodness are stronger than anything else!



# Turkey



## Sumela Monastery

## The Founding of Sumela Monastery

In the shadow of the towering Pontic Mountains, where thick forests swallowed the sunlight and cold rivers carved through the valleys, there stood a dark and lonely cliff known by the villagers as the Black Mountain. People avoided it.



The mountain was hidden for much of the year by swirling mist. Strange echoes carried through the trees at night, and shepherds claimed they sometimes saw flickering lights high among the rocks where no path could possibly lead. Far away, in Athens, two monks named Barnabas and Sophronios shared the same vivid dream.



In the dream, a woman dressed in deep blue stood before them holding a shining candle. Behind her was a cliff wrapped in clouds, and within the cliff burned a small golden light.

"Find me where the mountain touches the sky," she whispered.



When the monks awoke, each discovered they had dreamed the exact same vision.

Believing it to be a message from the Virgin Mary, they left their monastery and travelled eastward across mountains, forests, and stormy seas. For weeks they journeyed through the lands beside the Black Sea until at last they reached the wild mountains near

Trabzon.

The local villagers warned them not to climb the Black Mountain. "There are spirits in those cliffs," an old shepherd told them. "Even the wolves avoid that place."

But the monks continued upward.



The climb was treacherous. Rain soaked the narrow paths, rocks crumbled beneath their feet, and icy fog wrapped around them so thickly they could barely see. Yet each evening, just before darkness fell, they noticed a faint golden glow somewhere high above them.



On the third night, they found it.



Hidden deep within a cave in the cliff face was a small ancient icon of the Virgin Mary, glowing softly in the darkness beside a spring of clear mountain water. The monks fell to their knees in awe. They believed heaven itself had guided them there.

Barnabas touched the stone wall of the cave. "This mountain was waiting," he whispered.



The two monks built a tiny chapel beside the cave using rough stones and timber from the forest below. Over time, other monks came seeking solitude, prayer, and safety among the cliffs.

Slowly the chapel grew into the great Sumela Monastery.

And still it clung to the mountainside as if carved by giants from the rock itself. Travellers passing through the valleys would sometimes look up through the mist and catch sight of candles glowing impossibly high upon the cliff.



Many believed angels guarded the monastery. Others claimed the mountain itself protected the holy place from harm.

But the old shepherds would simply smile and say:  
"The mountain chose them."



# Finland

## Sauna



A

*sacred place*



For the people of Finland, the sauna is far more than just a hot room. It is one of the most important parts of Finnish culture, tradition, and identity — a place connected to family, health, nature, and peace of mind.

## **Background**

### **A Sacred Place - linked to life & death**

Traditionally, the sauna was considered almost holy. People were expected to behave quietly and respectfully inside it. In old Finland, people even said:

"Behave in the sauna as you would in church."

The sauna was the cleanest and warmest place in the home. Because of this, **important moments in life** often happened there:

- babies were born in saunas until the 20<sup>th</sup> century,
- the sick were treated there,
- Passed away loved ones were cleansed before the funeral.
- 

### **Connection to Nature**

Finnish saunas are closely tied to the natural world:

Many traditional saunas are beside lakes so people can move between intense heat and freezing water

.

### **A Place for Peace and Equality**

In Finnish culture, the sauna is one of the few places where everyone is equal.

A **place** for...

- community
- health and wellness
- connection to nature

A place connected to the **afterlife** - you must behave **respectfully!**

## Historical RULES OF THE SAUNA

- no being too loud
- no swearing
- no passing gas



Popular in all aspects of life including Eurovision song!

KAJ

- comedy/music group from a village near Nykarleby
- sing in a Swedish dialect, as they come from a Swedish-speaking area in Finland - like we do too!
- will represent Sweden in the Eurovision song contest 2025
- Bara bada bastu = "Just sauna"

A video thumbnail for the Eurovision Song Contest 2025. It features three men in suits performing on stage. The text "EUROVISION SONG CONTEST BASEL 2025" is at the top, and "Sweden" is written in large white letters at the bottom. A play button icon is in the center.

# The Sauna Elf

Deep in the snowy forests of Finland, long before electric lights or central heating, the sauna was the warm heart of every home.

It was where families washed, healed, rested, and even welcomed new babies into the world. People believed the sauna was a sacred place — so sacred that it was never to be treated carelessly.

And every sauna, they said, had a guardian.

The Finns called him the **Saunatonttu** — the Sauna Elf.





The Sauna Elf was said to be small and old-looking, with a long grey beard, bright eyes, and clothes made of rough wool and fur.

He lived quietly beneath the floorboards or among the stones of the sauna stove.

Most of the time, nobody saw him. But people knew he was there. On winter evenings, when snowstorms rattled the wooden walls and steam curled thick into the cold night air, families sometimes heard soft footsteps after everyone had left the sauna. A faint cough. The creak of a bench. The sound of someone gently stirring the fire. "The Sauna Elf is warming himself," the elders would whisper.



The Saunatonnttu protected the sauna and the people who respected it. If the fire was kept properly, if people behaved peacefully, and if the sauna was cleaned carefully, the elf brought good fortune, health, and warmth through the harsh northern winter. But the Sauna Elf could also become angry.



If people shouted, fought, swore, or behaved disrespectfully inside the sauna, strange things began to happen. Fires would suddenly die. Steam would vanish. Water buckets tipped over by themselves.

Sometimes careless people claimed they felt invisible fingers pushing them toward the freezing snow outside.

One old Finnish tale tells of a proud man who mocked the Sauna Elf during a midwinter feast.

"There's no spirit here," he laughed loudly, kicking ashes across the floor. That night, the fire mysteriously went out during the coldest storm of the year. By morning, the sauna door had frozen shut, and the man was found outside buried waist-deep in snow, terrified and begging forgiveness from the unseen guardian.



After that, nobody in the village dared disrespect the sauna again.

To keep the Sauna Elf happy, families sometimes left small gifts:

- a bowl of porridge,
- fresh bread,
- or a ladle of warm beer beside the stove.

And on the darkest nights of winter, when the forests of Finland lay silent beneath deep snow, people still believed the old Sauna Elf watched over the glowing wooden saunas, protecting warmth, peace, and family against the endless cold.



Hungary

Legends of Hungarian  
Landscapes

## Balatoni Kecskéköröm „Goat Nails from Balaton



Long ago, a beautiful fairy girl named Tihany lived beside Lake Balaton.

Every day she led her golden goats to graze by the shore and sang sweet songs as she cared for them.

Deep beneath the lake lived Balaton, lord of the waters, whose young son loved listening to Tihany's singing. Her voice filled the lake with joy.

But one day, the fairy girl's song suddenly fell silent. The boy grew weak with sadness and soon died.





Heartbroken and furious, Balaton raised enormous waves that swept across the shore, carrying Tihany and her golden goats into the depths of the lake.

After the storm passed, strange little stones shaped like goat hoofs washed onto the beach.



People say they are the nails of Tihany's lost goats, and they can still be found along the shores of Lake Balaton today.



## Ördögszántás „Devil's Plow”



Long ago, the Devil fell in love with a beautiful girl who lived near the mountains beside Lake Balaton.

Wanting to protect her daughter, the girl's clever mother gave the Devil an impossible task.

“If you can plough the entire mountainside in a single night,” she said, “you may marry her.” Certain he could succeed, the Devil harnessed his great black horses and began tearing deep furrows across the rocky hills. Sparks flew from the plough, thunder rolled through the valleys, and the ground shook beneath his feet.





But as dawn grew near, the old woman became frightened.

The Devil was almost finished.

So she climbed onto the roof of her cottage and crowed loudly like a rooster.



Hearing the sound, the Devil believed morning had arrived before he had completed the task.

Furious and humiliated, he hurled the plough across the mountainside and leaped deep into the earth, disappearing forever.



The giant scars left behind in the hills became known as "Ördögszántás" – "The Devil's Plough."



## Boszorkánykő „Witches' Stone“



In the spring and autumn, the witches of the local area would gather here on the misty heights to meet.

In the spring, they discussed what curses to bring to the villages.



No one ever saw the witches, only the rustling of the broom could be heard.



Every spring, they made bloody human sacrifices in honour of their superior, the head witch, for giving them all new and greater magic powers



## Medve-tó



Long ago, the highlands above the village were said to be home to beautiful fairies who lived hidden among the mountains and forests.

One young fairy secretly broke the ancient laws of her kind when she fell deeply in love with a shepherd boy whose flute music drifted across the hills each evening.



Drawn by his songs, she often listened from the shadows, enchanted by his gentle heart and beautiful music.

One night, the fairy came down from the hills to meet him at last. But when she reached the valley, she found the shepherd holding another girl in his arms.



Heartbroken and overcome with fury, the fairy used her magic to turn the shepherd and his flock of sheep to stone.

Then, filled with grief for what she had done, she caused her own shining palace to sink deep beneath the earth.



In its place, a vast hollow appeared in the mountains.



The fairy wept there for many years, and her endless tears slowly filled the great pit, creating a lake that still glimmers among the hills today.

# Cultural Reflection: What these stories about our individual cultures?

These stories were influenced by landscape & our geography. Although they may seem very different on the surface, many share cultural themes that reflect how all people across Europe once understood nature, danger, morality, & the supernatural.

## Similarities Across the Stories

- **Nature as a Living Force**

In all of these legends, the landscape is alive with meaning.

In the Hungarian tales such as **"Goat Nails from Balaton," "Devil's Plow," "Witches' Stone,"** and Medve Lake, lakes, cliffs, stones, and mountains are explained through magical events.

In the Finnish story of the Sauna Elf, the sauna itself becomes a sacred place protected by a spirit.

In the legend of Sumela Monastery, the monastery is hidden dramatically within the mountains, suggesting holiness connected to nature.

In Irish mythology, Crom Dubh is tied to harvests, hills, seasonal rituals, and ancient sacred sites.

We see, that across all cultures, nature is not simply scenery — it has memory, power, and spirit.

- **Supernatural Beings Reflect Human Fears**

Each culture created supernatural figures to explain dangers people could not control.

In Hungary the supernatural figures (devils, witches, fairies) represent jealousy, greed, revenge, fear of the unknown.

In Finland the Sauna Elf reflects respect, tradition, proper behaviour.

In Turkey, the sacred mountain miracle reflects Faith, divine protection.

In Ireland Crom Dubh & older spirits reflects Fear of famine, sacrifice, seasonal survival.

Overall, these stories acted almost like lessons including:

- respect nature,
- respect traditions,
- avoid pride and greed,
- and fear breaking sacred rules.

- **Isolation and Harsh Landscapes**

The stories come from regions with dramatic geography:

In Hungary, volcanic lakes and hills around Lake Balaton, the snowy forests in Finland, the steep mountains near Sumela and poor rocky Atlantic landscapes in Ireland.

In isolated rural communities, unusual natural formations often inspired myths. Strange stones became "goat nails," furrows in hills became the "Devil's Plow," and misty peaks became gathering places for witches.

Definitely, the environment strongly shaped the folklore.

- **Christianity Mixed with Older Beliefs**

All of these legends show traces of older pagan traditions mixed with Christianity. Witches, nature spirits, and magical lakes often come from pre-Christian beliefs and later Christian influence transforming many older gods into devils, demons, or dangerous spirits. For example, Crom Dubh may originally have been a harvest deity before becoming linked with darker folklore. The miracle stories around Sumela Monastery combine Christian faith with older mountain mysticism. The Sauna Elf survived in Finland even after Christianity spread because respect for the sauna remained culturally sacred. This blending of old and new beliefs is common throughout European folklore.

## Differences

### **Finnish Stories: Protection and Respect**

Finnish folklore tends to portray spirits like the Sauna Elf as guardians rather than purely evil beings. The focus is on cleanliness, respect, silence and harmony.

Punishment comes only when traditions are ignored.

### **Hungarian Stories: Drama and Punishment**

Hungarian legends are often darker and more dramatic - devils carve mountains, witches gather in secret, jealous fairies destroy villages, supernatural revenge shapes the landscape.

These stories strongly emphasize emotion, tragedy, and warnings about pride or betrayal.

### **Irish Mythology: Ancient Cycles and Survival**

Irish myths often focus on seasonal change, harvest survival, sacred kingship and the boundary between the human world and the Otherworld.

Crom Dubh reflects anxieties about hunger, fertility, and survival in difficult landscapes.

### **Sumela: Faith and Divine Wonder**

The legend of Sumela Monastery differs because it centres more on holiness and divine guidance than fear. The mountain setting still feels mystical, but the emphasis is spiritual rather than threatening.

## Conclusion

The details change from country to country, but the underlying human concerns — love, fear, survival, respect, jealousy, death, and mystery — are remarkably similar.

