

Cath Palug (2021)

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Legendary Welsh cat



The animal Cath Palug is described as a gigantic cat, raised on the isle of Anglesey by the sons of Palug (presumably a local king). According to the Welsh Triads ([Tryoedd Ynys Prydain](#)) the cat was born of the sow Hen Wen when she was chased across Britain by her owner; it wasn't born on Anglesey, but 'at Llanfair in Arfon under the Black Rock, and the Powerful Swineherd threw it from the Black Rock into the sea.' It survived, swam ashore at Anglesey and was adopted by the sons of Palug. Its siblings were a wolf and an eagle, and all three were said to bring 'a great oppression' to Britain. One of King Arthur's knights, Sir Kay (Cai in Welsh) brought a force and joined battle with Cath Palug – but the outcome varies; in some versions he slays the cat, in others his force is defeated by it with great loss of life.

The full story

Here's a version of the story by [Jackie Morris](#), in which the cat wins!

'Cats have lived with humans for centuries. We were worshipped in ancient times as gods. Now we live as pets and are shaped by humans to fit their lives. They spay and neuter us; they take out our claws. If we have kittens they may be taken from us and drowned by callous people; or they use us as they wish in the name of science.

'If we're lucky we are cherished, but many a cat is thrown out to live or die on the streets. But once we ruled over people, and one day Cath Palug will come again to avenge us. This is her story, a story told to kittens as they curl in the warm circle of their mother's fur – a story as rich as the warm cat milk they drink.

'She was born on the edge of the land, on the edge of a storm, eyes closed fast against the world, a tiny, mewling thing. No comfort from her mother, for she was a wild thing, and magical – born of a wild boar, her sister a wolf, her brother an eagle. All would be the scourge of Arthur's Britain.

'A shepherd found her. He picked up the small black scrap, and she became claws. Deep ribbons of blood flowed from his hands and he threw her from him, out over the cliffs, and she fell and turned and twisted and tumbled into the raging waters of the Menai Straits. Her world became water as down she sank, but she fought even

against the power of the Straits, clawing the waves as she swam, away from the land through water so swift its surface was like mirror glass. She swam, and the current pulled her on until exhaustion claimed her. For a moment she floated, still on the surface; then the weight of water began to pull her down. As she gave herself up to death, warm hands scooped her up, wrapped around her and placed her in a dark, warm cave against skin. She slipped into sleep.

They called her **Cath Palug**, a miracle cat of claw and bone. She was ever the shadow of Palug's son – would walk with him, eat with him and sleep curled around his head at night. She grew, first as big as a cat, then a hound, then a horse. In any other place the boy would have been burned as a witch, along with this unnatural creature – but this was Ynys Mon, the Island of Dreamers. She hunted with Palug's boy and his hounds and she was always the swiftest. Her claws were sharp as swords, curved like the new moon, her teeth like daggers.



Most times she was the boy's shadow, but when the moon was full she would be gone for a few days. No one knew where, but tales would be told of devastation on the mainland, of cattle taken, of hunters who disappeared. And so Cath Palug came to the attention of the great King, Arthur, feasting at his round table in the court at Glastonbury. Boasting and bragging that he would rid the country of all who stood against his rule of law, he sent out his knights to hunt the legendary wild lion of Wales. Cai [Sir Kay] went forth, with many a knight.

The day was hot when the knights came to the shore and looked across the treacherous waters to the Dreamers' Isle. Sun glinted on armour, swords and spears; flags waved in a gentle breeze. In the hush before battle, buzzards called. Distant clouds began to build – dark clouds of ravens summoned by the rumours of battle. And on the shore of Ynys Mon Cath Palug waited and watched, amber eyes like fire, watching the mice-men.

Little is known of the battle that followed, for humans like to tell only of their victories. Some say that Cai returned to the court of King Arthur with the head of the lion of Ynys Mon as a trophy gift to his lord. They lie.

The battle was fierce and bloody; side by side the Dreamers and the cat fought. She clawed and she spat and she ripped and she crushed with claws and with jaws. Her claws ripped the metal of shields and sliced through armour; her jaws crushed helmets and splintered bone. Nine score warriors fell before her, and when the battle was over few were left to crawl back home. She feasted with the ravens and buzzards and kites on the bodies of these heroes, and Cai, seeing his comrades so destroyed, ran into the woods, driven mad by the slaughter until he too died and became food for the wolves.



'From that day Cath Palug, the clawed one, vanished into myth and memory. No one knew where she went, but some say she swam across the sea to Ireland, where she mated with the Irish sea-cat Murchata. Together they would lash their tails in the water to summon up storms. And together they would swim out to sea and claw boats down into the watery depths, hunting the sailors as cats hunt mice and amassing a huge hoard of treasure. Their children are still seen today by the lucky few, when the moon is a claw moon and the shadows are deep – a movement on a hillside, a dark shape in a forest. These are the children of Cath Palug and Murchata: a shape in the gloaming, a scream in the valley.

'At Ynys Mon every year the ravens still gather in great numbers. Thousands come from all over Wales and Ireland, to roost in the trees and to remember the great battle of Cath Palug.'



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