

FISHER

The gale threatened to pluck Rhiedh from her swaying pole and toss her effortlessly to the river below. Her dark hair whipped behind her and ruffled the fur on her extremities. With her eyes streaming it was a challenge to track the fishing beasts beneath the river's surface. From a perch high above the water, her four bipedal hunters - her Kvamda - looked like rippling shadows as they swam towards their prey: a shoal of large, silver fish languishing in the shallows amongst the weed. One of the Kvamda popped its round, furry head above the choppy surface. Its sleek, long neck glistened with water as its beady eyes swiftly surveyed its surroundings. Rhiedh whistled loudly and the Kvamda barked a reply that was snatched away by the wind before it re-submerged.

A stone flew up into Rhiedh's vision and she looked about to see where it had come from. The pole adjacent to hers was vacant, but atop the one further along Memiacho was shouting something and pointing down river with fear widening her eyes. Rhiedh couldn't hear for the roaring wind, but looked to where her friend was pointing. She spotted something else in the river besides the Kvamda and fish. A long, snaking shadow announced its presence slithering its way towards the fishers. Her heart skipped a beat before hammering hard against her chest. Adrenaline coursed through her veins and the fur on the back of her neck bristled. She grabbed the chain attached to the top of her fishing pole and yanked on it hard. At the bottom of the post, just below the water's surface, the pulled chain caused a metal hammer to strike a plate. The clash of metal on metal reverberated through the water and reached the ears of the Kvamda. Instantly, they twisted around and with powerful strokes of their hind legs headed towards the quay and safety.

Rhiedh watched as the winding shadow approached. She was caught between her anxiety for the Kvamda and a rising excitement: the approaching amphibian was not only a great threat, but it was also a rarity and a brave fisher's dream. She judged the distance and decided her Kvamda would be fine. She looked over at Memiacho and smiled at her as she signalled that she was going to go for it. Shock registered on Memiacho's face as she vigorously shook her head and shouted ineffectually into the wind. Rhiedh just grinned at her as she stood up on her support and then dove off.

Rhiedh struck the water and allowed her momentum to take her to the river bed. She pulled herself along towards where she had last seen her quarry. Tall weeds slowly waved in the current and she used them to conceal herself as best as she could. Small, golden fish flitted around the weed and with a flick of their tails shot out of her way. She stared intently ahead through the clear water. Her heart continued to bang against her ribcage. Her mouth was dry and she strained her senses for any indication

of the approaching beast. She edged forwards, careful to stay close to the pebbled bed and within the confines of the green weed. Her mind raced with ideas of glory and the accolades she would receive for being the first Cerchae in fifty years to catch a Ghebnethychi. Her name would go down in history and her story would be sung to future generations by the Clan Sagi.

Rhiedh snapped out of her reverie as she spotted the Ghebnethychi's head no more than twenty strokes away to her left. For a moment she was somewhat perplexed as the beast's appearance seemed to be in conflict with the tales she had heard. Its head should've been rounder with a flat face. But what Rhiedh saw was an elongated head that was far smaller than she had been told and then, to add to that she could clearly make out arms, legs, a tail and another head! She suddenly realised that she was observing a line of Suqoya swimming one behind the other so close that they resembled a single, continuous, serpentine animal.

Rhiedh's excitement and dreams of fame vanished. Fear now gripped her stomach and caused her heart to race. The Suqoya hadn't spotted her but the lead one was almost parallel and only about ten paces away. She raced through her options and knew that her first priority was to warn the Clan. Even if it gained them only moments, it could mean the difference between life and death for a friend.

Rhiedh steeled herself, tucked her legs under her body and planted her feet on the slick riverbed pebbles. With a mighty push she propelled herself towards the surface and kicked for all she was worth. She looked over at the Suqoya and locked eyes with one. Suddenly the Suqoya let out a shriek that cut through the water and pierced her eardrums. The linear formation of Suqoya fell apart before Rhiedh's eyes and two of them struck out towards her. They were far better swimmers than her and would be upon her in moments. She kicked out furiously and reached for the surface. They were bearing down rapidly but suddenly she broke the surface disoriented and panicked.

"Suqoya," she screamed as loudly as she could, "Suqoya."

She searched around for a moment before she spotted the quay and fishing poles in front of the town wall. "Suqoya," she shouted again and saw with relief that her cry had been taken up by Memiacho. She had done all she could and ducked back under the water just as a jagged spear thrust towards her. She sank deeper and twisted her body, but the spear caught her on her right shoulder and she felt it snick her collar-bone. Metal scraped over bone as her blood flowed out and then she grimaced as the pain struck.