**Defending the Ker!**

The first thing the folk of the ker had to do was make sure that those who had been injured in the attack by the Kah Du-Kel were seen to, and treated, by the magerez. Enora dealt with the more serious cases, while Shonagh and one or two of the other folk dressed and cleaned the wounds of those whose injuries were of a less serious nature. Some of the folk began the task of clearing up the damage caused by the cats on their rampage, while another group met to discuss what action they might take. This group was headed by Kozhiadez for, whenever calm was restored, the cry went up to fetch Kozhiadez so that she could advise them.

One could tell by the look on Kozhiadez’s face that the recent events had caused her considerable worry. First aid having been carried out, and some attempt having been made to clean up the wreckage, the crowd around Kozhiadez grew, and Shonagh and Andrew joined them. Everyone, it was plain, was as concerned as Kozhiadez about what had happened.

It was Katell, wife of Tual, who spoke for them all, ‘What are we to do, Kozhiadez? What can hae got into the Kah Du-Kel? They’ve never done onything like that before. It’s a wonder naebody was killed! We’re nae used to defending oorsels against the like o that!’

Kozhiadez nodded her head in agreement with what Katell was saying, ‘Aye, Katell, you’re right to be worried, for so am I. First o all we’ll need volunteers to act as archer. We’ll put an archer at the end o each tunnel and each must carry a goaf. A taboulin will be put beside them which they must beat to warn everyone if another attack is likely to take place. Now, who’s gan to be an archer?’

There was no shortage of volunteers and Kozhiadez smiled encouragement and thanks to each one of them as he or she indicated their willingness to act as a guard for the community. Having got the desired number, which would allow for two lots of guards to alternate, Kozhiadez then addressed the problem of Enourabi and the delegation.

‘I dinna think it would be wise to sent oot a lot o folk to try and find oor friends. If Beuneg got to hear that a lot o folk were away frae the ker, he’d probably get the Kah Du-Kel to try another o their raids and then we’d need folk to defend the place. We’d be better off sending oot pairs o folk to cover as many o the tunnels as we can. They shouldna go too far and make sure they report back as often as possible. They needna stray ower far frae the usual paths to Beuneg’s mougev, for be sure Enourabi will take the quickest road. Some o the folk in the ooter parts will help, I’m sure, and they’ll see any important news gets back to the ker. Is everybody agreed to that?’

The only replies were sounds of agreement. ‘Right, Katell, you organise the archer and some o you young bairns can find taboulin and set them aside the tunnels. The rest o us can continue with the clearing up and see what we can do aboot replacing some o the bits and pieces that hae been lost or broken beyond repair. Make sure that the barriers to the mougev are all in good shape. If the attacks continue we might hae a lot o need o good, solid gates on the mougev. Get on with that first, then we’ll see who we can send oot to search for oor friends.’ So saying, Kozhiadez turned and went back towards her mougev and Shonagh and Andrew followed her.

‘Kozhiadez, can we do anything to help?’ inquired Shonagh.

Kozhiadez smiled at them, ‘I think you’ve done a fair bit already. You’ve helped a lot o the folk who were hurt and you, Andrew, certainly saved Enora frae serious injury. What would we hae done withoot oor magerez? The injury to the Kah Du-Kel might hae made the others run off too; we’ve never retaliated like that before so they’d have got a bit o a shock!’

Andrew was quick to explain that he hadn’t meant to hit the cat, but only wanted to divert it’s attention long enough to save Danny, for it was Danny who had really saved Enora.

‘I know you’re nae the sort that would hurt a beast. But there are times when that sort o action is just what’s needed and I some fear that more beasts, and folk, are going to be hurt before we get this business sorted oot. As you say, Danny was the one who drove the Kah Du-Kel away frae Enora and he’ll need to get a reward. I’m sure there’ll be something tasty for him in one o the mougev. We’ll just away and see what we can find. You and Shonagh just come along with me and we’ll hae a wee rest. A wee rest now and again keeps us all fit and makes us ready to face what’s coming. There’ll be a lot o work needs to be done yet and I’m sure you’re help will be needed.’

The party headed towards the mougev and on entering they found Danny and Tourz enjoying a hearty meal from the same dish. The pair had become firm friends, their joint efforts in the recent skirmish having drawn them even closer together.

Enora was in the mougev treating the last of her patients and looked up enquiringly as they entered. Kozhiadez shook her head, ‘Nae news yet, Enora, but I’m sure we’ll hear soon.’ Enora reply was a silent nod. She finished dressing the wound of her patient, a particularly deep gash on the forearm, and then began to tidy up her medicines.

‘Yehann brought in food for Danny and Tourz. They did well in the attack and deserve something special,’ said Enora, trying to sound as though she hadn’t some serious matters on her mind.

What might have been an awkward silence was disturbed by the sound of a taboulin being rapidly beaten. Andrew and Shonagh jumped to their feet as the drum’s rhythm echoed through the ker warning of someone approaching through the tunnels, but Kozhiadez held out her arm to restrain them. ‘It canna be anything or anyone who’d do us any harm. It must be friends, for Tourz hasna moved, and he’d soon be alert to the approach o danger.’

A cry went up outside that it was Enourabi and his two companions. Enora ran to the door and sped towards the tunnel from where the drum warning had come. The rest followed closely on and were in time to see Enora greet Gurval in the manner of the folk, but with a deeper warmth of feeling that was plain to all who saw it. Gurval, like Enourabi and Barban, looked as though no physical harm had come to him. But, they all looked extremely serious and their stern manner worried a lot of the folk.

The raised arm of Enourabi silenced the many inquiring voices and he led a growing crowd of anxious, and curious, well-wishers towards the meeting place. As they walked Kozhiadez gave Enourabi details of the attack by the Kah Du-Kel and told him of the damage to both folk and property.

Once they reached the clearing, Enourabi, Gurval and Barban mounted the platform and Enourabi raised his hands for silence. He repeated the greeting of the folk and they, in spite of their obvious impatience and desire to hear what had happened with Beuneg, returned their leader’s gesture.

‘You’ll hae realised that the news we bring isna good. There was no treating with Beuneg. I’ve heard from Kozhiadez how much you all suffered while we were away, Beuneg must hae used oor absence to catch you unawares. We should hae expected that! You’ve done well to defend yoursels so well, but you’ll need to be prepared to do it more often, I think.

‘Beuneg has opened up another mougev for himsel. It’s high on one o the walls near the western ster. The water o the ster, and the mougev’s high position makes it difficult to approach. There is a wee path up the side o the cliff, but there’s only room for one person at a time on the path, and he’d find it very easy to defend. He just laughed at us when we tried to reason with him. He fair thinks he’s safe frae anything we can do.

‘He’s got the Kah Du-Kel completely under his control. There’s something nae right aboot the way he controls them, but how he does it we dinna ken. His only words that really concern us were that he was going to get revenge on us all for the way we’d treated him in the past. He’s a bitter man and a bitter enemy. What he thinks is this: soon we’ll hae a new leader, and that leader will be Beuneg!’

An angry cry arose from the gathering and Gurval intervened, ‘Enourabi is just telling you what Beuneg was saying. That doesna mean that we’re to lie doon and let him take control o oor lives. But, we must deal with the Kah Du-Kel and Beuneg quickly. He’s caused a lot o problems for the folk in the ootlying parts o Menez, far more than we’ve suffered here. They canna put up with much more and might give in to Beuneg. Who could blame them?

‘He’s upsetting all the beasts by using the Kah Du-Kel to attack and harass them day after day. That’ll make the beasts frightened and wary and they’ll maybe turn on us. They’ve been used to us letting them live their own lives in their own way and if they’re gan to be continually attacked and sometimes injured they’re gan to retaliate somehow. Ye canna expect them to understand that it’s only Beuneg and the Kah who are responsible.’

Gurval was interrupted by a voice from the crowd, ‘Aye, Gurval, but what are we going to do? You say Beuneg’s mougev canna be got at. What’s the answer then?’

‘We’ll need to work on a plan and work on it speedily. We need to find a way into Beuneg’s mougev, but that’ll nae be easy. Tual, Janed and Yehann you come and join us in the council mougev and we’ll see what plan we can devise,’ counselled Enorabi.

Shonagh, to her own and everyone else’s surprise, found herself offering a possible solution to the problem of gaining access to Beuneg’s mougev, ‘Pitons!’ she exclaimed, ‘Pitons are what we need.’

The word plainly meant little to the folk who kept repeating it in a way that suggested they were trying the word for taste as well as meaning. ‘What are pitons?’ asked Enourabi.

Shonagh blushed as she realised that she had drawn all eyes towards herself, ‘They’re like iron spikes that mountain climbers use when scaling steep rocks or cliffs. If you had pitons you could drive them into the cliff and approach Beuneg’s mougev from a direction which was relatively safe for attack by him or the Kah Du-Kel.’

‘That’s sounds a good idea,Shonagh,’ said Kozhiadez, but then, added sadly, ‘we dinna hae any pitons. We’ve never had need o them as far as I ken.’

‘But Yehann, the marichal, could make us some,’ persisted Shonagh. ‘You could, couldn’t you, Yehann?’

‘If they’re made o metal then I can make them, but somebody would need to gie me a drawing or plan so that I could see what I was making. And we’re gey short o metal here. Something would need to be melted doon to make them and how many would we need?’

Shonagh considered before answering, ‘Enourabi, how far up the wall is Beuneg’s cave?’

‘It would be about five men’s heights,’ he answered.

‘About six or seven metres,’ mused Shonagh. ‘Well, I should think about ten to twelve pitons would do. Can you manage that if I draw one for you, Yehann?’

Yehann nodded assent and Shonagh went over to where a pile of sand gravel lay. She spread some on the ground and traced the shape of a piton on the sand with a stick. Yehann watched closely as Shonagh drew the shape and he was soon smiling, ‘That’ll be nae problem and winna use up too much metal. I’ll need to harden them though if they’ve to go into rocks.’

‘Great!’ said Shonagh, ‘All we need now is a hammer to knock them in.’

Yehann look puzzled and Enourabi cleared the matter up, ‘She means a morzhol, Yehann. I’m sure you can gie us one o those.’

Yehann looked closely at the drawing once more and then set off in the direction of his forge, happy to be contributing to the solution of their problems.

Enourabi, impressed with Shonagh’s idea, asked her and Andrew to join the group who were to try and create a plan of action against Beuneg. Shonagh and Andrew were delighted and joined the others as they headed for the mougev where the meeting was to be held. They were never to reach the mougev for as they were walking towards it a strange, eerie animal cry was heard echoing along one of the passageways, to be quickly followed by the rapid and rhythmic beating of a taboulin.

The attention of everyone in the ker, including that of Danny and Tourz was drawn to the sound and, even after the taboulin ceased its loud thumping, the shrill, terrifying cry continued.

Gurval was quick to recognise it, ‘That’s an animal in pain! Quickly, my bag and louzen. I must go to its aid.’

‘Hold on, Gurval,’ cautioned Janed, ‘it might be a trap.’

‘No, that’s an animal in real pain and, if I’m not mistaken it’s a Kah Du-Kel!’

‘If it is Kah Du-Kel, might it not be a trap, after all?’ was the thought that passed through many minds after Gurval spoke.