

“Knucker, Knucker,
Red river drake,
He knocks the rocks,
His home to stake.

Disturb not the Knucker,
Within his watery abode,
Or the Knucker’s anger,
You would certainly goad.”

The crocodile defiantly hummed the tune to the old nursery rhyme as he walked along the riverbanks; the soft dirt along the shore squishing slightly under his sandaled feet. Most locals avoided certain stretches of the large stream, as the legends of a menacing, territorial creature lurked the water. Yet the crocodilian youth considered the myth just that; a myth, a tale to keep children away from the water’s stronger currents so they wouldn’t drown or something like that.

The reptile scoffed. “They could at least forgo the scare tactics for those of us who are actually aquatic,” he muttered to himself, shaking his head. The crocodile was quite confident in his swimming abilities, justifiably so given his species, yet he was also brash and rebellious, as many adolescents are.

Of course, the crocodile had been afraid of the legendary Knucker as a child, like nearly all children raised in his home town. Yet, as he grew, he realized that every story he had heard of the water dragons had been second hand. He couldn’t find anyone that had actually seen a Knucker for themselves, let alone been attacked by one. Doubtless belief turned to curiosity, then suspicion, and eventually outright dismissal of the entire notion of Knuckers as a whole.

Still, such fears had been drilled into his head by his peers and elders his entire life, and only now, at almost sixteen years old, had the crocodile worked up the courage to explore along the riverbanks.

Swaggering confidently along the shore, the crocodile walked the familiar stretches of the water entirely unfazed, having spent much time swimming in the clear stream throughout his life. Though he enjoyed the activity greatly, the designated spot for such swims was often crowded on summer days such as this one, and the croc had grown tired of the throngs. He knew there were places that were always free of other swimmers; the supposed territories of the Knucker.

Sure of himself in the reckless manner of a rebellious youth, the crocodile strutted ever further from the shores he already knew, venturing into the banks that he had yet to see with his own

golden eyes. The light breeze fluttered his brown vest slightly over his deep emerald scales, while his mossy green slacks protected his legs from the muddy ground he walked upon, gaining a layer of dirt with each cocky step he took.

However, as time passed, the reptile couldn't help the lingering sense of worry that so many years of warnings instilled in his mind about this part of the river. His brazen surety started to die down, becoming a hesitant slinking as his shoulders lowered from their arrogant heights. Stooping low, nearly crouching, the crocodile finally reached the point in the river where he knew no one else would be to crowd his swimming area.

Yet, as he looked out to the waters, flowing clearly and serenely, the reptile felt himself reluctant to enter the stream. Biting his lip for a moment, the croc shook his head rapidly, actually slapping himself in the cheek. "Get ahold of yourself, Raeburn!" he scolded himself, "It's just a dumb story, the water's perfectly safe."

Thus reassured, Raeburn squared his shoulders, before marching right into the water, shuddering slightly from the cool fluid's touch. Feeling the earlier trepidation bubbling up again, the crocodile forced himself to simply dive straight into the stream, his webbed appendages combined with his powerful tail propelling him into the middle of the river in mere moments.

Bobbing in the water for a moment, Raeburn looked around, before a broad, satisfied grin parted his muzzle. "Hah! So much for the Knuckers!" he proclaimed victoriously, whooping excitedly before diving into the water. Thanks to his nictitating membranes, the reptile had built-in goggles for swimming, allowing him to explore his watery surroundings with an iridescent view.

In the water, the croc was able to move much faster and more gracefully, practically dancing his way around aquatic plants and chasing fish just for the fun of it. This was what he was looking for; a place to race around without colliding into another anthro. And even after several minutes of swimming beneath the surface, Raeburn's air supply was far from depleted; another advantage of his crocodilian heritage.

As he swam under the surface, the reptile felt his earlier fears fading away, as well as a growing feeling of self-satisfaction. Surfacing after nearly twenty minutes of enjoying the water, Raeburn let out a long exhalation, resupplying his lungs with air as he paddled to the shore again, coming to a smooth rest on the banks.

While he sat waist-deep in the water, the adolescent grinned smugly. "Knuckers, what a joke!" he scoffed aloud, giving a boisterous laugh, "Wait 'til I get back and tell everyone that there's no such--"

Before Raeburn could finish his statement, there was a sudden, rhythmic knocking sound, like two rocks being banged together. Freezing in place, the crocodile's eyes darted about, searching for the source of the noise. Yet before he could pinpoint any origin, the knocking stopped, and there was silence around him; the unnatural kind that sent chills up one's spine.

"O-okay... that was weird," Raeburn mumbled, slowly rising to his feet and glancing around worriedly. All around him, the sounds of the wildlife had ceased, with only the subtle splashing of the river's currents punctuating the void.

Feeling another wave of shivers prick his back, the crocodile shook himself, looking around with a fearful expression. As he took a step away from the stream, the knocking came again; faster, louder, and closer than before. Jumping in fright, Raeburn turned and made to flee, when he tripped on the muddy ground, sprawling out in the muck and thrashing about trying to get back to his feet.

Flipping over to his back, the croc heard the knocking growing in volume, getting ever closer to him. Bolting upright, the reptile tried to run, when something hard impacted the side of his head. Stumbling again, Raeburn fell to the ground, his fuzzy vision trailing the rock that had been thrown at him tumble to the mud. Dazed, the crocodile attempted to stand, when a massive crimson object entered his field of view.

"Knuuuuuck... knuuuuuck..."

The sound sent spires of fear into Raeburn's core. He had to run. He knew he had to escape, but as he lifted himself to his hands and knees, he felt a wave of nausea hit him from the dizzying blow he had received. The creature drew closer, its heavy footsteps inspiring the crocodile to lift himself up to his knees, but before he could stand, a rough shove knocked him back to the mud, where he curled up fetally, whimpering in fear.

"Knuuuuuck-nk-nk-nk!"

"HELP!" Raeburn screamed out in horror, feeling the Knucker's claws press onto his chest, pinning him to the mud. Vision focusing, the crocodile stared straight into the ruby eyes of the dragon, before his own rolled back into his head as he fainted in terror.

The teen woke with a start, glancing around fearfully. It was dark now, and the Knucker was nowhere in sight. Panting hard, Raeburn began to wonder if he had dreamt his encounter with the

beast, casting his gaze around worriedly in the light of the moon. Yet, as he attempted to sit up, the youth found himself restrained.

Whipping his sights to his arms, the crocodile saw that his limbs were sunk into the mud of the riverbank. Panicking, Raeburn squirmed against his confines, when the sound of heavy steps caused him to freeze in place. Visible in the moonlight, the Knucker padded over to the crocodile, a deep, rumbling growl reverberating in its throat in the reptile's direction, before an even deeper tone incanted,

*“Knucker, Knucker,
Red river drake,
I knock the rocks,
My home to stake.*

*Disturb not the Knucker,
Within my watery abode,
Or the Knucker's anger,
You would certainly goad.*

*I bear water,
As men bear steel,
The Knucker's wrath,
You now shall feel.”*

Eyes widening, Raeburn opened his mouth wide and inhaled deeply to cry for help, when he felt something wet and cold suddenly fill his maw. Lashing his head back instinctively, the action failed to dislodge whatever propelled itself into his muzzle; in fact, the pressure increased, the crocodile's cheeks bulging with... water?

Looking down, fear and confusion mixed as Raeburn saw a tendril of water extending from the river, seemingly guided by the gesturing paws of the Knucker. As the pressure continued to mount within his snout, the crocodile tried his hardest to clamp his mouth shut, fearing that the dragon was trying to drown him. He could only barely keep the flow of liquid from rushing down his throat now, his eyes watering from the effort.

“Knuuuuuck!” the Knucker growled as the crocodile struggled, padding over to the reptile and glaring into his eyes.

“Drink deep from my river,

*Arrogant crocodile,
You've trespassed in my home,
Its privacy defiled.*

*Drink deeply now,
It's what you've earned,
Your time is here,
Your lesson learned."*

Feeling his throat relax seemingly of its own volition, Raeburn gagged as water pumped down his esophagus, sloshing heavily into his plated stomach. Gurgling his protests through the stream, the complaints were unheeded as the river's flow was redirected into the crocodile.

It wasn't long before Raeburn felt full, then stuffed, and still the water flowed, starting to stretch his gut visibly. Whimpering, the croc thrashed his tail against the thick muck, twisting his body in an attempt to escape, until something sharp touched against his chest, ceasing his motions.

*"The mud of the river,
And the water as well,
Are my own to command,
You can't flee from my spell.*

*So be you still,
Or you shall see,
How harsh my wrath,
Can truly be."*

Gulping, both from the water and in fear, Raeburn slowly stopped struggling, simply swallowing more and more of the river. He could feel his stomach expand with every passing second, soon rising into his field of view around his long snout. Bulging and rounding out, the reptile's abdomen swelled ever further, the scutes along his belly slowly spreading out to reveal the sensitive flesh between them.

As he watched his gut grow, the crocodile could feel the water weighing him down more and more, the massive amount soon causing his belly to start rolling over his legs. Once it reached his knees, Raeburn suddenly felt the muddy grip on his limbs loosen, yet it didn't matter; there was no way he could even stand with the massive balloon of water that his stomach had become.

The sloshing dome soon began to rival the crocodile's standing height, straining and gurgling from internal pressure. Raeburn was sure that the Knucker was going to inflate him until he burst, eyes watering from the discomfort of being so relentlessly filled. Closing his eyes, the crocodile awaited the end.

Yet as he felt his stomach engulf his feet under its cool flesh, the water's flow slowed down, before coming to a stop. Groaning as his mouth was freed, Raeburn panted as he ran his hands gingerly over his scales, before noticing the Knucker move into his field of view again from around his massive gut.

*“Consider yourself warned,
Vain reptilian youth,
Pass the message along,
Let others know this truth;*

*If you venture here,
Then you should know,
I'll fill you up,
Until you blow.”*

Turning without another word, the Knucker dove into the water and disappeared. Weary from his punishment, Raeburn's eyes fluttered shut as he internally promised to pass the dragon's message to his people, before he finally passed out from bulging fullness and bloated exhaustion.