

The Kidnapping of Mobia

The house shook as blinding light flashed in the room.

“What in Hammond’s Name was...”

A second explosion stopped him as the south-side windows exploded inward.

Throwing up both hands against the spray of splinters, Mobia rolled from his chair, and scrambled behind it. He tried to wipe away the stinging barbs peppering his broad face, but found them too deeply embedded.

A scream jerked his attention to the ceiling.

“Malatia,” he bellowed while scrambling from his hiding place. “Get the girls into the basement!”

He raced across the room as fast as his short legs would carry him. Grabbing a cloth from a pile of debris, he quickly wiped his face, staining it green with his blood.

“What was that?” his wife cried as she and her daughters appeared at the top of the stairs.

Another nearby explosion sent debris dropping from above as he yanked the basement door open. “Just get down here!”

Malatia hesitated, her large almond-shaped eyes wide, her normally healthy gray-green face nearly white, and a sobbing daughter clutching each arm. She froze for what seemed to Mobia to be forever before quickly descending.

“We need to get outside!” she cried when they reached the foot of the stairs.

Biting his lower lip, Mobia waved urgently at the basement door. “There’s no place safer.”

“But...”

He wrapped six long fingers around her arm, screaming, “Go!” as the front wall of the house exploded inward. Stinging debris pelted his back as he pushed the threesome into the dark opening. Choking on the thick dust, he blinked away tears while slamming the door and nearly tumbling down the stairs.

Malatia was cooing soft words to her whining daughters when Mobia burst into the dimly lit basement. Gasping for breath, he mashed a button, and breathed a sigh of relief as a heavy metal door slid across the opening. Metal plates also covered the basement’s small windows as emergency lights flooded the space.

“They have laser weapons,” his wife cried. “That won’t keep them out.”

Coughing, Mobia shook his head and patted the wall next to him. “Their sensors won’t penetrate these walls. We just have to hope they think we were killed in the attack.”

The room shook, and though the dense walls reduced the sound to a distant rumble, the effect was no less intimidating.

Soothat, their youngest, rushed to Mobia’s arms.

“Make them stop, Daddy,” she wailed. “Make them stop!”

“There, there, Dear,” he whispered while picking her up. “We’re safe here.”

“Who are they?” Etharia cried.

Mobia shook his head, unable to tear his eyes from his wife’s startled glare.

“I don’t know, Honey,” he lied, “but they’re not Antrakans, like us.”

“My teacher says we’re at war with the Maatiirani,” Soothat sobbed. “Is it them?”

“No, Dear One,” he cooed. “There are no Maatiirani in this region of space.” He kissed her forehead. “It’s probably just Bandidies coming to steal gold from our mines. They just want to scare us. I’m sure they’ll move on to the mines very soon.”

“I don’t think they’re moving on,” Etharia stated shrilly after another explosion shook the walls. “What if it’s Kokos?”

“Oh Hammond, I hope not,” Soothat moaned. “They’re so ugly.”

“They sure are,” Malatia agreed as Mobia saw her silently mouth, “Please Lord. Not them.”

He nodded in agreement.

“No, Baby,” he said while hugging his daughter closer. “It’s surely the Bandidies.”

The room shook violently, as though something large had impacted the ground.

When he saw Malatia’s startled look, Mobia put Soothat down and moved to the entryway door. Leaning against the metal, he listened until Soothat hugged his leg.

“I hear weapons fire, and it’s not one-sided,” he declared while hugging his youngest to him. “Someone’s fighting back.”

“Who could it be?” Malatia asked. “None of our neighbors have anything more than hunting rifles.”

Without even consciously willing it to happen, Mobia felt his breathing stop. He looked quickly from his wife to both daughters before releasing Soothat and moving to a small closet. His lipless mouth was a narrow line as he pressed a hand over the security pad, listened for the distinct ping of the release latch before yanking it open.

When he turned back to his family, his fingers were wound tightly around his military-issue laser rifle.

“No,” Malatia protested. “You need to stay here.”

He leaned the weapon against the wall and grabbed two power packs.

“Someone is fighting for us out there,” he argued. “They’ll need all the help they can get.”

He slipped into his padded blast-reflecting combat vest as all three women watched in stunned silence.

“Stay down here,” he instructed while turning to face them. “Don’t open this door for anyone but me or the military.”

“Please no,” Malatia cried. “What will we do without you?”

Grabbing the rifle, he shook his head. “You’ll be safe until I come back.”

He pressed an ear against the door again, this time hearing nothing. Taking a deep breath, he adjusted the position of his weapon and pressed the release button.

The silence was jarring.

His eyes moving from the door to the button, he jabbed it again with the same result.

“Ceratha’s spit,” he swore while holding the rifle out to his wife. “I need to work the manual control. Hold this.”

Eyes wide, and mouth open, she clung tightly to her daughters, but made no move to take the weapon.

“Malatia, please,” he insisted. “I have to do this. We can’t let them destroy everything we’ve worked for.”

Though he continued to hold out the weapon, Malatia didn’t move. After a tense moment, his older daughter separated from her mother and held out both hands.

"I'll take it, Daddy," she said calmly, even though tears were streaking the fine skim of dust coating her face.

Her offer froze him for a moment until the burping sound of laser fire forced him to act.

Passing her the weapon, he wrenched open a small door next to the release button. Pulling a handle out, he began to crank on it. The steel door slowly rolled back.

As daylight began to leak through the opening, Malatia rushed to a far corner of the room and sat Soothat on a table. Hurrying to her older daughter, she reached for the rifle, but Etharia hugged it to her chest.

Before she could protest, the girl pointed to the slowly widening gap in the door.

"Help Daddy with the door."

The surprise on Malatia's face lasted only an instant, and despite the terror gripping his chest, Mobia had to smile at his daughter's quick understanding of the situation.

When his wife moved up to push on the door's edge, he turned to Etharia.

"Keep a lookout. If you see anyone, call out and give me the weapon."

Nodding, she turned to look out through the widening opening. Mobia continued to crank until he heard her gasp. Jerking around, he saw her wide eyes and open mouth.

"Look out," he screamed while lunging at his daughter.

At the far edge of his vision he saw Malatia roll back toward Soothat. His body impacted his daughter's just as something pinged against the metal door. Time slowed as they fell toward the floor, but before they impacted it, he felt something slam into him and everything went dark.

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"Here's another one coming around," a male voice announced as Mobia opened his eyes.

To his utter horror, he saw nothing.

"Don't worry, Friend," the male said. "It's those stunner grenades. Some of the others couldn't see when they first came to. It only lasts a moment."

Mobia blinked several times with no change in his vision. Trying to rise, he felt a sharp pain across his back.

"Ahhh," he moaned while gently touching the burned area. "What happened?"

"That's a nasty burn," the stranger said sympathetically. "Those Koko stun bars are brutal. I'm afraid that pain won't go away any time soon."

He struggled to rise, but his arms collapsed, dropping him back onto the hard floor.

Groaning at the pain, he rolled onto his stomach. Though his hands were numb, he could feel enough to probe the rough surface and recognize the pattern in it.

"This is deck plating. Are we on a ship?"

His companion let out a long breath. "I think so, though none of us came in here conscious, so we really don't know what..."

A loud clang stopped the voice.

"Oh dear," he said. "Here come some more."

Mobia turned toward the sound, but saw only a faint glow of diffused light.

“Prisoners?”

“We gotta move, Son,” the voice announced as a hand tugged Mobia’s arm. “You don’t want to cross these bastards.”

Wincing in pain, Mobia scrambled to his feet and let his companion lead him to a spot where others were crowding. It was then he started to get feeling in his arms and legs and realized he was naked.

“They took my clothes?”

The room’s faint glow went suddenly bright and the fuzzy image in front of him seemed to be nodding.

“Everyone’s.”

A gruff squawk startled Mobia and he turned to see two large shapes enter the room. The crowd pulled back, as though touching the intruders would burn their skin. Mobia’s hand instinctively went to the painful spot on his backside and realized that assessment wasn’t far from the truth.

“What are they...”

A hand on the arm stopped him.

“No talking,” his companion whispered.

When Mobia squinted in the bright light, the intruding blobs assumed the distinct shapes of KokoroTetian soldiers pulling limp Antraka bodies into the hanger by their feet. The victim’s large heads bounced as they were dragged along.

Each soldier had two crocodile-like heads on long thick necks that melted into broad shoulders over a barrel-shaped chest. Four arms allowed them to drag two people at a time, and their ten stubby legs motored them along, despite their ungainly loads.

“Where’s my wife,” someone screamed as Mobia shook his head in the hope of seeing better.

Half-way across the hanger, he could see what looked like several people scuffling.

“You slimy sons of Ceratha,” one of them screamed while tearing free of his companions.

The two Kokos unceremoniously dropped their captives. Squawking loudly, they each grabbed shock sticks from the belts holding up their broad battle skirts.

Despite the weapons, the screaming male ran directly at the soldiers. When a zap from the first Koko’s shock stick didn’t bring him down, the second slapped him with his stick. Though he fell to the floor, the captive was back up again, howling unintelligibly as he wrenched the weapon from the first soldier and turned it on him.

The remaining prisoners watched in horror as the zapped Koko jumped back. Both creatures squawked again as the male lunged forward, striking home when the hapless soldier couldn’t back up fast enough. He was preparing for another strike when the second soldier lurched forward and chomped down on the attacker’s head with a sickening crunch. Reaching around with his other head, he raked his victim’s belly with his sharp teeth.

Mobia closed his eyes as the muffled pitch of the male’s screams rose sharply then suddenly stopped. Unfortunately, his eyes involuntarily popped open when the Kokos shrieked in stereo and pounced on the corpse in a feeding frenzy. Turning away, Mobia was barely able to keep his bile down as others wretched loudly at the sickening sound of tearing flesh.

“They could have just knocked him out,” he gasped.

He opened his eyes to see his companion shaking his head. “These monsters don’t do anything by half.”

Mobia was preparing to respond when a loud squawk brought his attention back to the middle of the room. As he turned, a more colorfully dressed KokoroTetian entered the bay. The newcomer squawked shrilly and the two original soldiers dropped the remains of the carcass to stand at attention.

“Looks like some kind of officer,” a nearby prisoner muttered to no one in particular.

The officer squawked again and the two soldiers barked a response before turning toward the crowd, pointing to several prisoners and using their hands to indicate they expected them to pick up the newest, still-unconscious victims and move them out of the way.

Eight Antrakans rushed out to lift their neighbors up. They no sooner had them off the deck than a group of conscious captives rushed in until naked prisoners were standing shoulder to shoulder.

After the soldiers left the bay, the officer’s shrill squawk brought the doors clanging down, and left the room in total darkness.

“Lord Hammond help us,” someone sobbed loudly as several others around Mobia cried openly. The wailing grew even louder as the floor began to shake, and he could feel the ship rising.

“They didn’t even pick up the poor bastard’s remains,” someone nearby moaned.

Mobia could not even speak as the ship’s acceleration pushed sweaty bodies against him.

Be safe, my lovelies, he prayed over and over again in the hopeless darkness.

Can Mobia get out of this mess?

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