

The Victim

The strangled cry startled Tjianna as she jogged. Stopping, she heard another strange noise that caused her to peer around the huge bolder.

“Oh my God,” she gasped as her large coffee-bean colored eyes focused on the huge shape. “What is that?”

Her young male companion, Matorba moved up beside her, pressing his long, slender fingers against the stone while leaning around to look. “You’ve never seen a Koko before?”

Tjianna pulled back and looked at him. “A what?”

Matorba shook his head. “A Koko...er...KokoroTetian.” He looked around the bolder again. “My father showed me vids of them from the war. He said they’re like Siamese lizard twins, because they have two ugly heads, four arms and lots of legs.” He shook his head. “I’ve never seen one on this planet. What could it be doing here?”

“Who cares?” the girl hissed as she pushed past him and started back down the path. “Let’s get out of here.”

“Don’t be such a weakling,” he argued while waving her back. “It doesn’t even know we’re here.”

Tjianna hesitated for a long moment as her companion continued to beckon her, his eyes on the scene. After looking back at their escape route, she shrugged angrily and moved to his side.

Peering around the rock again, she saw a large two-headed creature snapping its stubby crocodile-like mouths at something in the tall grass at its feet. The creature’s four arms were waving wildly, randomly slapping at whatever it was sparring with. As the bulky beast moved around, she saw that its tree-trunk-like body swelled at the waist. A large skirt surrounded its butt and reached down to the tall grass.

“Their legs must be really short, and how many feet do they have?”

“Ten,” Matorba answered distantly, “but that’s no animal trapped there.”

She huffed again. “Then what could it be?”

He didn’t look at her as he answered slowly, “I don’t know.”

A hand holding a club rose above the grass in front of the Koko. The creature grabbed at the weapon, but the defender was faster and wacked its hand.

Squealing, the Koko jumped back and when it attacked again, the club rapped its snout.

“Hammond save us,” Tjianna gasped. “It’s trying to eat a *person!*”

“We have to help,” Matorba shouted, pulling back quickly when the KokoroTetian turned a head in their direction.

Tjianna shook her head. “That’ll just get *us* killed.”

“Maybe,” he countered, “but I have to do something.”

“Suit yourself. I’m leaving,” she said while working her way around the rock and starting back down the trail.

“Get help,” Matorba called, watching her for a moment before a cry brought his attention back to the battle.

The KokoroTetian was now holding the club. Grabbing a handful of rocks at his feet, Matorba charged into the open.

“Stop,” he screamed as the largest rock flew from his hand.

Though the missile missed its mark, the creature turned one head to face him. Without hesitation, Matorba sent another rock flying, but when it bounced off the creature's snout, it hardly winced. A third struck its upper-left arm, but its reaction was the same.

The head facing him let out a deafening squawk that stopped Matorba, but rather than charging him, or turning back to its victim, the Koko seemed to hesitate, even taking several steps away from the person lying on the ground.

Matorba could now see part of a head and both arms, but the smaller rocks in his right hand felt useless, so he dropped them. Looking at the ground around him, he quickly located a large stone, and scooped it up.

Holding the weapon at shoulder height, he shouted, "Get back!"

The creature brought both heads around, but still looked hesitant as Matorba continued to dance around, brandishing his improvised weapon. The Koko's heads cocked in opposite directions, but it did not otherwise move.

"Go away," Matorba cried as he suddenly realized the rock was too large to throw effectively.

The Koko stood transfixed a moment more before emitting an eardrum-breaking screech and charging directly at Matorba. The young male's heart froze as the huge beast raced toward him. When he finally moved, the rock tumbled from his hand, striking his shoulder and shocking him into action.

His heart racing, he did a quick spin, stumbled once before sprinting up the path Tjianna had taken. As he approached the rock they'd been hiding behind, he looked back to see the screeching KokoroTetian was gaining on him. Looking forward again, he jerked right to avoid colliding with the rock, but that made him stumble again and almost fall. He quickly regained his balance, but a quick glance showed the monster's club heading towards his head. He ducked down, dug in his toes, and ran with all his might.

Despite his best effort, the Koko stayed right with him, swinging its club ineffectively, but close enough to make any mis-step lethal. Feeling his legs weakening, Matorba cut into a small grove of tightly clustered trees, forcing his pursuer to stop when his wide body would not fit between them.

Though his lungs were burning, Matorba did not let himself stop.

"Got to get help," he wheezed while guiding his smaller and thinner frame through the tightly packed grove.

He was almost to the edge of the trees when a bright light flashed in the forest and a nearby tree exploded. He dropped into a crouch, gasping for air, and looking quickly around to see nothing but a wall of trees.

Peering around a nearby tree, he saw a different Koko looking in his direction.

Ducking quickly back, he groaned, "What have I gotten myself into?"

He had only managed to take a couple of breaths before the burping sound of laser fire brought him up short. Peering around the tree again, he saw billowing smoke between him and the second Koko. Another burp sent a row of trees tumbling.

"Ceratha's burning bowels," he swore while taking off in the direction he had come.

The Koko behind him squawked loudly as another row of trees thumped to the ground, and Matorba heard his companion screech in response. He turned quickly right,

but a beam of laser fire ignited a tree just ahead of him, sending burning debris exploding in his direction.

Scrambling to move clear of the flames, his foot caught a surface root and sent him tumbling to the ground. Bouncing up quickly, he saw almost the entire forest around him was ablaze. His heart skipped a beat when he realized the only direction open to him led back to the first Koko. The repeated laser fire accelerated the burn, forcing him to move away from the heat and burning embers of exploding trees.

Standing still meant a horrible death, so he scrambled through the trees until he saw the first Koko dancing back and forth and peering into the forest. With no other avenues open to him, he continued to move closer and closer to the edge of the trees, the fire now allowing him a path only about fifty meters wide to move through. However, just before Matorba reached the grove's edge, the creature squawked loudly and ran to his left. Though he wanted to stop and see what the Koko was doing, the fire's heat forced him to scramble from the safety of the forest.

When he stumbled into the clearing, the Koko was nowhere to be found.

"What the..." he started to ask before Tjianna appeared on his right with two Antraka men.

He stumbled away from the growing inferno, heading as best he could in their direction.

"Matorba," she screamed when he tripped over his own feet and fell, but quickly bounced up and ran toward them.

"Did you see them?" he asked.

"There were two of them," one of the men announced while waving at the fire.

"What were they doing here?"

"We saw one trying to kill someone," he answered. "Where are they now?"

The lead man shook his head. "They got away in their ship. We notified the planetary guard."

"Where's the guy they tried to kill?" the second man asked.

Tjianna was already moving when she said, "Follow me."

Matorba started to follow, but a suddenly bout of dizziness made him stumble and drop to his knees.

"Whoa there, Son," the second man cried as he grabbed Matorba and steadied him. "You OK?"

Matorba gasped for air as he struggled with limbs that felt like alien beings. The first man shook his head when Matorba stopped struggling.

"You've had quite a shock. Stay here and your friend can show me the way."

Matorba shook his head, but made no effort to rise.

"I'll stay with him," the second man announced. "See what you can do for the other one."

Matorba watched as Tjianna and the first man vanished around large bolder, but it seemed only a moment before they were back.

"What did you find," he asked as he saw Tjianna's anxious face.

Her head shook. "He's gone," she said as they stopped in front of him. "The ground is green with his blood, but they must have taken him away."

The first man shook his head as he held up a bloody object. "I found this boot a short distance away."

“Oh Lord,” the second man gasped. “It’s military.”

“What does that mean?” Tjianna asked nervously.

The first man sighed and shook his head. “You may have been involved in the first battle of a war with the Kokos.”

What happened during the war between the Antraka and the KokoroTetian’s?

What the heck are Antraka and KokoroTetians?

Pick up a copy of *Prison Earth – Not Guilty as Charged*.