

Kokoz: The Grunt

Chapter 1

Dammit, the cows came home

The area held a dull green luminescence, reminiscent of sludge in every way. Kokoz was unperturbed as he opened his eyes slowly and rubbed them, clearing his vision. Moisture in the air helped his stressed muscles relaxed as the memory of his homeworld surrounded his being. The air was just as he remembered, and no airtank was necessary.

No airtank meant no armor. No armor meant no clothes.

Kokoz instantly became fully awake and covered his private parts, but saw no one around. A sigh of relief followed, and Kokoz looked around, yet saw nothing except for the seemingly dusty and humid air. Something did not feel right though.

Picking himself off the ground, Kokoz started walking, but was abruptly stopped by some hard surface. He shivered as the wall touched his midsection. It was much cooler than the surrounding environment. Feeling it with his claws, it was very flat and smooth. A wall.

Thinking about the situation, he realized the ground was also colder and not as rough as normal for his home planet. Kokoz walked in another direction and another wall kept him from proceeding further. The other directions did so as well.

Reality struck Kokoz hard as his last memories came into focus. He was part of a boarding party...32 or 31, or maybe 23. His commanding officer had been barking orders all day that day, and he wished that they could just finish the stupid war before he died from it. That's how it worked with his kind, and was even a proverb in some of their ancient texts before they were taken into the Covenant: "Life flows when battles are short, or when they do not happen at all. Either surrender or accept surrender, because life is short. There isn't a need to make it shorter."

Returning to the memory, he was sitting next to two of his fellow Unngoy in the back of the boarding craft. A Kig-yar snarled at him when he nearly fell asleep during the flight, which was not enough time to finish with a food nipple. But thankfully, the stupid Kig-yar was punished for his impudence by the commanding Sangheili.

Then a few orders were shouted out, a loud noise came and the boarding craft stopped suddenly, and they tore through the hull of whatever it was they were attacking. Kokoz didn't know what it was they were attacking, because it wasn't important for him to know. All of his orders were to simply follow the commands of his commander, which only said, "Prepare for the attack!" So he waited for it, and quivered in fear with the other two Unngoy.

When they had fully penetrated the hull, it flung off and several unfortunate Unngoy in the front of the boarding craft came out first. The sound of weak Human weapons vibrated through Kokoz' head, but his knowledge didn't kill his fear. He saw other Unngoy, and even Sangheili die at the hands of the Humans, and the only thought through his mind was that today was his day.

The others in front of him kept coming out, but just before it was his turn to leave, an explosion knocked him down hard. He let go of his gun and heard something snap in his leg. Only a moment later he felt a surge of pain and screamed as loud as he knew. Kokoz scampered a look to his left and right, but only saw the bodies of his fallen comrades, none of them moving. They left him for dead.

And when a giant shadow loomed over him, it was the only thing worse than a Human that could kill him. It was the Demon. Story's the others told said that if killed by the Demon, your soul would be devoured by it, and would never be released unless the Demon itself was killed. Other said the Demons were invincible, and could easily overtake an army of even the greatest of Sangheili. And some said that the touch of the Demon could kill. Kokoz didn't want that to happen, but he didn't have much of a choice either.

So he did the only thing he could think of: reach for his gun. But the damned thing was too far, and a body lying on his leg wouldn't let him budge.

Then the Human's language poured into him, but his excitement and the intense beating of his hearts kept him from hearing their words. But the Demon stepped away from the edge of the boarding craft, and another Human entered and carried him out. His consciousness faded shortly after.

And now he was in some strange room that was misty like his home planet, with normal air and temperature. He began to quiver once more, and quickly ran to the closest corner and sat, shaking.

"There's no need to be afraid," a strange voice said. In complete fear, Kokoz looked in every direction, making sharp turns with his head but not finding the voice's source. But it was in his native tongue, and that alone managed to relax him just a bit. "Nobody is going to hurt you. We simply want to help you."

"H-h-help me h-how?" Kokoz muttered.

"You can trust us. We wouldn't have helped heal your wounds if we meant harm, would we?"

"N-no, me guess not."

"That's right." The voice, wherever it was coming from, was very soft and soothing. Without meaning to or realizing it, his body began to loosen up, and he started listening more closely. "We want to bring you back to your...people. To your race."

"You mean you no Unngoy?"

"No, I am an artificial intelligence program working for Humans. I'm here to help you situate yourself with the changes that have occurred over the last day." Kokoz suddenly became extremely agitated, now knowing he was in the enemy's hands, and that they could do whatever they wanted with him. And from the stories he heard about what Humans do with prisoners, it made the Demon look like a child's toy.

"Don't worry, nobody will hurt you here. While you were asleep, a treaty with the Covenant has been made. We're allies now." The words hit Kokoz hard, but they were too distant, too unbelievable.

"N-no, Humans evil. They no join Covenant."

"If you would like, I can show you a video of one of our leader's signing a treaty with one of your leaders." With that, the lights in the room dimmed, and one of the walls illuminated, showing a bald-headed Human and several Sangheili signing documents, which only made Kokoz's eyes widen.

“I’ve just released a gas that will make you fall asleep again. When you wake next, your leg will be fully healed, and you will find yourself in your armor and atmosphere suit. But be prepared for a fight, because we might find ourselves in one.” Just before he could protest, Kokoz’ legs became very weak, and he practically fell to the floor, clawing at the air. By the time he hit it, he was out cold and drooling on it.

Chapter 2

Err...am I gonna go boom?

“Kokoz...wake up...” The Grunt started to stir and a ripple coursed through Gaia’s holographic image. Even though using the special translation software was tedious, repetitive, and seemingly worthless, this one moment made up for it.

Gaia was made as a protecting, motherly AI, and always wanted to see everything go well for everyone. She wasn’t fond of the idea of war, thinking it a waste of time. But as an AI construct in the UNSC, her role in the war could not and would not change. In this case, however, she had help.

Although the ship she was on was very hostile (as far as she considered), her job was unwavering: fulfill all duties tasked for her by superior officers, and follow through with her beliefs. She had successfully monitored all transmissions going to and from Earth, and had video footage of the ‘peace talks’ aboard a Covenant ship. She could understand every word spoken with clarity above and beyond all those who were present. It only strengthened her.

Kokoz, however, was her main project. She had to keep him from doing anything that would have any high strung military officer decide that he was still the enemy, even though he was captured, had no weapons of any kind, and was no threat to anyone or anything on board. Only she could supply Kokoz with such abilities, and Gaia had no intention of doing so.

She did, however, want to make sure he would stay alive.

As Kokoz finally stood up, she rechecked all of her calculations. Everything had to be perfect for this to work, especially if her goal was to keep them both out of harms way. She had proof that they weren’t at war with ‘part’ of the Covenant, and which part of it at that. She had escape vectors for herself and Kokoz if anything went wrong. She had codes to get into every room in the ship with exception of the bridge and its deck. On top of that, she knew every member of the crew, who they were loyal to, both on paper and in reality, and where they could find refuge if need be.

And she knew the codes to every weapons locker in the entire ship. She counted the number to be around 241, although Gaia was counting on not having to use any of them. For anyone.

Now all Gaia had to deal with was Kokoz. She projected herself in front of him, making sure that he would see her. "It's time to go Kokoz."

"Go where?" the startled Grunt asked.

"Somewhere safe. Right now, if someone walks into this room, they may be startled by you being here, and might attack you. So I have to get you out of here." Kokoz let out a yelp, followed by what sounded like a gulp. Gaia's radar showed nobody around for at least 30 feet, which was like a universe in the huge ship they were in. It would be perfect.

Fear was the only thing that flowed through Kokoz more than urine, but he was too afraid to notice it. By the time he finally did, it didn't matter because his atmosphere suit was meant to take in any waste anyways, and could hold a small amount. But when he realized it, Kokoz made Gaia to swear not to tell anyone.

Everything was very strange to Kokoz. There had been several Human ships that he had boarded, each of them destroyed later on, but this one was of a completely different architecture. At least from the inside, Gaia assured him. But from her attitude, this was also not the time or place to worry about such things.

He was also somewhat unhappy with how he was forced to take orders from a female. Even if it was a machine, it was still unnerving to him. Never before had such an occurrence happened to his knowledge, at least in his society. Gaia also made it clear that things would change.

Gaia opened the only door to the room they were in, and Kokoz immediately remembered that he had no clue as to how he got there. "Keep going straight, then go to the hallway to the left. Make a left turn there, and go into the third door on the right. Don't worry, I'll monitor all of your movements and let you know if anything comes up." He wanted to ask her, but he could have sworn that something pushed him out of the door and into the hall. That made him move.

Kokoz moved on all fours as fast as he could, but still didn't feel like he was going fast enough. Normally in such a situation, he would have gone on his hind legs and held a plasma pistol and kept a few grenades ready, but Gaia made it very clear to him that he would not be engaging any enemies if she had any say about it. Therefore, it was moving from one objective to another with only her watching his back. It wasn't very comforting at all.

The blood pumped faster than ever before through him. His hearts seemed to beat his armor suit, and going through his chest. He couldn't focus on anything because each time one of his hearts beat, his vision was blurred. So Kokoz stared straight ahead and ran, bouncing up and down. "Turn left here", he heard, and did so immediately. Determination and focus were what kept him going so focused...until a guard turned the corner.

At first, Kokoz' hearts stopped completely. He didn't even realize that his legs were still going, because he was completely overtaken by fear. The Human was tall though, and hadn't noticed him, but from the course he was running in, he would run into the guard's leg in a few seconds.

“Hey big boy, come here,” a strange voice said in the Human’s language farther ahead of Kokoz. The Human guard turned to find the voice’s source, saw an open doorway, and headed towards it. “Kokoz, turn right now!”

He scampered right, all of his claws sliding on the ground for a second before he caught traction, and ran out of sight from the Human. “Quick, go inside this door!” A door opened to his left, and Kokoz tried to turn into it, but slid past a few feet, then managed to change directions and ran in. The door closed behind him fast, and he turned to it with lightning speed. Everything was dark, except for a single dull glow. And all was quiet for the moment.

Then, right next to his hearing orifice, Kokoz heard the familiar sound of a gun cocking ready. His brain fell through his neck into his stomach.

“Melissa, stop!” A bead of cold sweat broke out all over Kokoz’ neck and he still was unable to breath. The lights turned on and illuminated the entire room, but all he could see was an empty room. Before he could give a sigh of relief, his legs gave out and Kokoz kissed the ground, not knowing that a Human still held a gun pointed at him from behind. “Melissa, we need your help.”

“Gaia, is that you? What’s going on?” As the words left her mouth, Kokoz’ eyes widened and didn’t stop growing until it hurt, but his shock kept him from feeling the pain. He turned around slowly, and at the first glimpse of the Human female, dashed to the closest cover he could find.

“Don’t fire at him. He’s unarmed, and I’m just trying to get him somewhere safe.”

“Yeah, well this ship was the worst place for it,” she said as she looked over to where Kokoz had hidden. He held up a small table for cover, and held the ends with his claws. But he shook so hard, the entire table and everything near it shook as well. “And from the looks of your friend, I doubt we’ll get very far without this ship shaking out of Slipspace.”

“Don’t worry about that. We’re leaving Slipspace now. I’m betting you’ll be called back on duty anytime now, Lieutenant, so we could use your hand before that.”

Chapter 3

You mean I did all that for nothing?!

Crawling through the tiny maintenance shaft, Kokoz complained at every small thing that happened to him. His armor’s fin kept hitting some pipe or wire, and it was very dusty. The dust kept smudging his mask and he would be forced to stop and clean them. When it was finally too annoying to continue doing, Kokoz ended up head first in a wall.

Fixing his helmet, Kokoz kept going until he reached an intersection. One path went left, another right, and a third that continued straight ahead. He looked at all three paths but couldn’t remember where he was told to go. So he focused as hard as he could on what had happened before.

“Look, I’ve got two minutes to get up to my post,” Melissa said. I’d love to help, but I really don’t see what I can do.”

“Well, for starters, you can tell the guard outside to go and do something other than stand there and impede our progress.”

“Anything else?” She pulled her left hand through the sleeve of her uniform and glanced over at Kokoz, who was still shaking behind a downed table. “Wait, where are you trying to take him?”

“Down to a cargo hold, preferably one that won’t be used anytime soon. I need to get him out of harms way.”

“He can just stay here. I mean, I am a lieutenant, so my quarters are perfectly safe.”

“Not so. Whenever anyone’s quarters are empty of personnel, they are randomly searched every hour. New rules from Colonel Ackerson. And I can’t find when they will search individual rooms because they don’t do it by computer, and the marines just pick rooms randomly. That means I can’t make a good guess when and if they’ll be here.”

“Well, we could just send him through the maintenance shafts. The one in here leads almost directly to cargo hold B, and the rest are nearby. I think he can fit through. That fin might be a problem, but I’m sure he can work around it.”

Gaia’s image fizzled briefly when she heard ‘we’, knowing now that Melissa would help in any way possible. That’s what Gaia needed to be sure of. “Ok, that’s fine. I’ll bring up the schematics, and I’ll keep you informed of our progress on your console on the bridge.”

“That’s fine, but make sure that Ackerson doesn’t see of it. You’ll have to monitor him, me, and you’re new friend at the same time. I know it isn’t very hard for you, but don’t spread yourself too thin, or we could all be found out.” She walked towards the door, which opened automatically for her as it was alerted by her proximity to it, and turned back to both of them. “And tell the little guy good luck. He’ll need it.”

“Thanks.” The doors closed behind Melissa, and Gaia’s image looked back at Kokoz, who now got up from the protection of the table. “She’s going to help us. There is only one way to go right now, but I can’t function in the maintenance shafts. You’ll need to remember these instructions to get to the cargo hold. Are you ready?”

Gaia could have sworn that Kokoz farted or something of the sort, but her sensors said otherwise. The only part of his body that changed in any way was his throat. He gulped.

Now Kokoz couldn’t remember where to go. He looked left, then right, then left again. It was no use, he couldn’t remember. Slumping against the wall to his left, he tried his best to remember, but he only remembered that there was a pattern he was supposed to follow.

He couldn’t remember if it was left straight left, straight left straight, or some mixture of the two. There were definitely no ‘right’s’ that he needed to take, so each guess was a fifty-fifty chance. But he didn’t know which way to go. It was too much pressure for him. And Kokoz didn’t handle pressure well at all.

Back at his military training, he had received the worst grades in all field exercises. His written examinations were second to none, but out in the field he was less

useful than spilled groblua. At least someone would trip over the groblua, and maybe fall and break something.

As soon as Kokoz decided he was screwed, he heard a loud crash. It scared him out of his wits, and then the sound of bending metal rang through him. Straight ahead, the maintenance shaft looked like it was twisting uncontrollably. At that moment, Kokoz did the only thing that he could do well: run.

Kokoz ran left and kept going as fast as he could. Looking back, more metal seemed to split at its seams, and it looked like it was going faster than he was running. Fear flowed through Kokoz and it almost overwhelmed him, but the ship shook and threw him into a wall, keeping him from losing consciousness. Turning left, then right, he was about to turn left at the next intersection but it was completely encompassed by fire, and he kept running straight.

Just before another intersection, the metal he ran upon got very hot, and very quickly became too hot for him to be on. He yelled in pain and ran faster, trying to keep his feet off the hot metal as best he could. After a few steps thought, it simply collapsed under his weight, and he fell on his back in a foreign room, but shut his eyes hard at the pain.

Rolling over, he fell again, this time on his undersection, and pushed himself back up. When Kokoz realized that the sound of footsteps was prevalent in the room, he immediately became very sensitive to his surroundings, but didn't see any Humans around. But an open door at the end of the room allowed the sound of footsteps to enter, and he gave a sigh of relief. As long as they weren't coming to meet him.

"Quick Kokoz, get out of sight! And hold onto something, we're being attacked!" The moment he finally was able to lower his heartbeat, it spiked out of his chest again and again fear overtook him. This time, however, he was only able to drop to the floor and quiver. "Kokoz!"

Just then, a marine walked into the room casually and went over to a table near Kokoz. He didn't notice Kokoz, because he was on the other side of the table, but there was no way for Gaia to stop the marine or get Kokoz out of his trance. The marine reached over the table and picked up a cup, got the coffee dispenser and poured some for himself, then bumped into Kokoz by accident. He looked down as Kokoz looked up, and both freaked.

The marine threw the coffee in the air and grabbed his pistol from the holster, and Kokoz just as quickly protected himself with his arms and got up, starting to run. Right before the marine pulled the trigger, the cup of coffee hit his chest and threw his aim off, and steaming coffee spilled all over his chest, but it didn't burn him because of the Kevlar armor. Aiming for the second shot, the pot itself hit him in the head and shattered, burning this face and cutting it badly. He dropped to the ground and yelled loudly, and covered his face with his hands.

Kokoz, seeing that this was his chance, ran back and grabbed the pistol off the ground, and pointed it at the marine. His stubby fingers made it difficult to hold the gun as it was meant to be held, but he was able to pull the trigger with a claw. And just as he was about to fire, Gaia interfered. "Don't fire Kokoz!" Her voice startled him and he pulled the trigger, and shot the marine in the leg.

Gaia's sensors showed it only to be a flesh wound, and was able to think normally again. "Quickly Kokoz, you have to get out of here. Just two doors down, there's a cargo

hold with no personnel in it. Hurry!” He scrambled out of the room, but looked both ways before proceeding farther in the hall. Gaia’s sensors showed this and she wished she had a head to hit it against something. Kokoz ran again on all fours, and managed to carry the pistol as well.

When he reached the doors, Gaia opened them and locked them behind Kokoz. He scanned the room briefly and saw Gaia’s holographic image on a pedestal nearby. “It’s safe in here. The doors are locked and there’s no way for them to get you.” For a full second, Kokoz waited for something to go wrong, but nothing did. The atmosphere didn’t suddenly leave his suit, the ship they were on didn’t just explode, nothing. He leaned against the wall and slumped to the ground, and let go of the pistol.

“What now?” Kokoz just realized that this was only a small step he would need to take, and that the ship was still full of Humans, most of whom would kill him on sight. He didn’t even know what the point of running was, because eventually they would find him and kill him, or he would run out of methane and suffocate. This was just a waste of time and energy.

“Now we wait. I think we’ll find that you’re quite welcome on this ship in due time.” Kokoz turned his head slightly to the right and looked at Gaia, not understanding what she meant. “So, tell me about yourself. I’m very interested in you.”

Chapter 4

I wanna go home! Waaaa!

The hull of the ship came to a very abrupt stop, which threw Kokoz off his seat in the cargo hold. It wasn’t really a seat, but rather a small box that he could actually reach. He didn’t question what was inside, because he was still excessively scared for his life, which was in danger every second the ship had any Humans in it. They all seemed to want to get him, except for the one whom he’d been in the room with.

Gaia had kept him company for the past hour, but everything was quiet. Almost too quiet, like deadness filled the air. Nobody moving in and out of the cargo holds, nobody scanning the area for intruders, nothing cleaning...the only possible conclusion was that they had all left.

“Where is everybody?” Gaia’s holographic image fluttered momentarily when she saw she was needed, and immediately returned from her standby setting.

“Right now, I read that all personnel on board are currently being stationed in their quarters or are on duty. Although we have stopped and docked somewhere, nobody has left the ship. As far as I know, we’re waiting.”

“For what?”

“Your guess is as good as mine.” They both sat in silence again, and all Kokoz could do was twiddle his claws. It was an exercise he’d become accustomed to, because every mission he’d ever been on required lots of waiting and doing nothing, and Unngoy

weren't allowed to speak without permission. So they all had their little habits. Kokoz twiddled his claws. "Wait...I'm getting a message."

Kokoz looked up and his eyes widened. Maybe they'd come for him, to take him back. Maybe he'd be able to return home, back to his wife and child. This was the call he'd been waiting for. This was the message he'd waited the entire war to hear. He picked his head up high and waited exuberantly for it to come, almost getting off the box so he would be ready to jump with joy.

"It's a message from the lieutenant." Kokoz two hearts stopped for a moment, as his mind almost kept him from hearing what was actually spoken. He almost believed he'd heard what he wanted to hear, but when he realized what was actually said, he slumped back down onto the box, and kept going lower and lower. "It's a well encrypted text file. She's saying that we've waited too long here, and that its time for us to leave. She's sending out a few teams to go after the Master Chief and the Spartans, and that we should come along if we're to get you back safely."

"To get me back?"

"That's right. Just a short time ago, two Cove-Preeminent ships docked as well, and unloaded their entire regiment of troops. We didn't realize it until they'd already left, but they haven't returned yet. So we should go after them."

"But the humans..."

"Won't harm you. The lieutenant has informed them all of what's going on, and they are loyal to her. So there shouldn't be any difficulties. But I can't go with you, unfortunately. My physical limitations don't allow for it. You'll have to go alone."

Grief filled Kokoz, as the only reason he survived for so long was because of this machine, and now he had to part with it. And even more so, he had to part with his best chance for survival overall. He did, however, feel something for the machine, and walked over to the podium that Gaia stood upon and hugged it. Her body turned red instantly, but he never saw.

"I'll miss you human machine."

"And I'll miss you Kokoz. Good luck. Now go, before they leave without you."

Kokoz ran to the door, went through it, and Gaia watched it close behind him. She shook her head as her emotion chip made her feel a strange sensation, something she hadn't felt before. As she tried to understand what it was, the doors opened again and Kokoz poked his head through. "Which way I go?"

"Dammit, why are we stopping again?!"

"Because the Grunt's tired. We have to worry about that little thing."

"Shut up boys, you know that this *thing* is our mission until we get to the Master Chief, so quit bitching." Rogers and Clemenza had been giving their CO crap from the start, and they didn't like what was going on at all. Escorting a former enemy to a possibly high-danger area while scouting didn't sound right at all. Especially since they didn't have any intel on where they were going or what they would find when they got there. All they had was a trail of breadcrumbs.

"Can I just shoot it? We'll say its friendly fire and keep going without any more delay."

“Rogers, I hear another word out of you and I’m gonna send you back to the ship so fast, that you’ll be wishing you took the bullet instead. If you want to go faster, why don’t you just carry the little guy.”

“That’s alright ma’am, I have no problem waiting for the weakling to finish resting.” Clemenza laughed and they clapped hands, while the rest of the marines kept quiet. They didn’t care enough to think of it as a joke or otherwise: they knew they were in unfamiliar and very-possibly hostile territory, and kept their focus on more important things. And on top of that, they knew that the CO could handle herself. Ross had been through worse before.

“No, it’s not alright. I think that was a great idea Rogers, and since you volunteered, I can’t see any reason to stop you. Go ahead.”

“It was a-”

“That wasn’t a suggestion marine. Now get to it ASAP!”

“Yes ma’am,” he grumbled. Walking over to the panting Grunt, he grabbed it single-handedly and put him on his shoulder. Kokoz shrieked, but dared not fight it. This human was very large, and would easily dispose of him if he so wished. So he kept quiet.

They kept walking, and a minute later, Rogers dropped Kokoz. “Oops.” Ross came over and kicked Rogers’ knee out, dropping him fast. He flew off the ground and Clemenza grabbed his arms, keeping him off Ross. They stood face to face, with only Clemenza holding Rogers back. Kokoz shook his head and just started walking ahead. The humans would catch up to him. Plus he had one of their weapons off the large human, so he wouldn’t be defenseless.

And he wanted to go home. If there was a fight, he wanted to get it over with. Kokoz started to lose his fear because he only cared about one thing: Home. That’s what he needed and that’s what he wanted, and nothing was going to stop him from it.

A ton of noise came from the corridor beyond, and Kokoz didn’t know what to make of it. At first he was curious. Then an explosion pushed him off his feet, and he realized what was going on. Getting up, he ran over to the entrance to a giant room, where an enormous battle ensued. He’d never seen anything like it in his life.

Flood were everywhere. Even more Covenant were around, firing their plasma weapons. He was about to look further, but as soon as he saw his comrades fighting in battle, the ones whom he worked so hard to get back to, nothing else really mattered. He started walking into the room when something hit him in the back of the head, and knocked him unconscious.

Rogers leaned over Kokoz’ body and picked up his pistol and holstered it. “That’s what you get for being a little thief.”

“Dammit Rogers, what did you do now?”

“Nothing ma’am, he must have just fainted from the sight of the battle.” Ross looked down at the Grunt and looked at Rogers, trying to determine what really happened.

“You do know that hitting him in the back would have killed him, and we would know you did it if he were dead.”

“Yeah? So why don’t you check him?”

Ross bent down and felt Kokoz’ neck, and felt a pulse. She looked up at Rogers, who seemed to be sweating now. “He’s breathing. I know you did something, but I don’t

know what. You're off the hook this time. But right now, we've got bigger things to worry about. Call in reinforcements...we're going in and we'll need some help."

Chapter 5

If I were your Grunt...

Reality came into focus as Kokoz sat up, but he grabbed his head immediately. It throbbed harder than he could remember, and he had a feeling that it was not going to be a good day. Then he opened his eyes and found out why it would be that way.

A battle like none he had seen before was taking place right before his very eyes. He had no idea why or how it was happening, or what they were fighting about. He didn't even know who was fighting who, but Kokoz distinctly saw who was fighting.

Flood. Humans. Covenant.

And on top of that, different sects of Covenant were fighting in different areas. Jiralhanae fought with Yamne and Kig-yar far from where the Sangheili, Lekgolo and Unngoy were. Kokoz didn't look at who they were fighting because he was stuck in awe at how the Demons, which there were more than he had ever seen or believed there to be, were fighting alongside the Sangheili.

But only confusion flew through Kokoz' mind. He didn't have any idea of what he should be doing. So he simply stared at the battle, shook at every explosion, stopped breathing every second he saw one of his brothers fall, and felt his heart skip every time any Flood came within a 50 meter radius of him.

Then, in the corner of his eye, Kokoz saw several dark figures making their way towards him. Without looking directly at them, he couldn't make out what they were, and fear collected inside him like he had never felt before. It kept him from looking...so he counted to five.

One. They seemed to grow, but very slowly. Perhaps they hadn't noticed him yet.

Two. Now they were running. They must have noticed him. Maybe they could smell fear.

Three. Kokoz knew they would be on top of him very soon, maybe even before he could reach five. His arms quivered and he reached for where his plasma pistol was meant to be, but only found a vacant spot.

Four. The fear reached its apex as Kokoz wet himself and forcefully looked for his weapon. It never occurred to him that he didn't have a plasma pistol for several days, and he frantically searched for it or something of the likes to use. Doing a full 360 spin, he suddenly felt a metallic object under his foot.

Five. Picking up the familiar metal object, he turned and pointed it at his oncoming enemy and pulled the trigger.

The M6D blasted one arm off the first Flood Combat form, then a foot. It tripped and fell to the ground, rolling just short of Kokoz, who backed off immediately and

opened fire on the second one. It tripped over its counterpart, and Kokoz managed to keep them both down, and three more bullets pierced both Flood forms.

Kokoz stared at the pistol, and had no idea where it came from. Just before he blacked out from the blow to his head, he felt the pistol he had taken from him. On top of that, this was a different weapon entirely, much more powerful than the last. More thoughts came to him, but several more Combat forms heard the shots and were coming for him.

Running into the gigantic room, Kokoz looked for anyone he could get help from. He turned back and saw six Combat forms chasing him, and didn't feel as confident as he did when the first two were downed. The sight of more Combat forms made his small legs go faster than he thought possible, until he ran into a small group of Unngoy. They made a small circle with three plasma turrets, and the six Unngoy inside fired in every direction.

Jumping into the group, Kokoz was thrown out just as fast and back in unprotected land. He got up and tried to get in again, but they kept him from doing so. "What are you doing?! Let me in!"

"Sorry, Masters said only six per group. If they catch us with seven, then we'll be punished badly." A shot rang out from behind Kokoz and one of the Unngoy in front of him dropped. They all looked down, then at Kokoz. He jumped in and took control of the Plasma turret and opened fire.

The plasma slowed the Combat forms and kept them from firing, and the superheated plasma fired too quickly for them to react appropriately. All they could do was let it hit them until they melted or burnt into nothingness. The rest of the Unngoy stared at Kokoz for a full 30 seconds before anyone said anything. Then the leader Unngoy stepped forward, patted Kokoz on his shoulder, and said, "You're the new leader."

Staring at the Unngoy, Kokoz waved his hands. "No, you leader. Me follow your lead." They started to argue about it when a Sangheili came out of nowhere and silenced all of them immediately.

"Who is the leader?" Kokoz was about to point to the one who gave him leadership, but the other five Unngoy made a quick circle around Kokoz and pointed at him. "You, come with me. And take one of those turrets with you!" The Sangheili started to run off and Kokoz sighed while the rest of his 'team' went back to firing at the enemy. Picking up a plasma turret, he made his way after the Sangheili.

For the entirety of his run, Kokoz had his head down. It never occurred to him that it was a good idea to help from getting hit by any stray shots, because he was depressed at having to do someone else's bidding. He knew that it meant almost always that he would be hurt or killed, which happened 99% of the time. He'd even done the statistics to prove it.

But he didn't have a choice, and simply followed his orders. The Sangheili who was ordering him around waited far ahead of him to catch up. When Kokoz finally reached his master, the Sangheili hit him over the head. "Slow one, take your turret and fire there. Do not stop under any circumstances. Understood?" He pointed into the distance, but Kokoz was more concerned with making his master pleased. From his experience, that would keep him alive much longer than actually following orders.

“Yes! Right away!” The Sangheili grunted and ran off, and Kokoz looked into the distance. He saw hundreds of Lekgolo, and they seemed to be pushing against a wall, but Kokoz didn’t question their actions. He knew it was better to stay ignorant. That was another way to stay alive longer.

The Sangheili pointed in that general direction, and Kokoz didn’t have good enough vision to make out where a Lekgolo was and wasn’t. They were too far away for him to discriminate a difference between what was something he should fire at and what he shouldn’t fire at. And that scared him.

Suddenly he saw rapid plasma fire come from his right. It was firing at one specific spot. Then another plasma turret fired to his left, but fired at the exact same spot. He knew where to fire.

Aiming as best he could, Kokoz fired and hit one of the Lekgolo in the back, and it let out a loud roar. “Sorry!” Fixing his aim, he hit the same target that the other two turrets hit. He kept firing for a few minutes until the entire room seemed to shake. Kokoz covered his ears from the immense sound that came out from it. It felt as though his head was going to explode, and Kokoz pushed as hard as he could on his helmet. It was the only impulse he had.

All of a sudden, it stopped. Dead silence filled the room, but a few seconds later, noise came from the other sides of the room became audible again. Opening his eyes, Kokoz saw that nobody fired any weapons where he was. All of the Lekgolo that were pushing against the wall were running away. Everything was running away, except for the Flood. They all just stood still.

Only then did Kokoz notice a shadow overhead growing larger and larger. Looking up, some massive entity was falling right where he was, and Kokoz ran wildly. He ran as hard as he could, but whatever fell hit the ground. The force of the fall dropped Kokoz dead in his tracks and threw him to the ground hard. He started to get up, but a wave of air made him fly through the air like he weighed nothing, and straight into a large pillar. Kokoz blinked his eyes and tried to get up, but he was too weak, and fell into unconsciousness.

Chapter 6

The end for a Grunt...

Opening his eyes slightly, everything blurred heavily, and Kokoz couldn’t make anything out. But everything that was blurry moved past him very quickly, and a sharp jolt pulled on his neck a moment later. He was moving.

He almost fell back into unconsciousness, but another hard jolt woke Kokoz up completely. His eyes were wide open now and everything was clear. Everything he saw, the Covenant warriors and Flood Combat forms, bobbed up and down. Kokoz looked up

and saw a Sangheili holding on to his armor. Immediately recognizing the Sangheili, Kokoz fell into utter awe that he was actually seeing clearly. It couldn't be.

The Arbiter.

They stopped abruptly and Kokoz felt himself being lowered until his feet touched the ground. The Arbiter then crouched down next to Kokoz, causing him to look at the ground. It was improper to look at such a divine warrior in the eyes.

"Look up, little one. An important mission awaits." Kokoz looked up from the ground and saw the brilliant silver armor that was worn by the greatest of Covenant warriors. His throat constricted and Kokoz tried to speak, but couldn't. So he nodded. "I require you to go forth and find my general. Find him and inform him that our battle has been won, and that a new strategy may come about, as my forces will join his shortly. We must regroup though, so it will take time. He should, however, be prepared for us when we arrive."

Questions fired off randomly in Kokoz' mind, too many for him to distinguish. A few moments passed and Kokoz stared into the abyss, not noticing that the Arbiter stood from his crouch and started to look around. Kokoz finally looked up and stared right at the Arbiter, and said, "Who is that?"

The Arbiter smiled gently and put his hand on Kokoz shoulder. "He wears a white armor, and has lost a lower mandible. He will not be hard to miss. Take care..."

"Kokoz, Arbiter."

"Take care, Kokoz. The ensuing battle may rest on your shoulders."

Then the Arbiter started to run off, and Kokoz yelled, "I no have weapon, Arbiter!" As soon as Kokoz spoke, the Arbiter turned and threw his sword to Kokoz, who caught it midair and fumbled it. When he finally had a grip on it, the Arbiter was nowhere to be seen. Kokoz inspected the sword and found an activation button on it, pointed the sword away from himself, and activated it.

As the sword extended and plunged into his chest, Kokoz' last thoughts were a mix of bliss and fear of death, but as it burnt his heart, he expired too quickly to feel the pain.

Alternate Ending

As the sword extended from its shaft, the silver glow filled Kokoz' eyes, making them shine just as his sword. Pulses of silver energy jumped from one side to another, then disappeared into the stream of raw untamed energy that made the sword the most ancient and potent weapon still used by the Covenant. Ungoy were not allowed to use them, and neither were any other race other than Sangheili because of their high spiritual value and history.

However, the Arbiter had entrusted him with the weapon, and Kokoz had no intention of disrespecting the most honored of his lords. When the sword broke free of its prison, something did so within Kokoz. He physically felt different, stronger perhaps. The sword felt like an extension of his arm, just as he learnt it was meant to be.

Kokoz turned around and ran away from where his forces had just fought and towards another battle. In the distance, Kokoz made out at least a thousand Covenant troops. But no Jiralhanae, Yamne or Kig-yar were in sight.

Suddenly Kokoz realized that he was losing his balance, and started tripping over himself. His lack of concentration made him stumble around while holding the sword, which he struggled to keep away from himself while trying to stay upright. While doing so, Flood Combat forms came from all angles and attacked him.

Kokoz, however, was so busy trying to keep from falling with the sword that he swung it away from himself vehemently in every direction, slicing each combat form before it could manage to strike him. More came and fell, until Kokoz finally got his balance back. Every Combat form was down, sucking up their own green liquid that he could only imagine to be blood.

Staring at the scene in bewilderment, Kokoz took a hard look at the energy sword and scrutinized it deeply. After a few moments, he felt a pride that he had never felt before, and a courage that he had never known. Kokoz stood with his back straight, not arched. His eyes focused on where he needed to go, and he tightened his grip on the sword.

Then turning around slowly, he saw a single Combat form, standing in place, seemingly waiting for him. But Kokoz felt no fear, only anticipation for battle. Bending his knees, he extended the sword and held himself in position, waiting for the Combat form to attack.

It yelled loudly, but Kokoz didn't flinch. His eyes stayed concentrated on his target, which now ran towards him. Kokoz' eyes squinted slightly and his grip tightened more, until he finally lunged the beast. The combat form pivoted right and dodged the blow, but Kokoz continued to slash at it fiercely, not conceding to his foe. Swiping the sword through the air over and over again, he continued missing, but the Combat form was losing ground to Kokoz.

Finally, it threw its tentacle-arm at Kokoz, who ducked and prepared to lunge again at the Combat form, but just as he did, one of the tentacles hit his hand hard, knocking the sword out of his grasp. He had already lunged, and was flying towards his enemy, who didn't have the time to attack him. Kokoz fell onto its chest area and bounced off, running to a safe area outside of the Combat form's reach.

The two of them stood apart from each other, both weakened by the battle. Kokoz, however, still glared at the Flood beast with much fire in his eyes, but he had no way of ridding himself of the fiend. A flickering light turned his gaze away from the Combat form and Kokoz saw a plasma grenade. He immediately jumped at it, rolled on the ground, and tossed it at the Combat form who evaded it easily. That's when Kokoz cracked.

He turned around, threw his hands into the air, and ran screaming at the top of his lungs away from the Combat form. It chased him, and soon Kokoz' fear took over so badly that he couldn't concentrate on anything. The only thoughts in his mind were those of his life flashing before his eyes. And as he heard the footsteps get louder and louder, he closed his eyes as hard as he could, and tripped on a body of something which he couldn't see.

Plasma fire came over his head and Kokoz didn't move, but not because of anything other than his paralyzing fear. A yank on his armor forced Kokoz off the ground and back onto his feet, but he shook hard and still had his eyes closed. "Idiot!" one Sangheili yelled. At the sound of his voice, Kokoz looked up hesitantly and saw two blue armored Elites, both looking at him with great annoyance.

“Where is your weapon, fool?!”

“He must have dropped it, like he did with his waste!” One of the Sangheili spit in his direction, and Kokoz looked down in shame.

“Stop standing around! Return to the battle!” The two Sangheili turned hastily and ran off, while Kokoz stood very quietly in place. He saw something coming towards him, and he stood very still. “Why are you standing there?!”

Kokoz looked up hastily, and saw the white armored Sangheili. For a moment, he was overjoyed, but just as the smile came on his face, he saw the Sangheili frown. “Arbiter give Kokoz mission. Mission to find General. Give General message.”

The Sangheili’s eyes widened briefly and he crouched down, bringing himself down to Kokoz’ height. “What was the message Kokoz?”

“Arbiter tell Kokoz to tell General that Arbiter is coming. Arbiter want General to be ready for him arriving.”

The General stood up slowly, contemplating at what Kokoz had said. “They have defeated their beast. Excellent. We will be ready when they arrive. Excellent job Kokoz.” Turning and walking away slowly, the General turned back to Kokoz and said, “How did you get here without a weapon?”

“Kokoz had weapon. Arbiter gave Kokoz sword, but Flood took sword. Now Kokoz have no weapon.”

“If the Arbiter gave me a sword, then I would retrieve it.” Kokoz looked up and the General nodded. Turning as fast as he could, Kokoz ran back the way he came and searched the ground for his fallen weapon. The General simply went back to his battle, but kept in mind that the last time any Sangheili had spoken to an Ungoy normally as they just had hadn’t happened in long enough.

As Kokoz looked about, and explosion nearby threw him off balance, then another threw him in the other direction. Doing his best to keep up, Kokoz saw the sword, right near the Flood Combat form bodies he had brought down only a short time ago. He ran towards it as fast as he could, but the ground shook violently and he was flung into the air. Kokoz landed right near the sword, and reached it quickly. He pulled it to himself and held on as tight as he could, and the entire room seemed to shake. For a moment, it seemed like something grabbed the room and threw it, and it was hitting the ground now.

Being tossed into a huge pillar, Kokoz shook his head and tried to stand, but the pillar collapsed right on top of him. His grip never ceased.

Epilogue

Sniff. Sniff Sniff. The smell of humid marshland and ash made Kokoz stir and come to. He opened his eyes and was surrounded by lush greenery, all of which was reminiscent of his homeworld. But he remembered that the last time he had experienced such a sight, and was skeptical.

Waiting for someone to call him or start asking questions like some heavenly voice, only silence ensued. Seconds turned into minutes and Kokoz became tired of standing up straight. He slouched down like any normal Unngoy would, but was growing weary of the situation.

“Hello? Hllloooooo?!” An echo resonated off mountains far away, which he couldn’t see, but remembered were there. Taking a second look around himself, it also was embedded in his memory, but he couldn’t quite place it. He started to walk but stopped suddenly as a feeling of euphoria washed over him. Kokoz’ legs shook and he fell to the floor unconscious.

“Kokoz...Kokoz...” The distant noise became louder as Kokoz realized that he was no longer asleep. He was too weak to show any excitement for anything. His right hand was overcome with warmth suddenly and he opened his eyes to see what had caused it. Looking at his hand, he saw it in a toilet, but he was too tired to remove it. “Kokoz, you look here.”

A similar feeling, though not as warm, he felt with his left hand. Turning his head again, it started hurting. He tried again, but it just hurt too much. “My neck hurt.” The sound of feet shuffling made Kokoz aware of more than one being in the room, but when she entered his sight, he didn’t feel any pain.

His wife, Zazap, stood above him and held his hand. “Me so glad you back Kokoz. Me and baby miss you.”

“Baby?” Kokoz asked wearily. Then he remembered hearing more feet than just his wife’s. A small Unngoy crawled over to the bedside and held onto one of Kokoz’ claws. Joy filled his entire being as he was reunited with his family. “But how?”

“Some Sangheili came and left Kokoz here, but Kokoz was too hurt to walk alone. So Sangheili came back and brought Kokoz home and left Sword on mantle.” Kokoz looked up above his bed and saw it. The Energy sword that the Arbiter had given him.

“Zazap, bring sword here.” She did as he said and he scrutinized the sword, and then noticed that there were inscriptions in the handle. It read, “Unngoy: Strength through numbers.”

A tear started forming in Kokoz eye, as he understood what was thought of his entire race, as well as himself, by the leader of the Preeminent. And for Kokoz, the war had changed his life. No longer did he slouch down as a normal Unngoy would, but he stood tall. Of course, he did get afraid from time to time, but in time he hoped that would change. And he taught his children to do the same, and a change had begun for the Unngoy, one that would be only for the best. Trifling times would ensue for many more years to come, but the persona Kokoz had gained spread like wildfire through his people. It was only a matter of time...

