BIOLOGICAL CHRONICLE

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Book 3: Masks
Turaga Vakama, elder of the village of Ta-Koro, sat in silence. The council fire had burned down to ashes. The Matoran, tired from their labors, had gone to sleep and the island of Mata Nui was quiet. It should have been a time of celebration for the Turaga. The shadow of the insectlike Bohrok swarms and Bohrok-Kal had finally been lifted from the land. The Toa had returned from their struggle and joined with the Matoran to repair damage done to the villages. All were enjoying a rare feeling on Mata Nui: peace.

Only the Turaga stood apart from the joyous work. They knew many secrets about the past and the possible future. The time had come to decide if those secrets should be shared.

“We have to tell the Toa the truth,” Turaga Nokama of Ga-Koro insisted. “They have earned this through their great deeds. How many times have they saved us all from Makuta’s power?”

Onewa, Turaga of Po-Koro, shook his head. “That is true, sister. But they have done so without knowing any more than was necessary about the past. I prefer it stay that way.”

Nokama began to reply but was cut off by an angry string of clicks and whistles coming from Turaga Nuju of Ko-Koro. Matoro, Nuju’s interpreter, struggled to keep up with the rapid speech. “Um, Turaga Nuju says…” Matoro began. “Oh, no, I can’t say that about Turaga Onewa!”

Nokama tried not to smile but failed. Even Vakama chuckled, saying: “Our friends from Ko-Koro always go right to the heart of the matter. Still, Onewa has a point. We know all too well what can happen when knowledge is in the wrong hands.”

“We also know, brother, the heartache of not being trusted ourselves,” Turaga Matau from Le-Koro said. “I say the Toa are wise enough and strong enough to know all. They must know all if they are to fulfill their destiny!”

Onewa slammed his stone hammer on the ground. “Destiny? Let them show unity first! Since they became Toa Nuva, they have done nothing but argue with one another. Kopaka squabbles with Tahu, Gali avoids speaking with either of them… are these the acts of worthy Toa?”

“There was a time, hammerer, when Toa argued quite often,” said Nokama. “I am quite sure you remember. Yet somehow they found the will to do what had to be done.”

“That was… different,” Onewa replied with a shrug. “Perhaps these Toa do not have the same wisdom.”

“Wiselearning is hard to come by, if no one will teach,” said Matau.

Whenua, ruler of the underground village of Onu-Koro, had said nothing throughout the debate. He had merely sat and listened to the worry and the anger, the hope and the fear. It was not so different from listening to the sounds of the earth, hearing the approach of a quake or the roar of a subterranean river.
Finally, the wise Turaga rose from his seat and looked around at his old friends. “Brothers…and sister…the Onu-Matoran live in darkness. It is our way. We thrive where the light does not reach, and when we walk on the surface, we must shield our eyes from the sun’s glow.”

Nuju clicked something in response. Matoro opened his mouth to translate, but Vakama held up a hand. “Be at ease. I believe we all can guess what he is saying…and the answer is Whenua will make his point in his own time, as he has always done.”

“When I was younger, I believed all answers could be found in the past,” continued Whenua. “I still believe the past should be our teacher. Not so very long ago, the Toa came to our shores and brought hope. They defeated every danger that threatened Mata Nui…and as Onewa says, they did it all in darkness. But what more could they have accomplished with the light of truth?”

“I must agree,” Nokama said quietly.
“Knowledge, my friends…knowledge is the key,” Whenua said. “Without it, for all their power, the Toa will not see. We must share our secrets.”

Now Vakama rose, fire staff in hand, and lifted his head to look at the six stars in the heavens above. “If they knew…If they knew what really happened in Metru Nui, how would they feel? Would they welcome knowing they are not truly alone, or be angry at our deception? How are we to know the right thing to do?”

“The same way we always know,” said Nokama. “We turn to legends. The Toa learned much in their quest for the Kanohi Nuva masks. Stripped of their powers, they still found a way to succeed. Perhaps in the tales of their adventures, we will find the answers we seek.”

“I have heard the tales,” answered Vakama.
“Heard, yes…but have you listened?” said Nokama.

Vakama thought about her words for a very long time. Perhaps Nokama was right. There might have been something in the Toa’s most recent deeds that he had missed.

He returned to his place in the circle. “Once again, the Turaga of water proves to be the wisest of us all. Very well, then. Each of us will tell a tale of the Toa’s search for the Kanohi Nuva. At the end of our storytelling, we will make our decision. Now, who shall begin?”

Vakama’s answer was a burst of clicks and whistles from Nuju. Matoro nodded and reported: “The Turaga says…he says you have all created enough hot air to melt the glaciers of Ko-Wahi. He will tell his tale first, and no more will be needed after that.”

“Ha! I sometimes think, brother, that too much time in the ice and snow has caused your brain to freeze,” Onewa said. “Allow a true story-teller to share a tale!”

Nokama laid a gentle hand on Nuju’s arm. “My friend, I have no doubt your story will be the greatest of all and make ours look poor by comparison. So why not save it until later in the evening, when it will be most appreciated?”

In all the time he had known her, Nuju had never been able to say no to Nokama…not for long, anyway. He looked at Vakama and gave a nod.

“Then it is settled,” Vakama announced. “Begin your tale, Onewa, for we are turned to hear.”

Onewa smiled. “And well you should be. My story begins in the vast, frozen regions of Ko-Wahi, on a very different night from this. A night when it seemed that all was lost for the Toa and Mata Nui itself…”
When Kopaka Nuva, the Toa of Ice and protector of the village of Ko-Koro is troubled, he travels to a remote spot on the slopes of Mount Ihu to think. The only sound is the wind rushing through the mountain passes and the crunch of ice beneath his feet. Even other Ko-Matoran rarely go there, so no other living being interrupts his time alone.

Most of the time.

“Brother!” Pohatu’s voice boomed across the snowfield. Somewhere in the distance, an avalanche started by his shout roared down the mountainside.

Kopaka turned and saw the powerful form of the Toa of Stone struggling to walk through the hip-deep snowdrifts. It was tough going for one as heavy as Pohatu. He no doubt needed help making it through.

Without a word, Kopaka resumed walking up the icy pathway.

“I know you can hear me!” Pohatu shouted. Kopaka narrowly dodged the rain of icicles shattered by that sound.

“Mata Nui can hear you, and he is sleeping,” Kopaka muttered.

Down below, Pohatu watched as his brother Toa continued slowly and steadily up the mountain. Walking through snow was almost as bad as being underwater. Then again, Pohatu supposed snow did combine the worst parts of Gali’s realm with those of Kopaka’s. Still, he was determined to reach his destination, with or without the help of the Toa of Ice, and although he wore the Great Mask of Speed, Pohatu hesitated to use it. On this slippery surface, running would not get him there any faster.

Pohatu continued to follow Kopaka through the darkness, doing his best to ignore the cold. In turn, Kopaka ignored him, hoping he would turn back. Sometimes that worked with Pohatu, but not often.

“Help! Brother, help me!”

Kopaka whirled and saw Pohatu floundering in a drift. The Toa of Po-Koro had lost his footing and gone down. Without something solid to hold on to, Pohatu was finding it impossible to rise.

Frowning, Kopaka split his ice blade in two and attached the ends to his feet. In an instant, he was flying down the mountain on his power iceskates, sparks flying as the protodermis blades sliced through the ice. He was aiming for the curved lip of a ridge, and as always, his aim was true. His momentum sent him soaring through the chill air toward Pohatu.

Kopaka waited until he was at the height of his arc, then curled up and did a series of midair flips. He hit the slope at just the right angle and slid to a stop beside the fallen Toa.

“I will help you up,” Kopaka said, as quietly as a snowfall. “Then you will leave my land.”

“I have a better idea,” replied Pohatu, springing to his feet. “I’ll get up on my own, thanks, and then we’ll travel together.”

“You faked your fall.”
“Oh, no, brother, the fall was real… tricky things, these snowfields,” said Pohatu. “I welcomed the rest. And while I was lying there, I thought, trying to get to Kopaka is really quite tiring. If I stay here, perhaps he will come to me.”

“There is a blizzard coming. With my ice powers stolen by the Bohrok-Kal, I will not be able to stop it,” said Kopaka grimly. “Turn back.”

Pohatu folded his mighty arms across his chest. “Here I am, and here I’ll stay.”

Kopaka shrugged. “Very well. When I reach Ko-Koro, I will tell Turaga Nuju to have you dug out when the thaw arrives… if it ever does.” With that, he turned and walked away.

Pohatu frowned and hurried after him. “I thought we could help each other. There are many masks to find. Don’t you remember how well we worked as a team when we first arrived on Mata Nui?”

“You buried me in a landslide, as I recall,” said Kopaka.

“Oh. Well, I didn’t do it on purpose. Besides, that can’t happen now. I’ve lost my powers, just like you have.”

Kopaka stopped dead and looked over his shoulder. “Pohatu, I do not want your help. I do not need your help. I will find the Kanohi Nuva on my own.”

Before Pohatu could answer, Kopaka had vanished into the darkness. The Toa of Stone stared after him for some time. Then he started to follow again, careful to stay in Kopaka’s footsteps.

The blizzard that struck was one of the fiercest ever known in Ko-Wahi. The winds roared down from the summit of Mount Ihu, carrying blinding snow and stinging pellets of ice. In moments, every trace of Kopaka’s passage had vanished beneath the drifts.

Pohatu stopped to think. He knew his brother Toa was following an ice path, but where was it? If he began digging through the snow to search, he would freeze long before it could be found. Unless… unless he could find a new use for the Mask of Speed.

Doing his best to ignore the subzero temperatures and the blowing snow, Pohatu planted his feet on the ground. Then he held his arms out in front of him and began to rotate them, faster and faster, letting the power of the Mask of Speed, Kanohi Kakama Nuva, flow through him. In seconds, his arms became a blur as they sent twin blasts of air before him, which blew the snow aside to reveal the hidden path.

“Let’s see Kopaka do that,” Pohatu said to himself as he resumed his journey.

Kopaka had more to worry about than the snowstorm. When his elemental powers were stolen, his resistance to extreme cold disappeared as well. For the first time, he could feel the numbing temperatures of the Ko-Wahi region slowing him down. All he wanted to do was rest, preferably someplace warm. He would lie down and sleep, only for a few moments, in the shelter of a rock outcropping. Then he would be ready to resume his search for the masks.

The cold and the darkness were closing in on him. In icy dreams, he saw two of the insect-like Bohrok-Kal, Kohrak-Kal and Nuhvok-Kal, stealing the symbol of his Toa power from his village. His energy was gone. He could hear them shouting his name, over and over, and something else… a terribly familiar growl.

Kopaka awoke with a start. Standing over him, saliva dripping from its jaws, was a Muaka. The largest and fiercest predator in Ko-Wahi, the great cat saw anything that moved as prey. Its claws dug into the icy floor as it sniffed Kopaka, trying to determine if the Toa was still alive and might be a threat.

Once I would have been far more than a threat, Rahi. Kopaka thought, using the Matoran name for a wild animal. Two days ago, a single ice blast from my blade would have left you frozen solid. But today it is just a powerless tool and little defense against a beast of such power. The Bohrok-Kal have stolen all my Toa energies.

It was then that Kopaka heard his name shouted again. That was no dream. It was Pohatu, still searching through the snow for his brother Toa. Better still, it was enough to distract the Muaka just long enough for Kopaka to roll away, grab his blade, and sprint toward the mountainside.
The Muaka bellowed and pursued, its long legs easily making up the ground between them. Kopaka could just see a narrow ledge high on the rock face. If he could reach it, he would be safe, since it was too high for the Muaka to reach. But somehow he doubted the Rahi would give him the chance to climb.

There was no time to plan. Kopaka broke into a dead run, holding his ice blade in both hands. He could feel the Muaka’s breath on his back. His feet were slipping underneath him, and he knew any fall would be his last.

Eyes locked on the mountain, Kopaka counted down seconds. He would get one chance to make this work. If he failed, Ko-Koro would need another protector. So I will not fail, he said to himself.

Before the Muaka could react, Kopaka planted one end of his ice blade into the ground and vaulted high into the air. He struck the mountain hard and began to slide down the ice-covered rock. He was slipping off the ledge, with the Muaka waiting below, jaws open wide.

Something whizzed past him, burying itself in the rock with a loud metallic sound. Kopaka reached out and grabbed it. It was one of Pohatu’s climbing claws! Down below, the Muaka snapped at the Toa’s heels. With his last bit of strength, Kopaka hauled himself onto the ledge.

The Muaka snarled and leaped, scrambling in vain to hold on and then sliding back down to the snow. It was preparing for another try when the sharp crack of rock striking rock caught its attention. The sound repeated three times before the Muaka decided it might mean easier prey and loped off to investigate.

As soon as it was gone, Pohatu appeared. “I might not still command the rock,” he said, “but at least I can still toss one.”

Kopaka yanked the climbing claw free and tossed it to the Toa of Stone. “I thought you had turned back, Pohatu.”

“I was going to,” the Toa said, shrugging. “but mask hunting alone is like playing the sport of kolhii alone – good practice, but not much fun.”

Kopaka slid down into a snowbank and approached. When he spoke, his voice had a bit less ice in it than usual. “You should go home, Pohatu. This is no place for you… perhaps not even for me, anymore.”

“Turaga Onewa said something to me before I left Po-Koro,” replied Pohatu. “He said it’s easy to be a hero when you have plenty of power and your only worry is whatever enemy is fool enough to challenge you. It’s not so easy when all you have is your wits and your biggest enemy is yourself.”

The eyepiece of Kopaka’s mask extended and whirred as he scanned the mountainside. “That sounds like Onewa. You two are much like the stone you represent. Solid. Practical. Down to-earth.”

“Well, thanks, I --”


“You’re welcome, Kopaka,” Pohatu snapped. “Oh, no, rescuing you was my pleasure.”

Kopaka glared at his brother Toa. “If your trick had failed, the Muaka might have had us both. The strength of the Toa would have been reduced by one-third and our villages would be in peril. Foolish risks are a luxury we cannot afford.”

Pohatu pointed up the mountain. “Then maybe we should get out of the way of the avalanche!”

It was too late to react. A wall of white slammed into the two Toa, knocking them both off their feet and carrying them along in its wake. Helpless, they tumbled end over end down Mount Ihu, bashing into rocks and almost losing their Kanohi. Kopaka made a desperate effort to will the avalanche away, but not even the slightest trace of his powers remained.

Toa of Ice and Stone wound up sprawled in a heap at the base of the mountain, half buried in snow. Long minutes passed before they staggered to their feet, exhausted and aching. “I hate winter,” Pohatu growled.

“The Mask of Shielding would have protected us from that,” Kopaka said. “We need to find the Kanohi Nuva now. As long as you are here, Pohatu… you might as well travel with me.”

“It’s certainly been fun so far,” the Toa of Stone replied, brushing snow from his arms and legs. “Onewa mentioned a Mask of Shielding in an ice cave near here. Any idea where that might be?”
Kopaka did not answer. He stepped away from Pohatu and activated the power of his mask, enabling him to peer through tons of stone into the network of caves within Mount Ihu. It was the work of moments to find a cavern in which there was a lone Kanohi Hau Nuva, the Mask of Shielding.

“It is nearby,” he reported. “Perhaps half a kio up the mountain. But the entrance is—”

Before Kopaka’s eyes, Pohatu vanished, only to reappear a split second later. “Blocked by boulders. I know. I saw,” the Toa of Stone said. “Mask of Speed, remember?”

Kopaka’s eyes narrowed and his voice was like sleet striking a suva shrine. “Don’t do that again.”

Pohatu was tempted to argue, but the storm was growing worse. Neither Toa could see more than a short distance ahead. They walked together in an uncomfortable silence, fighting the wind and the snow as they made their way back up the mountain.

Finally, though, it was too much for the Toa of Stone. “What’s the matter with you, brother? I rescue you, you aren’t pleased; I scout ahead to save time, you aren’t pleased. Is there no pleasing you, Toa of Ice?”

Kopaka stopped and said, “I am not here to be pleased. I am here to find Kanohi Nuva so I can regain my stolen powers and truly be the Toa of Ice again. If you wish to help, fine. If you wish to talk… seek out Toa Lewa.”

Not another word was spoken by either.

The cave mouth was not a pleasant sight. The entrance was blocked by massive boulders that had fallen sometime during the night. Even Onua Nuva, Toa of Earth, helped by his Mask of Strength, would have had a difficult time clearing them all away.

Kopaka set to work trying to pry the stones free with his ice blade. But the tool was not designed for that type of work and he soon gave up in frustration. Pohatu, meanwhile, had done little but stand to one side, observing.

“Difficult,” Kopaka said.

“No, no,” answered Pohatu. “Simple. Watch me.”

Pohatu approached the pile of stone and gently laid his hands upon it, first on one spot, then another. He almost seemed to be listening to the rock, though how he could hear anything above the howl of the winds, Kopaka had no idea.

“It’s a puzzle, brother,” said Pohatu. “Each stone supports another. Alone, they are powerful. Together, even a Toa cannot budge them. But the key to the puzzle is there, if you know how to look.”

“Where did you learn this?” asked Kopaka.

Seeing that his brother Toa was genuinely interested, Pohatu smiled. “Onewa taught me. He said that his knowledge of rock is older than the rocks themselves. Not quite sure what he meant by that, but it certainly sounds impressive. Ah! Here we are.”

Pohatu drew back his leg and slammed a center stone with a mighty kick. The rock splintered and flew apart, robbed of their support, the other stones collapsed, revealing the cavern entrance.

“See? When they can’t work together and share the burden, they can’t perform their task.”

For just the briefest instant, Kopaka almost smiled. “Yes, brother. Perhaps I do see.”

Kopaka led the way into the ice cavern with Pohatu close behind. The Toa of Ice carried a lightstone, its glow reflecting off of the polished surfaces of the cave. The only sounds were their breathing and their heavy footsteps on the ice.

Pohatu lost track of how far they walked. He was beginning to wonder if they would be able to find their way out again, then reminded himself that Kopaka’s Mask of X-Ray Vision would show the way. He felt uncomfortable here, with so much ice cutting him off from the feel of stone.

Their progress was halted by a great crevasse that yawned in the cavern floor. Pohatu crouched and peered into the gap. “It’s blacker than Makuta’s spirit down there, brother. No telling how far it goes.”

“We will find out,” said Kopaka. “The Kanohi Hau is at the bottom.”
Pohatu sighed. “Someday I am going to have a long talk with whoever hid these Kanohi,” he said, checking to make sure his climbing claws were well fitted.

Kopaka split his ice blade in two, taking one half in each hand. They would not be as efficient as Pohatu’s claws, but they were strong enough and sharp enough to serve as climbing spikes. He scanned the crevasse again, satisfied that there was nothing down there but the mask, and nodded to Pohatu. “We begin.”

Pohatu rammed a claw into the ice wall and swung his legs over the edge of the gap. “I hope Mata Nui appreciates all this, if he ever wakes up.”

The climb down was slow and treacherous. Once one of Pohatu’s claws slipped, and only fast action by Kopaka kept the Toa of Stone from plummeting to the floor far below. By the time they reached the bottom, both Toa were exhausted.

The gray Mask of Shielding, the Kanohi Hau Nuva, was wedged in a far corner, perhaps a hundred kio away. Its power would protect a Toa from any physical attack, provided it was not unexpected. Of all the Great Masks, it was perhaps the most valuable to possess now, when the Toa were without their elemental energies.

Kopaka took a step toward the mask, but Pohatu grabbed his arm. “Hold it, brother! Do you feel that?”

“What?”

“I am not one with the earth like Onua, but something is wrong… very wrong.”

Suddenly a violent earth tremor struck the mountain, shaking it like it was a toy in the hands of a Matoran. Pohatu looked up in time to see the roof of the cavern far above collapsing, sending tons of rock and ice plunging toward them.

Pohatu didn’t hesitate. He rammed Kopaka hard with his shoulder, sending the Toa of Ice flying across the icy floor toward the Kanohi. Kopaka slid to a stop against the wall, an arm’s length from the mask. Stunned, he looked up to see half the mountain about to crush Pohatu.

Kopaka scrambled and grabbed the mask, slamming it onto his face. The Hau Nuva mask had the power to protect those near the wearer as well. If he was in time, the shield might extend to Pohatu. If not…

The shield flared to life around Kopaka. Stone rained down upon it and shattered to harmless fragments, while the ancient energies of the Kanohi kept the Toa of Ice safe. But there was no sign of Pohatu.

It felt like an eternity before the quake ceased. Kopaka scrambled over the rubble toward where Pohatu had last been standing and began to dig with his hands. “Pohatu! Pohatu!” he shouted, but the only answer was the echo in the cave.

In the end, he was forced to give up. Nothing stirred beneath the rock.

“Good-bye, my brother,” Kopaka said. “Perhaps we were too different to truly be friends. But a noble heart beat within that body of stone.”

Grimly, he turned from Pohatu’s final resting place and began the long journey back to the surface.

A full day passed before Kopaka reached the village of Po-Koro. Matoran lined its newly constructed walls, on the alert for any appearance of the Bohrok-Kal. The approach of the Toa of Ice sent a stir through the guards, for all knew he rarely ventured out of Ko-Wahi these days.

Turaga Onewa met him at the gate. “You journey alone, Kopaka, in this dangerous land?”

“No,” replied Kopaka. “I journey with the memory of a fallen brother. “Pohatu! Pohatu!” he shouted, but the only answer was the echo in the cave.

In the end, he was forced to give up. Nothing stirred beneath the rock.

“Good-bye, my brother,” Kopaka said. “Perhaps we were too different to truly be friends. But a noble heart beat within that body of stone.”

Grimly, he turned from Pohatu’s final resting place and began the long journey back to the surface.

“I thank you for that, brother!” The booming voice came from behind Kopaka. All who saw him that day would later say that the Toa of Ice was not so cold as some believed. For he turned with a smile to see the approach of Pohatu, battered and weary but very much alive.
“Pohatu! It is good to see you once more,” Kopaka began. Then he swiftly added, “I mean, it is good to know that Po-Koro will not be left undefended in this time of danger.”

“Thanks to you,” said Pohatu. “The power of the Mask of Shielding protected me, but not before I was stunned by the falling rubble. Still, it enabled me to survive the quake and your efforts made it easier for me to dig myself out. Too tired to climb, I walked until I found a tunnel that led to another, and so on. I emerged in Onu-Koro and made my way here.”

Kopaka took the Hau Nuva from Onewa and handed it to Pohatu. “This is yours. Although I believe your courage is a greater shield than this mask could ever be, Toa of Stone.”

“I will take the mask anyway, brother, with gratitude,” replied Pohatu. “For I believe we will need every bit of power — and all of our courage — to make it through the days to come.”
His tale finished, Onewa sat down with a smile. “So you see,” he said, “Kopaka’s refusal to accept help could have led to disaster. After all this time, has he learned nothing about unity?”

Nuju clicked and gestured furiously. Matoro translated, “The Turaga says Pohatu was too stubborn to leave when asked. He should have respected Kopaka’s wishes.”

“Seems to me neither was too everquick,” Matau put in. “But the Kanohi was discovered-found, was it not? And now they are true brothers-friends.”

Yakama nodded. “That is true, Matau. They are both very brave. But do they have the wisdom to understand what has gone before?”

“I will tell my tale,” Turaga Whenua said softly. “And then we shall see.”

Toa Onua Nuva dove to avoid the flailing tentacle of the massive subterranean worm. The dead-white appendage narrowly missed him, smashing into the tunnel wall with such force that the whole place shook.

The Toa of Earth had heard of these creatures before but thought they were only Matoran legend. Those who mined protodermis, the substance of which everything on Mata Nui was built, had occasionally spoken of great tentacled worms that lived in the very deepest tunnels of Onu-Wahi. Some claimed they ate protodermis and were attracted by the piles of ore gathered by the workers. One thing no one argued was that the appearance of such a creature was more than enough to shut down a mine for good.

*Now I see why, Onua said to himself. If that thing weren’t blind, it would have caught us long ago.*

The Toa looked over to see how his companion was managing. Turaga Whenua was doing his best to hold off the creature with his drill, but without actually doing it any harm. Unfortunately, that meant his efforts were not having much effect.

“I think we are going to have to subdue this beast,” Onua suggested, rolling out of the way of another blow. “Not that I can imagine how.”

“No!” Whenua said. “This creature has existed on Mata Nui longer than either of us. He is a link to the past. He must not be harmed!”

Onua grabbed a tentacle as it went by, trusting to the power of the Great Mask of Strength to hold it steady. The worm simply tossed him aside as if his strength were no more than an annoyance.

“A shame the beast does not feel the same way about us,” said the Toa. “Our past he may be, but we will have no future if we do not defeat him!”

A few days before, stopping the creature would have been no problem for Onua. With his command of the earth, he could have raised a wall of dirt and rock to protect himself and Whenua. But when the Bohrok-Kal stole his Nuva symbol, he had lost his power – perhaps for good.

The Turaga leaped over a swinging tentacle and landed next to Onua. “Think, Toa of Earth, with something besides your Great Mask! Force is not the answer.”
So Onua dodged, and rolled, and thought. He remembered his decision to seek out a Kanohi Kaukau Nuva said to be hidden far below the surface. Over his objections, Whenua insisted on coming along. They had been journeying for more than a day, through tunnels long abandoned by the Matoran, when they encountered the worm.

Whenua dodged another wild swing and shouted, “Think! What do you know about this creature?”

_Not enough_, thought Onua. _It’s big; it’s strong; it’s bleached white, like so many other creatures of the underground; it lives in constant darkness, so it is blind and navigates by…_

_Hearing!_

Despite the danger, Onua managed a smile. It all seemed so simple, once the truth was stumbled upon.

Working quickly, he used his twin quake-breakers to carve two huge stones out of the rock wall. “Guard yourself!” he shouted to Whenua as he brought the two boulders together with a mighty crash.

The explosion of sound echoed through the tunnels, leaving even the Toa of Earth deafened and stunned. The worm let out a roar of anger and withdrew into the darkness below, far from the source of that horrible noise.

Whenua was speaking, but at first Onua could not hear him. After a short time, the ringing that filled his mind quieted and he was able to make out the Turaga’s words. “So,” said Whenua, “you found his weakness.”

“Yes. He makes up for his lack of sight with supersensitive hearing,” said Onua. “So it was a reasonable guess that he would hate loud noise.”

“Guess? Bah!” snapped Whenua. “It was no guess. It was knowledge gained from your experience of the realm of Onu-Wahi. It was the past speaking to you.”

Onua said nothing. Of all the Toa, he was the best at not speaking unless he had something worthwhile to say. Only Kopaka lived in greater silence, by choice.

“Come,” said Whenua, continuing down the tunnel. “We still have far to go, Toa of Earth.”

Later, the Toa and the Turaga sat in a small cavern and shared a meal from their packs. Even Onua, who had spent most of his existence beneath the surface, could not remember having been down this deep. He wondered what waited below, as well as what adventures his brother and sister Toa might be having far above.

“They will be fine,” said Whenua, almost as if he were reading the Toa’s thoughts. “They can be strong, as long as they do not forget the source of their power.”

“You mean the Kanohi?” asked Onua.

“No, I do not mean the masks. I mean true power – the power of six Toa, side by side.”

Onua frowned. It had not been so very long ago that the Toa of Fire and Ice, with support from the Toa of Air, had suggested the Toa Nuva part ways. Gali had protested, but he himself had said nothing. Afterward, she was angry with him for his silence. He had questioned ever since whether he had chosen the right path.

“The decision was made to pursue our own destinies,” he said. But he could not manage to make the words sound believable, even to himself.

“You have but one destiny,” said Whenua. “You owe it to the past… to the Toa who have gone before you… to see that destiny through.”

It took a moment for the Turaga’s words to sink in. _The Toa who went before us? What is he talking about?_

When he turned to ask, Whenua was already gone.

He caught up with the Turaga around the next corner. The tunnel sloped sharply downward here and the air was warmer. Onua wondered if they were still in Onu-Wahi, or if they could have journeyed as far as the realm of Tahu. It certainly felt like they were in the heart of a volcano.
When he pressed Whenua for an explanation of his words, the Turaga shook his head. “I meant nothing. Besides, we have far greater things to worry about than that right now.”

At first, Onua did not know what he could be talking about. Then he remembered that the Kanohi Ruru mask Whenua wore gave the Turaga far greater night vision than even the Toa possessed. Now that he looked harder, he could see the floor and walls up ahead were… moving.

Despite the oppressive heat, the Toa of Earth suddenly felt very, very cold.


Whenua took a step backward. “Alone, no threat. But in a swarm…”

Onua nodded. In a swarm, Kofo-Jaga could bring down a creature many times their size. They thrived on heat and flame, and although they plagued Onu-Wahi, many believed they were native to the lava pits of Ta-Koro. Certainly they would follow the scent of molten magma wherever it might lead.

“We have to turn back,” said Whenua. “They have not noticed us yet.”

“Run?” Onua replied in disbelief.

“You are very wise, Onua,” said the Turaga of Earth. “Perhaps the wisest of all the six Toa. But experience is the greatest teacher. What does experience tell you?”

Onua respected his Turaga, admired him, and would have given his life to protect him. But he still hated it when Whenua was right.

“Fire-scorpions felled a full-grown Kane-Ra bull, a hundred suns past. It was a day the beast still remembers with pain,” said Whenua. Then he added, “He was too foolish to know to avoid them.”

Onua Nuva did not answer. He simply turned his back on the Kofo-Jaga and walked away.

“I came with you to see what you have learned from the past,” said Whenua as they continued their journey. Onua had not spoken a word since the encounter with the fire-scorpions.

“And what is the lesson I am learning today?” the Toa asked bitterly. “That without my earth power, I must flee from the smallest creatures on Mata Nui?”

Whenua stopped in his tracks. “To be a Toa is to defeat all who oppose you?” The Turaga held up a clenched fist. “Is this what you believe a Toa to be? A mighty arm to strike down your enemies?”

“No. But our power –”

“Is nothing. A Toa’s true strength is here,” Whenua said, pointing to his head. Then he placed a hand over his heartlight, saying, “And here. Your Toa power can move the dirt… Your mind and heart can move mountains.”

Whenua began to walk again, Onua beside him. “And is that what you used when we met the Kofo-Jaga?” the Toa asked.

“My mind told me they have a sting,” Whenua replied. “My heart told me I would not enjoy it.”

They followed the tunnels deeper and deeper into Mata Nui. The farther they went, the hotter it became, until the walls were too searing to touch. Even a Ta-Matoran, who farmed lava all day and surfed it all night, would have turned back by now.

More than once, Whenua had to stop to catch his breath. Onua waited patiently, not wanting to risk getting separated from him. There was no telling what might live this far underground.

“One day, I will walk along a beach in Onu-Wahi,” the Toa said at one point. “And I will spot a Kanohi Mask hanging from a tree. I will pluck it like a fruit and my search will be done.”

Whenua laughed. “Yes. The same day Makuta decides he would like a little sun, and perhaps a friendly game of kolhii.”

“Why are the masks so hard to find? If we are meant to have them –”

“You are meant to earn them, Toa of Earth. That is the answer.”

Onua stopped and held out a quake-breaker to block Whenua’s progress. “Hold, Turaga. Do you hear that?”

Whenua could, indeed, hear something, but wished he did not. It was the harsh, ugly sound of massive claws snapping. He did not need his Noble Mask of Night Vision to know the source.
The chamber of the mask is just ahead,” he whispered. “But, like fish to a reef, the presence of a Kanohi has drawn the Manas.”

Onua and Whenua edged closer, their backs flat against the hot tunnel wall. The sight that greeted their eyes made both regret having such keen night vision. Two giant Manas crabs clashed in a huge chamber, striking at each other and then scuttling away, only to strike again. Both were easily three times the size of the Toa, and infinitely more powerful. Beyond them, the Kanohi Kaukau Nuva rested on a rocky outcropping.

“Makuta’s guardians,” said Whenua.

“They were,” corrected Onua. “We Toa defeated them and drove them away. But it took the six of us, merged into the mighty Toa Kaita, to do it.”

“When they cannot fight others, they fight among themselves,” said Whenua. “Before you came to Mata Nui, none had ever seen them and returned to tell the tale.”

Onua slumped against the wall, not even noticing the intense heat now. The powers of six Toa combined had barely been enough to defeat these creatures before. How could one Toa, stripped of his elemental energies, hope to win? It was hopeless…

Whenua winced as one of the Manas just narrowly missed the other with a snapping pincer. “Too big to slip by. Too fast to avoid. If only the other Toa were here…”

“Even if the others were near, they could only delay those beasts, not defeat them,” Onua said sadly. “I can see no way to….”

Whenua turned and looked up at the Toa of Earth, Onua was silent, staring intently at the Manas, his quake-breaker resting against the wall. His eyes glowed like twin points of flame in the darkness.

“I have been looking ahead,” Onua said, more to himself than to the Turaga. “I need to look behind.”

“What are you talking about?”

Onua didn’t answer. He had his quake-breakers running at full speed and was boring holes, seemingly at random, in the walls. Blasts of superhot air greeted him each time.

“What are you doing?” Whenua demanded. “Have you lost your mind?”

“No,” Onua answered, not pausing a moment in his work. “I have begun to think like a Toa.”

“Like a Toa who has lost his mind,” grumbled the Turaga. “It isn’t hot enough down here for you?”

Onua plunged his quake-breaker deep into the stone, then drew it out again. The tool glowed red-hot. “It is. It is hot enough for the Manas as well.”

“Hot enough for…?” Whenua glanced at the great crabs. They were still absorbed in their contest against each other. He thanked Mata Nui for the favor.

“When the Toa Kaita faced the Manas, we defeated them with intense cold,” Onua said, grinding more holes in the stone. “Manas hate the cold. They fled down here to be where it’s hot.”

Whenua stared at him but said nothing. Onua obviously had a plan, but the Turaga could not imagine what it might be. Looking behind, he said… Whenua sifted through his memories, but he could find nothing that explained this strange behavior. Still, it was not the first time he had questioned the wisdom of a Toa, and he had been wrong before.

Onua noticed Whenua’s puzzled expression from the corner of his eye and laughed softly. “Come now, Turaga. You, who always say I should not forget the past? Think – what else do we know that loves the heat?”

As he said this, Onua found what he was seeking. His quake-breaker burst open a lava pocket and molten magma began to pour into the tunnel, heading slowly but surely for the Manas’ chamber. Whenua leaped high in the air and wrapped his arms around the Toa’s neck.

(Of course!” he proclaimed happily. “I should have remembered myself. But will it work?”

“If it doesn’t, I do not think we will return to tell about the attempt,” replied Onua. “If the lava doesn’t get us, the Manas most certainly will.”

The Toa calculated there was little time. The lava was seeping closer and closer to the Manas. As soon as they noticed its approach, they were bound to spot the Toa and Turaga and charge. If he had
been wrong about what other creatures might be living in this furnace... or if it took them too long to reach here...

“Onua! They are coming!” Whenua shouted, pointing back up the tunnel. Now Onua could hear the *skritch-skritch-skritch* of a thousand insectoid legs scrambling over stone.

The Kofo-Jaga were on the march.

Drawn by the heat and the scent of lava, they swarmed down the tunnel. Onua and Whenua flattened themselves against the wall to let the insect horde go by. Just as the fire-scorpions reached the chamber, the Manas saw the molten lava closing in upon them. They roared in anger, snapping at the magma tide, backing away toward where the Kanohi waited.

If the lava was too much for the Manas, it was like a warm bath to the Kofo-Jaga. But they had no intention of sharing their good fortune. First by the thousands, then by the millions, they moved toward the Manas, fiery stingers ready to challenge their new enemies.

The Manas were creatures without fear, but not to the point of stupidity. Little by little, they gave ground before the swarm, clearing Onua’s path to the mask. Their claws flashed as they struck at the fire scorpions, but it did no good. There were simply too many of the Kofo-Jaga.

“It must be now!” Onua said. Then he charged into the chamber, ignoring the lava, the fire-scorpions, and the angry Manas. Before the creatures could react, he snatched the Kanohi from its resting place and dove for the tunnel entrance.

Whenua watched, wide-eyed, as the Toa of Earth headed right for him on a collision course. “Mata Nui!” the Turaga shouted, jumping aside just in time to avoid being tackled.

Onua Nuva struck the tunnel floor quake-breakers first, carving his way through the stone and vanishing through it. Five seconds later, Whenua heard a splash from far below.

The Turaga rushed to the ragged edge of the hole and peered down. There was Onua, the Kanohi Kaukau on his face, treading water in a subterranean river. “Turaga! Jump!”

Whenua took another step toward the edge, then dizziness washed over him. Heights were for Le-Matoran, not the Turaga of Onu-Koro. “I cannot!” he shouted back. “It is too far!”

The Toa of Earth smiled. “Turaga Whenua, remember the past,” he said. “Haven’t I always caught you before?”

The river carried them far from the Manas and the Kofo-Jaga to the mouth of a wide tunnel. Once they were back on dry land, Onua shifted from the Great Mask of Water Breathing to the Great Mask of Strength. Together, they began the long trek up to the village.

They had been walking only a short time when Whenua paused, running his hand over the tunnel wall. Onua could see faded Matoran letters carved into the stone just below the ceiling, but too much time had passed to read what they said.

“What does it mean, Turaga?” he asked.

“The past,” Whenua said, with wonder in his voice. “I carved these letters long ago... the same day I carved this tunnel.”

The Turaga said nothing further. But he wore a smile all the way back to Onu-Koro.
Whenua wore the same smile as he finished his story. “You see, Onua remembered the past even when I did not. The Toa are wise… wise enough to understand.”

“You trusted your Toa, and he trusted you,” Onewa replied. “But do they trust one another?”

Vakama glanced at Onewa, then at Matau. “Our brother of stone speaks the truth, though I am sorry to say it. There is little friendship left among the Toa, it seems.”

“Do not be so quickjumping, Vakama,” Matau, the Turaga of Le-Koro, answered. “There is much you do not know. Let me tell my tale of Toa and trust…”

Lewa Nuva, Toa of Air, stood at the edge of a cliff overlooking the lush domain of Le-Wahi. Hidden in the jungle below was his village, Le-Koro, only recently rebuilt after being leveled by the Bohrok.

He shuddered a little at the memory. The day the insectlike Lehvak swarm succeeded in sweeping away the village was the same day they captured him, removed his Mask of Power, and used one of their parasitic krana to make him one of them. He could have resisted, of course, but the Lehvak had already taken over Turaga Matau and the Le-Matoran. Challenging the Bohrok might have placed his friends in danger.

He closed his eyes and did his best to drive the memories away. For a brief time, his mind had been filled with thoughts that were not his own. They were the voices of the swarm, commanding him to help them complete their task on Mata Nui. Had it not been for Onua’s timely rescue, Lewa knew he might still be a servant of the Bohrok.

It had taken him a long time to feel comfortable after that. The other Toa, particularly Tahu, treated him differently. Some felt sorry for him; others seemed nervous that he might turn against them. Now, when he finally felt like the old Lewa again, his power over air was gone. Once more, as he journeyed through this land he knew so well, he felt lost.

That was what had brought him to the cliff. In the days since his power disappeared, he had not attempted to glide on the air. Before, he could command the wind to keep him flying. Now it would not listen to him. Wisdom said he should keep to the trees and the vines… or worse, walk on the ground! But the day he did that, he knew, would be the day he stopped being a Toa.

He fitted his twin air katana onto his arms and legs, turning them into glider wings. The breeze was right. If all went well, he would soar over the jungle and land in the heart of Le-Koro. He took a step forward…

“Toa Lewa!”

Startled, Lewa almost fell. He fought to keep his balance, not easy with the glider wings in place. Then a hand grabbed his and pulled him back from the edge.

It was Turaga Matau, looking concerned. “Word is deepwood that you are seeking Kanohi Nuva Masks. There are no power-masks here. Only mountain-rock.”

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“I know, Turaga,” said Lewa. “But I have been treebound for too many suns now. It is time to ride the wind again.”

Matau laughed. “Is this a day for sunsoaring? Very well, then. You will find your Toa-brother on the groundpath below. Try not to hardland on him.”

Another Toa in Le-Wahi? Yes, now that Lewa thought of it, there was something new in the wind. The scent of... smoke.

“Yes, and hot-fire, too,” said Matau. “Enough to darkash Le-Koro again, if someone does not stop it.”

The Turaga said the words lightly, but there was no mistaking their meaning. Le-Koro was in danger again. No matter the cause, Lewa would not fail his village a second time. He stepped to the edge of the cliff, took a deep breath, and launched himself into the wind.

At first, he had a hard time holding steady. Gusts blew him about like a leaf, up above the mountain and then down almost to the treetops. The smell of fire was much stronger now, but Lewa still could not see any flames.

He shifted his body to try and turn right. The wind had other ideas, blowing him toward the left and into a spiral toward the ground. By instinct, he tried to summon the air currents to carry him high again. But the air would no more listen to him these days than it would to Gali or...

Tahu!

Of course. It must be the Toa of Fire down below. If smoke was in the wind, did that mean he had somehow regained his powers? Lewa had to know. There was no more time for testing his flying. He triggered the power of the Mask of Levitation and floated gently to the ground.

Lewa did not like being on the flat earth. Yes, it was better than being in the water, which he positively hated. But he always felt clumsy when he “groundwalked,” not like when he was swinging through the trees.

Lewa loped along the path, following the scent of fire. He could hear the crackling sound of the flames feeding on old branches. He hoped it was not the trees of Le-Koro that were burning.

Coming around a rock, he saw Tahu. The Toa of Fire was standing in front of a blaze, magma swords in hand. Lewa recognized his stance. Tahu was trying to stop the fire by drawing the flames into his swords, but it was not working. His power, too, was gone.

Lewa rushed over to him. At first, Tahu did not seem to notice the other Toa. Lewa had to grab his arm to get his attention. “Tahu! Trying to quickburn the jungle, Fire Toa?”

Tahu shook him off. “Toa of Fire? Toa of nothing! I no longer command the flames, Lewa.”

A small group of Le-Matoran scurried into the clearing and began shoveling earth on the fire to put it out. Lewa led his brother Toa away. “We all face the same hardluck, Tahu. But it’s no time for angershouts. Why have you come to Le-Koro?”

Tahu looked at the Toa of Air. He had always liked Lewa, even if their ideas about being a Toa were very different – Lewa saw it as fun and adventure, Tahu as a serious task. But so much had changed in the last few weeks: Lewa taken over by the Bohrok, the Toa Nuva splitting apart, now the loss of all their powers. Tahu was no longer certain what – or who – he could trust.

“It is... not your concern, brother,” replied Tahu. “I will not be in your region long. Once I have what I have come for, I will be on my way.”

“If you search for something in my lands, then a wayfinder you must have,” said Lewa brightly. “And a wayfinder I shall be. Turaga Vakama has told you where a mask can be found?”

“Two,” said Tahu, already walking away. “I would welcome your company, Toa of Air.”

That way I can keep an eye on you, the Toa of Fire added to himself.

Of all the regions of Mata Nui, Le-Wahi was easily the most difficult to travel through. The air was heavy with rain and the ground was mostly mud. The farther one went into the heart of the wahi, the denser the jungle growth became. Even for Toa, hacking through vines every step of the way was exhausting.
However, if Tahu and Lewa were tired, the sight that met their eyes in the center of the swamp was enough to wake them up. A grove of trees had been torn out of the ground, roots and all, and piled on top of one another to block the path.

An even worse surprise waited when Tahu tried to lift one of the trees. Even without the Great Mask of Strength, a Toa should have been able to toss a swamp tree aside. But this one felt like it weighed twice as much as Mount Ihu. After three tries, Tahu gave up.

“How could a Bohrok-Kal do this?”

“It controls gravity, Lewa. First it makes the trees so light that they float out of the ground… then so heavy that they crash to earth and cannot be moved. You, of all Toa, should know that.”

Lewa stiffened. When he spoke, the normally light tone of his voice was gone, replaced by anger. “No. I did not choose the Bohrok dark-time I lived through. I do not know where the Bohrok-Kal are or what they are doing.”

Tahu leaned in close until their masks almost touched and said harshly, “How do I know that? How do I know your ‘wayfinding’ is not leading me into an ambush?”

“If I were your enemy, you would be lateknowing. Better to worrythink about the Nuhvok-Kal.”

Tahu frowned. He could not help being suspicious of Lewa, whose mind had so recently been controlled by their enemies, the Bohrok. None of the other Toa knew that Tahu, too, had once lost a mask and had it replaced with a krana. Although he had not worn it long enough to be absorbed into the swarm, he knew how powerful the krana could be. Sometimes the Toa of Fire worried that his decision to split up the team might have been caused by the Bohrok somehow.

“All right, then,” Tahu said, backing off. “The Kal knows we need the Masks of Power, so it’s probably heading for the same spot we are. We find it; we capture it; and we make it give our powers back.”

Lewa began to scale the barrier, climbing effortlessly over the stacked trees. “You are heartfeeling, brother, not headthinking. Nuhvok-Kal is not so easy to capture. Take one step toward it and you are highflying or groundbound.”

Tahu began to climb, but it was not quite as easy for him as it had been for Lewa. Once he slipped and almost fell back to the bottom, which did nothing to improve his mood. “Do you have a better idea, Lewa? Perhaps if we ask the Nuhvok-Kal to give us back our Toa powers, it will agree to think about it.”

“Think about it…?” Lewa repeated. Then he jumped from the top of the barrier, went into a roll on landing, and leaped up into a tree. “Mata Nui! What a quicksmart idea, brother!”

Tahu reached the top of the barrier and looked at Lewa as if his brother Toa had turned into a giant swamp lizard. “I am beginning to wonder, Lewa, if the Toa of Air has too much of it inside his head. What idea?”

Lewa was now springing from one branch to another almost faster than the eye could follow. “Have you ever seen a Nui-Jaga at a bog snake nest?”

Tahu shook his head. He knew that the giant, scorpionlike Nui-Jaga liked to feast on bog snakes, but he had never witnessed it. He swatted aside a swarm of insects and snapped, “No, and what does that have to do with anything?”

“Nui-Jaga very hugebig,” answered Lewa from high atop a tree. Then he jumped off, flipped over and over, and landed on a lower branch. “Bog snakes are many, but small. So what to do when hungry Rahi comes around?”

Lewa dropped to the ground in front of Tahu. “Bog snakes come from in front, behind, uptree, downtree, all at once. Nui-Jaga gets confused. Too many for even sharpstinger to stop. Understand now?”

Tahu had to admit that this was a rare case where he did understand exactly what Lewa was saying.
The two Toa began to plan. Lewa sent a message back to Le-Koro, instructing Turaga Matau to gather as many vinesmen and windriders as possible and send them to the Toa. Meanwhile, Tahu went to scout ahead and see if he could spot the Nuhvok-Kal.

When he returned, Lewa was already putting the Matoran to work. The green-masked villagers were up in the trees all around, tying off branches, readying rocks, and rigging nets made of vine. Tahu was impressed.

“They work hard, brother. You should be proud of them.”

Lewa smiled. “They learn from lifedawn that he who climbs fastest and highest will get the sweetest fruit. And… they have special reason to want any Bohrok stopped.”

Tahu looked around. Of the dozens and dozens of trees that surrounded the clearing, not one was empty. Even if no Matoran was visible, the rustle of branches said one was at work turning the jungle into a giant Bohrok-Kal trap.

The idea was a simple one. Nuhvok-Kal was incredibly powerful, but all power has some limit. Come at the Kal from different directions, like the bog snakes do the Nui-Jaga, and make it use its power again and again. With luck, it would reach its limit. If not…

“What happens if this doesn’t work, Toa Tahu?” The question came from Kongu, one of the Le-Koro Matoran.

“It has to,” Tahu replied.

“It will,” said Lewa. “Now we just have to lure the Nuhvok-Kal to this spot.”

“We will need some clever trick,” said Tahu. “Some bait it cannot resist.”

Lewa turned to the Toa of Fire with a broad smile. “Make sure you shout loud so the Kal can hear you, brother.”

Nuhvok-Kal was angry. Its mission was to find and free the trapped queens of the Bohrok swarms, and it wanted to be doing that. But Tahnok-Kal had ordered that the Kanohi Nuva masks be found and hidden so the Toa could not use them.

Nuhvok-Kal had been searching for the masks since first light, with no luck. It did not like the jungle. Too many places for enemies to hide. Not that anything on this island could threaten a Bohrok-Kal.

“Creature!” boomed the voice of the Toa of Fire. “Turn and face justice for your deeds!”

Nuhvok-Kal wheeled around to see Tahu, magma swords drawn. Far from being a frightening sight, the Kal would have laughed if it were able. Instead, its harsh voice hissed, “Toa Tahu! I thought I smelled the scent of failure somewhere nearby.”

“Then perhaps you should bathe more often, Bohrok,” Tahu replied. “Are the powerful Kal now searching the jungle for scraps? Or are you just lost?”

The Kal didn’t respond with words. Instead, it lifted its shield and sent waves of gravitic energy at the Toa of Fire. Rocks and trees, freed of the bonds of gravity, began to float into the air all around Tahu. Slowly, they drifted together until they were hovering just above the Toa’s head.

Tahu flipped backward a split second before Nuhvok-Kal increased gravity by a hundred times. Stone and wood slammed into the ground where he had been standing, coming down so hard they buried themselves deep in the mud.

The Toa of Fire scrambled to his feet and shouted, “Follow me, Bohrok! Perhaps we can find more rocks for you to throw!”

Then Tahu raced away, heading for the clearing where Lewa waited. He knew Nuhvok-Kal was following, for he could feel his legs growing heavier with each step. If the Bohrok-Kal got any closer, its power would root Tahu to the ground and the plan would fail.

The Toa of Fire’s only chance was the unexpected. He raced up a slope, leaped, and grabbed a tree branch. He spun around the branch to build up momentum. At the peak of his motion, he let go and shot forward like a Matoran disk.
He almost missed the vine he was shooting for, grabbing it at the last moment. Tahu swung out over the jungle, letting go of one vine only to grab another. He could hear trees falling behind him as the Bohrok-Kal continued the chase.

One final swing brought Tahu into the clearing. Halfway through his arc, he let go and landed hard in the mud. Lewa rushed over, not sure whether to be stunned or amused at the sight of the Toa of Fire as a vineswinger.

“Don’t say a word,” Tahu warned. “I wouldn’t think of it,” said Lewa, trying hard to hide a smile. “Everything is ready.”

“Good. It’s right behind me.”

The two Toa split up, each rushing to a different side of the clearing. The Nuhvok-Kal burst through the trees a second later, shouting, “Toa! You cannot escape from the Bohrok-Kal!”

Lewa thrust his air katana into the air. “Now!” he yelled, and chaos was unleashed.

From all around the clearing, Matoran slung disks and stones and branches, all aimed right at the intruder. Nuhvok-Kal reacted by reflex, using its power to erase gravity from each and every object thrown. But even as they floated toward the sky, more came to replace them. The Bohrok-Kal spun around frantically, trying to keep track of everything coming its way.

Lewa waved to get Tahu’s attention. “Brother! I can quicksteal his krana-kal!”

Tahu shouted, “No! Wait!” but it was too late. Lewa had already broken into a run, leaped… and went crashing to the ground when Nuhvok-Kal’s power struck him. He lay at the Bohrok-Kal’s feet, pinned to the ground by the weight of gravity.

Tahu started forward to rescue him… then paused. What if Lewa was still being controlled by the Bohrok? What if this was all a trick? Could he trust a Toa who had been a part of the swarm such a short time ago? The whole trap had been Lewa’s idea… but who was meant to be caught in the snare?

All of this ran through the Toa of Fire’s mind in an instant. His answer came to him even more quickly. He could not – would not – turn his back on a brother Toa, no matter what.

He charged. Nuhvok-Kal turned to face him and unleashed his devastating power. But Tahu was already gone, leaping and spinning in the air, striking the falling stones with his magma swords. One rock crashed into another, sending it hurtling into a third, all moving too fast for even the Bohrok-Kal’s eyes to follow. No sooner did the Kal send its power against one stone than it was ricocheting off of three more, all scattering in different directions.

In all of this, Lewa was not forgotten. Tahu hit the ground, grabbed the Toa of Air, and carried him to the safety of the trees. “Stay here!” he ordered. “I will deal with the Kal.”

But Nuhvok-Kal had had enough. As Lewa had predicted, the constant rain of rock and wood and the effort to stop it all had exhausted the Bohrok-Kal’s power. It stumbled into the jungle, using its last reserves to bring trees down behind it to slow pursuit.

Tahu started after him, but Lewa called, “Wait, Tahu. Let it go. There will be another clash time to settle with the Kal.”

The Toa of Fire wanted to argue… but hadn’t he just realized he had to trust Lewa? He turned back and said, “You may be right. Are you ready to travel? We have Kanohi Masks to find, after all, my brother.”

Together, the two Toa headed into the jungle, Tahu walking, Lewa swinging through the trees. “How can you groundwalk, Tahu, now that you have vineswung?”

“I leave the trees to you, brother. And if you ever tell anyone about that, I’ll –”

“Our secret,” answered Lewa. “Heartswear. But next time, work on that hardland, brother…”

Then the Toa of Air’s laughter could be heard all over Le-Wahi… and the Toa of Fire’s, too.
Vakama laughed, his whole body shaking. “Tahu swinging through the trees? No wonder he was in such a foul mood when he returned to Ta-Koro that day.”

Nuju ran through a complicated series of gestures. Matoro translated, “Perhaps it did the Toa of Fire some good to see the world the way Lewa sees it.”

“They have been good Toa brothers since then,” said Matau. “All doubtfear is gone, it seems.”

“Perhaps, Matau,” said Onewa. “But if we make the wrong decision... if we tell the Toa all that has gone before... then won’t they ‘doubt-fear’ us? We have kept this from them for so long, would they ever trust us again?”

Nokama rose to her feet. “Brothers, I know what it is to betray a Toa. I have done it, and not so very long ago. Listen to my tale, and I beg you not to judge until I have reached an end.”

The Turaga fell silent as the Turaga of water began to speak...

Hahli rowed her canoe frantically through the bright blue waters of Gali’s Bay. She ignored the schools of Makuta fish that pursued the boat, despite the fact their jaws could easily tear the craft to pieces. Nothing mattered but finding Turaga Nokama.

She beached her boat on the outskirts of Ga-Koro and raced up the sand. Macku was on the beach, repairing a seaweed fishing net. “Have you seen the Turaga?” Hahli asked.

Macku could see how upset her friend was and put down her work. “Yes, she is inspecting the work site. What’s the matter?”

“I’ll tell you later,” Hahli said, on the move again. “I have to talk to her!”

She found Nokama up on a ridge, supervising a Ga-Matoran work team. A Bohrok squad had tried to build a dam to cut off the waters that fed the bay, until Gali drove them off. Now the Matoran were tearing down what was left of the structure.

“Nokama! You have to come quickly!”

The Turaga turned and saw Hahli. The Matoran was out of breath. “What is it, Hahli? Calm down and tell me.”

“It’s Gali Nuva. I saw her on the beach, and this huge wave came at her... She raised her aqua axes... but she couldn’t stop it! Her power over water is gone!”

Nokama frowned. She suspected something like this might happen when the Toa Nuva symbol was stolen from the village. “Where is Toa Gali now?”

“Still on the beach, last I saw,” said Hahli.

“Stay here. I will go to her. She will need someone who understands.”

Nokama arrived on the beach to find Gali stalking up and down, her aqua axes tossed aside like they were worthless fish bones. The Turaga had never seen her so angry before.

“Gali? Are you unharmed?”
The Toa of Water’s eyes flashed. “I cannot hear the water. I am deaf to the song of the waves, Nokama, the ebb and flow of every river and stream on Mata Nui. I walk this island, but I am no longer a part of it. No. I am not unharmed.”

Nokama bent down and picked up the aqua axes. “Your Toa tools are not to blame.”

“No, my brother Toa are,” Gali snapped. “I told them we should stay united. I told them there would be another menace and we would be stronger together. But Tahu and Kopaka would not listen… not even Onua stood with me.”

Nokama handed the tools back to the Toa. “And will raging like the storm change that? Be at peace, Toa. Remember, calm waters are the easiest to travel.”

Gali walked away and sat down on a rock overlooking the bay. “With respect, Turaga, that is easy for you to say. You do not know what this feels like.”

Nokama laughed softly. “You are so wise, Gali, yet know so little. You are swimming in my wake, Toa. There is nowhere you can go that I have not traveled before.”

Nokama walked to the water’s edge and dove into the bay, swimming with long, easy strokes. “One day I will tell you a tale, and you will understand. But for now… come with me.”

Another world exists far beneath the waters of Mata Nui. Here schools of fish congregate around protodermis reefs, feeding on the microscopic organisms that dwell within. Then, without any warning, the school compresses itself into a tight cluster, in a desperate attempt to defend against a Takea shark on the hunt. One pass, two, and the cluster is shattered, fish darting every which way in a race for safety.

Gali had seen this many times in her travels under the sea, but never before had she understood how vulnerable the fish must feel. *It is bad enough the Bohrok-Kal menace the island, but if Makuta should return…* The thought filled her with fear. Without their elemental powers, the Toa Nuva would stand as much chance against the master of shadows as those little fish had against the shark.

The Toa of Water forced herself to focus on the present. Nokama was swimming quickly, leading Gali deep into the night-black waters near the bottom of the bay.

The journey ended in a sea cave, one Gali could not recall ever exploring. Inside she discovered that the cavern held air pockets. The atmosphere was heavy and stale, but breathable just the same. A large lightstone embedded in the wall illuminated the entire cave.

“Why have you brought us here? What is this place?” Gali asked.

“It is a place of memories,” Nokama replied. “Look.”

Carved into the stone were six figures, each wearing a Kanohi Mask and carrying a strange tool. They did not look familiar to Gali, but there was no mistaking the fact that these were Toa.

“Who –?” she began.

Nokama gestured for her to be silent. “Who they are… or were… is not for you to know right now. But they are one reason you are here. As for the other reasons, you will find a Kanohi Nuva in this cave… and a test as well.”

“A test? Why, Turaga?” Gali demanded. “After all the Toa have achieved on Mata Nui, why must we still be tested?”

“When you know the answer to that, Toa Gali, you will have passed the test,” answered Nokama, already swimming out of the cave. Gali pursued, but a huge stone slab suddenly slammed down, blocking the cave mouth. She threw all her might against it, but it would not budge.

The Toa of Water was trapped. The only thing worse than that was knowing that she had been betrayed by the one she trusted most.

Outside of the cave, Nokama let go of the ancient stone lever that triggered the slab. In her heart, she wished there had been another way. But Gali would need true wisdom in the time to come, and not every lesson can be taught by a Turaga telling stories. Some only life can teach.

*I hope Gali can forgive me… if she ever finds her way out,* thought the Turaga.
Gali treaded water and tried to think. There would be time later to learn why Nokama had done this. Right now, she needed to find a way out.

She thought about the other Toa Nuva and how they would approach this problem. Onua and Pohatu would rely on brute strength and try to smash the slab. Lewa would see the whole thing as another reason to hate water. Tahu would probably order the slab out of the way, and if it knew what was good for it, the slab would move aside.

And Kopaka? The Toa of Ice always said, “The trap itself contains the key to escape. You simply have to know where, and how, to look.”

All right, Kopaka’s way it is, then, she said to herself. Assuming Nokama is not being controlled by Makuta, she wanted me to find something or learn something here. But what?

Gali took a deep breath and forced herself to be calm. Once all worry and fear were gone, she looked around her, trying to take in every detail. The cave walls were smooth—too slick to climb. Running a hand over one, she noted that it was not the uneven texture caused by years of erosion. These walls felt like they had been polished. This was no natural sea cave, then. It was more like an Onu-Wahi tunnel.

The only other remarkable feature seemed to be the carvings. Gali swam closer to take a good look at them. They were very old, made long before she or the others had come to Mata Nui. The Toa pictured were definitely not her brothers or herself, but something about them did look familiar. It took her a moment to realize it was the Kanohi they wore. The masks were not like any she had seen before, but somehow she knew what they were. And one of the Toa looked like…

No, it couldn’t be, she told herself. I must be mistaken.

Seeing the Kanohi made her realize that she had forgotten the most important clue Nokama had given her. There was a Mask of Power hidden somewhere in this cave. Finding it must be the test, and once she had it, she could escape.

Gali dove beneath the water and began to swim deeper into the cave.

The Toa of Water swam slowly, surfacing now and then to get her bearings in the unfamiliar cave. She had seen schools of Ruki minnows, cut off from the open sea, flitting about in the water in search of escape. Strangely, though, there did not seem to be any larger fish. Didn’t anything live down this deep?

Further exploration answered her question. Through the murky water she spotted bones littering the cavern floor. She retrieved one and brought it to the surface to examine it in the glow of the lightstone. It took her only an instant to remember where she had seen such a bone before: Nokama’s trident. These were Makuta fish bones.

Suddenly, Gali felt very alone and a little bit afraid. Makuta fish were certainly prey for larger creatures, like Takea, but few made any effort to hunt them down. Makuta fish were fast and cunning, with rows and rows of razor-sharp teeth in their mouths. Although any one was powerful enough to survive on its own, they preferred to swim in a school. Together, there was little that could stop them.

Much like the Toa, Gali thought.

But something had defeated the Makuta fish. Something strong enough and fearless enough to challenge them. Gali hoped that, whatever it was, it had abandoned this particular cave long ago.

She looked down the tunnel, but saw nothing that looked like a threat. Just the glow of two lightfish hovering in the water, waiting for their dinner to swim by. Gali wondered if there wasn’t something in the waters beyond them, much larger and much nastier, waiting for exactly the same thing.

Gali continued her journey, scanning beneath the waters for any sign of a Kanohi. She saw none. Against her will, she began to wonder if Nokama could have been lying about the mask. Then she pushed that thought aside.

The two lightfish had still not moved the slightest bit, despite her drawing closer to them. Normally, even a good-sized fish would startle at any movement. Of course, they probably had never seen a Toa before.

Don’t worry, little ones, Gali thought. The Toa of Water will not harm you.
As if in answer, the lightfish suddenly went out. A second later, they began to glow brightly again. Gali froze. Lightfish never stop glowing, not while they are alive. Which meant those weren’t lightfish. They were eyes. And they had just blinked.

Gali spun around and hurled herself forward, trying to go back the way she had come. But it was too late. She felt a tentacle wrap around her right leg, then another around her left. Despite all her power, she was being slowly dragged backward.

The Toa of Water looked over her shoulder. The creature that had her in its grip was a monster with twelve enormous tentacles. Each tentacle had a snapping beak on the end, and another, larger beak could be seen in the center of the creature’s body. Its eyes glowed brightly as it pulled Gali closer and closer.

Desperately, she looked for a way out. Fighting the creature was a last resort, she knew. She had no wish to harm anything that lived, and besides, there was no guarantee she could overpower something this size.

Another tentacle was reaching toward her now, trying to wrap around her waist. Using all her strength, Gali dove toward the cavern floor, narrowly avoiding the creature’s grasp. She planted an aqua ax into the stone floor, trying to slow her progress toward the creature. Her free hand reached out for something, anything, to hold on to.

Then she felt the familiar shape of a Kanohi Mask. She had found it! Gali grabbed it and put it on, immediately feeling the speed power of the Kanohi Kakama flowing through her.

Her joy turned to disappointment. She had been hoping it would be a Pakari Nuva. Greater strength would help her wrestle herself free. What good was speed when she was held in such a grip?

Worse, without the powers of the Mask of Water Breathing, she could stay under for only a brief time before she needed air. If she was going to put the Kakama to use, it had to be now.

She remembered something Tahu had once said. “Fire never surrenders,” he had told her. “If it cannot burn through, it burns around. Block its path and it sends sparks through the air, to begin the blaze anew somewhere else. Fire always finds a way.”

Can water do less? Gali asked herself. Then she began to kick her legs, faster and faster, until they were nothing but a blur. Still, the creature would not let go. She increased her speed, straining for air as she forced her legs to move even faster.

In a test of sheer strength, Gali could not win. But even stripped of her elemental energies, she could still be saved by the power of water. Her ultrarapid kicking generated a current stronger than any ever seen before in the waters of Mata Nui. It slammed into the creature with the force of a tidal wave, rocking it just enough for its grip to loosen. Gali seized her chance and rocketed forward. In a split second, the tentacled monster was left far behind.

The Toa of Water shot through the cavern, carried forward by her momentum. She could feel some of the familiar effects of the Mask of Speed. Her reflexes had become lightning quick, the only thing making it possible for her to maneuver at such high speed. Her vision was sharper. Objects that should have been just a blur were sharp and clear to her.

Unfortunately, that also meant she could see what she was heading for: the slab Nokama had lowered over the cave mouth. Now that she had the Mask of Speed, Gali could look forward to being flattened against the stone that much faster.

No! Water finds a way!

The Kakama Nuva was more powerful than the old Mask of Speed. Maybe it could do more than just make her swim more quickly. She had to concentrate… concentrate on getting through that stone.

Gali drew on her last bit of energy and willed her body to begin to vibrate. Every atom in her body began to move until she was nothing but a blur moving through the water toward the slab. If she had guessed wrong, she would be crushed against the stone by her own speed.
Seconds before she was to strike the stone, the Toa of Water shut her eyes. Her final thoughts were of the other Toa. She wished her last words to Tahu and Kopaka had not been such harsh ones. Even more, she wished she could be by their side to confront the dangers to come.

Then the thought hit her – at the speed she was going, she should have reached the cave mouth by now. Cautiously, she opened her eyes. She could see sunlight filtering through the water high above, Ruki fish darting everywhere, even a lone Tarakava lurking close to the shore. She was back in the bay.

Gali called the Mask of Water Breathing back to her and turned back to look at the cave. The slab was intact. Somehow, her vibrations had allowed her to pass right through the stone without injury. The Mask of Speed had been even more powerful than she expected it to be.

She thought of the carvings, Nokama’s “test,” even her differences with Tahu and Kopaka. And she wondered how many of those things were also far more than they seemed.

When Gali broke the surface, Nokama was standing on the beach waiting for her. The Turaga smiled and held out a hand. “Welcome home, Toa of Water.”

Gali waited a moment, then took the outstretched hand and stepped out of the water. “You wanted me to discover the Kanohi Kakama’s powers on my own. You wanted me to see they were no longer the same as before.”

“Nothing is the same,” Nokama replied. “The Toa have changed. Your Kanohi have changed. You may soon find that everything you think you know about Mata Nui, about your life here, is but a fraction of the truth.”

Nokama stopped and looked up into the Toa’s eyes. “You are the Toa of Water, Gali. You, above all, must be able to look beyond the surface and find the hidden depths below.”

Gali considered Nokama’s words as they walked along the beach. When she spoke again, it was to say, “Those carvings in the cave… was that you, Turaga?”

“Me?” Nokama laughed. “Now, Gali, did you see a Turaga in that picture? Those were Toa. Heroes of a long-ago age. I am just the elder of Ga-Koro.”

Yes, you are, thought Gali. But what lies beneath your surface, Turaga?
Nokama looked around at the other Turaga. With the exception of Whenua, all of them looked as if she had just suggested building a temple to Makuta.

“Those Toa carvings should have been covered up years ago,” said Vakama. “Showing them to Gali without talking to the rest of us first was most unwise.”

“Why? Because I do not like asking Toa to risk their lives for us again and again while lying to them about the past?” replied Nokama.

“Nokama speaks the truth,” said Whenua. “Listen to her.”

“I have been listening,” said Onewa. “I have yet to be convinced these Toa will understand the tales of Metru Nui. It seems they barely understand one another.”

Nuju gave a shrill whistle and ran through a complicated series of gestures. Matoro translated, “Sometimes accepting what you do not understand is the first step toward understanding. Hear Nuju’s story and decide for yourselves…”

Gali Nuva stood on Kini-Nui in the twilight, remembering. It had not been so very long ago that she and the other five Toa had emerged from the Bohrok nest, changed by protodermis into the powerful Toa Nuva. At first, it seemed like a blessing. Their greater strength and tougher armor would make it easier for them to defend the village from any threat.

But as they began to test their new power, the team began to fracture. Finally, Tahu and Kopaka almost came to blows. Before she even knew what was happening, the two of them had decided the Toa should go their separate ways. Each Toa would pursue his or her own destiny, all though thoughts of unity forgotten.

At first, she had dismissed the Toa of Fire and Ice as foolish and stubborn and vowed not to ally with them again. Now her talk with Nokama had convinced her that perhaps she was the one being stubborn. Gali decided she had to try to bring the Toa back together.

Her meditation was interrupted by the arrival of Kopaka. “Hahli sent word that I was needed,” said the Toa of Ice. “So I am here.”

“Thank you, Kopaka. I knew you would not refuse my summons.”

The Toa of Ice said nothing. He looked uncomfortable, but then he often did around Gali. She had always insisted on treating him as a friend, even when he insisted he did not want or need friends.

“It concerns the KanoHi Nuva Masks,” she said. “As soon as one other arrives, I will explain.”

Kopaka’s eyes narrowed. “Another? Who?”

“It is I, Toa of cold breezes!” The voice belonged to Tahu, who vaulted onto the Kini-Nui to stand beside them. “You can go back to your snow fortress. I am sure Gali and I can handle matters.”

Kopaka smiled. “Perhaps, if all Gali needs is water boiled.”

“I sent for both of you!” Gali said sharply. “Tahu, kindly stop acting like you are Mata Nui’s gift to us all. Kopaka, for a Toa of few words, you never seem to know when to be quiet.”
“I did not come here to be lectured, sister,” Tahu replied. “I have business in Ta-Koro, and —”
“Three of them, or so Nokama tells me. But there is great danger here, as well.”
“You have the Mask of Speed,” said Tahu. “Why don’t we just race in, retrieve the masks, and race back out again?”
“Too easy to speed into a trap,” Gali answered. “No, we must make this journey one step at a time. Be on your guard, Toa, for we know not what waits for us within.”

The sun was shining when the three Toa began their trek. It did not take them long, however, to learn how this spot had gotten its name. They were barely on their way when the mountains seemed to close in around them, cutting off all light. The brightest of days turned into the long shadows of dusk in an instant. The warm breezes of Ta-Wahi were gone now, replaced by an icy wind that chilled them to the core of their beings.

No one spoke as they walked. In this place, a whisper would have seemed like a shout. All around was cold, hard stone, without so much as a weed growing amid the rocks. There were no sounds, for nothing dared to live here.

Kopaka led the way, sharing the power of the Mask of X-Ray Vision with his two companions. In spite of this, they heard the danger long before they saw it. It was the rumble of thunder, so loud it shook the ground, and the howl of the wind that almost drowned out their thoughts.

Gali pointed overhead. Black clouds now filled the sky, where a moment before it had been clear. Twin lances of lightning flew from those clouds, striking the peaks and shearing off huge chunks of stone. Boulders flew down the mountainsides heading right for the three Toa.

“The Mask of Shielding will protect us!” Tahu yelled over the wind.
“No!” Kopaka shouted. “It will protect us from being crushed, but not buried! We need the Great Mask of Strength!”

Tahu started to argue, but Gali stopped him with a look. He summoned the Great Mask of Strength, sharing his powers with Kopaka and Gali. All three felt a surge of energy in their bodies as their strength increased.

“Spread out!” Gali said. “We need room to move!”

As the boulders rained down, the Toa struck with their tools, crumbling tons of stone to powder. Without a shield to protect them, even one stone getting through could mean doom. Tahu, Kopaka, and Gali struck blow after blow, swatting away massive rocks as if they were hailstones.

Above, lightning bolt after lightning bolt struck the mountains. Rocks that had taken an aeon to rise to the sky were sent tumbling to the ground in a flash. Only the reflexes and power of the Toa kept them from being overwhelmed.

When the avalanche finally ended, all three sank to the ground, exhausted. “What was that?” Gali asked.

“A welcome from the shadows, perhaps,” answered Kopaka.

“We have to keep moving,” said Tahu. “We can’t let a few pebbles stop the Toa.”

Kopaka used his ice blade to help himself to his feet. “You are right.”

Gali looked up at the Toa of Ice, surprised. “Did you actually agree with him?”

“You do not need the wisdom of a Turaga to know that if we stay here, whatever lurks in this place will know where to find us,” said Kopaka. “We need to move on.”

“Come on, Gali,” Tahu said, helping her up. “This is your expedition. You wouldn’t want to miss the next narrow escape, would you?”

Tahu took the lead this time, while Gali hung back to talk with Kopaka. “You know Tahu does not mean all he says, Kopaka. But so many look to him as a leader, and to him that means he can never ask for help.”

“Then that is the difference between us,” Kopaka replied. “He cannot ask for help… and I don’t need it.”

But Gali was no longer paying attention. Her eyes were locked on the path up ahead and her expression was one of shock. “You may want to change your mind about that, Kopaka.”

The Toa of Ice followed her gaze and saw Tahu, swords drawn, standing before a raging wall of fire. “Toa of ash! What have you done?”

Tahu did a backflip away from the advancing flames. “It was not my doing, brother. It erupted from the ground like lava from the Mangai. Perhaps your icy breath can blow it away?”

“Perhaps you both can stop acting like quarreling Makika toads and pay attention!” said Gali. She pointed to a second wall of fire that had appeared behind them. “We cannot go forward, and back is not looking very appealing, either!”

“Up!” suggested Kopaka.

“At the speed these fires move, we would never make the climb in time, brother,” said Tahu.

Waves of heat washed over Gali and the world began to spin around her. She reached out to steady herself on Tahu’s shoulder. “Brothers… the heat… too much…”

Kopaka looked at Tahu. “You know the ways of fire. If we cannot go over or under…”

“Then we go through,” agreed Tahu. “Gali! We need the powers of the Mask of Speed!”

“Yes… of course…” Gali said, struggling to stay conscious. With great effort, she summoned forth the Kanohi Kakama Nuva.

Tahu took her left hand, and Kopaka her right. With a final glance at one another, the three Toa launched themselves at the fire at top speed. Running so fast their feet barely touched the ground, they broke through the flames and emerged on the other side, unharmed.

“You see? At such speed, even the fire could not touch us,” said Tahu proudly.
“No… no, there is something wrong here,” Gali muttered. She stumbled back toward the fire, reaching out to touch it. Kopaka rushed forward to stop her, but she brushed him aside.

“Gali! No!”

Tahu’s cry came too late. Without a moment of hesitation, Gali plunged her hand into the flames. But no cry escaped her lips, and when she drew it out again, it was not even scorched. “It’s not real. None of it. It’s a trick.”

At first, Kopaka and Tahu thought perhaps Gali had broken under the strain of lost powers and the long trek. But they both knew the Toa of Water too well. They could hear the absolute certainty in her voice, and so they believed her words. As soon as they accepted them as truth, the flames vanished.

“We have seen this once before, in the Bohrok tunnels. We thought it was the Bahrag’s work,” said Gali, her voice grim. “We were wrong.”

“Makuta,” Tahu whispered. “Striking at us through our minds,” said Kopaka.

“We turned away from unity. When we did that, we turned from our duty and destiny as well,” said Gali. “In that moment, we became vulnerable to Makuta.”

“But no more!” thundered Tahu. “Now we know he sends nothing but illusions at us. And illusions will not stop the Toa of Fire! Come, we will find those Masks of Power! We will make Makuta regret ever hearing the name Toa!”

Without waiting for a yes or no from his companions, Tahu marched off. Gali and Kopaka followed behind, walking quickly to keep their brother in sight.

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Without waiting for a yes or no from his companions, Tahu marched off. Gali and Kopaka followed behind, walking quickly to keep their brother in sight. “At least we know now we cannot be harmed, as long as we do not believe in the illusions,” Gali said.

“Yes,” replied Kopaka. “There is only one problem. What if the next danger… is no illusion?”

Darkness brought their journey to a temporary halt. Gali had the unique privilege of watching Tahu and Kopaka work together to start a fire. Once it was blazing, Kopaka went off to stand guard while the other two rested.

Gali was the first to break the uncomfortable silence. “Kopaka tells me Pohatu is well.”

“As is Lewa,” said Tahu. “Of Onua, I have heard nothing.”

“It is not right that we should be so uncertain of a brother’s safety. We were meant to stand together, Tahu, as one.”

“But we are six,” he replied. “Six Toa, each with enough power to defeat any menace… or at least, we once had such power. And we will have it again!”

“Yes. Then we will go our separate ways again, avoiding one another’s wahi, until some new threat rises to strike in the borderlands. That is the price we pay for the pride of fire and ice.”

“Water,” Tahu said, as if it were a curse. “Water soothes and calms and lulls the spirit to sleep. You cannot understand what true power demands.”

Gali’s eyes blazed with anger. “Toa, if the Great Beings see fit to restore my energies to me… I may one day show you what power really is.”

Tahu stood and walked away, saying over his shoulder, “The prophecies may say that we have to work together, sister. But nowhere is it written that we must enjoy it.”

The next day dawned bright and clear, but a shadow still lay over the Toa. Gali and Tahu were not speaking to each other. Kopaka spoke to neither, not out of anger, but simply because he saw no need to clutter the morning air with words.

They had gone only a short distance when Gali called a halt. She had spotted a carving on the rock wall. It showed the six Toa she had seen before, this time in a valiant struggle against… what? It might have been some many-armed sea creature, or perhaps some other Rahi they had never seen before. One thing was certain — they were in a place of fire.

“Impossible!” said Tahu. “If such beings ever roamed Ta-Wahi, I would know of it.”

“As we knew of the Bohrok, brother?” asked Kopaka quietly. “Or the Kal?”
“What are you saying, bringer of winter?”
“Simply that the Turaga hold many secrets. Perhaps too many.”
Gali said nothing, but her thoughts were on her earlier encounter with Nokama. What did they truly know about the Turaga? Was any of it the truth?
She did her best to ignore her doubts as they journeyed onward, but it was not easy. As one of her brothers had once pointed out, there were too many unanswered questions about Mata Nui. Perhaps when the Bohrok-Kal were defeated, it would be time to get some answers.
“There!” Tahu shouted. He was pointing up ahead, where three Kanohi – the Great Mask of Strength, the Great Mask of Levitation, and the Great Mask of X-Ray Vision – sat atop stakes planted in the ground. Although a dull gray when not being worn, still the Pakari, Miru, and Akaku gleamed in the sunlight.
“Perhaps our worries were for nothing,” said Gali. “Our enemy has fled. Nothing guards the masks.”
“Nothing that we see,” corrected Kopaka. “Even with my enhanced vision, the way seems clear.”
Strangely enough, it was Tahu – normally the boldest of Toa – who hung back. “Something is not right here. When have we ever found Kanohi so easily? This is another trick.”
Kopaka focused the power of his Kanohi Akaku on the masks. “They are real. No illusion.”
“I understand your caution, Tahu,” said Gali. “But we do not have time to waste. If the masks are there to be taken, we must take them.”
Reluctantly, Tahu nodded and joined his two companions. Perhaps Gali was right. Perhaps whatever had been placed here to guard these masks had fled. With a final glance at Kopaka and Gali, he reached out to take the Miru.
The next instant, they were plunging into darkness, falling end over end into what seemed like a bottomless well. Tahu had noticed too late that the ground was giving way beneath them. There was no time to grab on to the edge or dig his magma swords into the walls. All he could do was fumble with the Miru and hope the Mask of Levitation would do its work.
The Kanohi did not disappoint. As soon as the mask was on his face, Tahu could feel himself floating gently in the air, held aloft by the power of levitation. Kopaka and Gali, too, were safe thanks to the power of the Nuva mask.
They reached the bottom, finding themselves in a cold, dark chamber far beneath the surface. All three were on alert, but Gali was the first to say, “We are not alone here.”
“No, brothers, you are not.” Onua stepped out of the shadows, followed by Pohatu, Lewa, and Turaga Vakama. “It seems the Toa Nuva are together again, if not in the way we would have wished.”
“Who is responsible for this?” Tahu raged. “The Kal? If so, I will...”
“No, Toa,” said Vakama. “Even the power of the Kal could not tame what lives in this place. It is a menace I hoped never to face again. Even at the height of your powers, you could not hope to defeat it... only contain it.”
Kopaka frowned. “Another secret, Turaga? What is this thing we face?”
A deafening roar filled the chamber. Each Toa drew his or her tools and looked around, but there was nothing to see.
“What is it, Toa of Ice? A thing of raw power... a creature with no fear. It was created for only one purpose, and one alone.”
The fear on Vakama’s face was clear to see in the glow of his firestaff. “It lives to defeat Toa.”
Vakama stood, his eyes on Nuju. “That is enough. I will tell the rest of this story. After all, I was there.”

“Yes, you were,” said Nokama. “But neither you nor Nuju have told us about this before now. Why?”

“I asked Nuju to keep his silence,” answered Vakama. “But now the time has come to tell the tale.”

The six Toa Nuva took up positions around the chamber, their eyes fixed on the entrance to the darkened tunnel. From somewhere in those shadows came the roar of the creature Turaga Vakama swore no Toa could defeat. But the heroes of Mata Nui had no intention of giving up without a struggle.

“I will bait the beast,” Tahu said. “The rest of you close in on it from behind. We may fall, but by the Great Beings, this creature will know it has faced Toa!”

“Tahu, think,” Gali implored. “We have the Masks of Speed and Levitation. We can escape this chamber the same way we did the lair of the Bahrag – flight!”

Kopaka shook his head. “We could, Toa of Water – if not for that,” he said, pointing to the ceiling. Even with the enhanced strength granted by the Kanohi Pakari, the Toa could never get safely past all those spikes.

“All right. Then we stay here,” Gali said firmly. “And we make sure someone regrets it.”

The guttural growl came again, closer this time. Onua, closest to the tunnel entrance, could hear the sound of massive claws scraping against stone. “What is this thing, brothers? Nothing could be as large as it sounds.”

Tahu glanced at Vakama. “Well, Turaga, you said you know of this creature. We are in great danger – isn’t this usually the time you reveal your secrets?”

Vakama stared straight ahead. His eyes never wavered from the tunnel as he whispered the words of an ancient text from memory. “Beware the Rahi Nui... beware the beast of horns and claws, who stalks land, sea, and air. Born to seek the Toa, it will bring down all the works of Matoran in its path. You will know it by its roar, by the shaking of the ground as it strides, by the fierce glow of its eyes. Guard well against it or it shall be the end of all.”

When he had finished speaking, he lowered his firestaff to his side and stared at the ground. None of the Toa could recall ever seeing Vakama look so defeated.

“Well, those were cheerhappy words,” Lewa commented, sarcasm in his voice. “I thought perhaps this beast was something to worry-brood about.”

“We need a plan,” said Kopaka.

“Yes. A plan,” agreed Pohatu, looking hard at the Toa of Fire and Ice. “Not six plans, one for each of us.”
“Very well,” said Tahu. “We delay the creature as long as possible, while Turaga Vakama makes his escape. When we have fallen, Takua sees to it that this struggle occupies an honored place in the chronicles.”

Lewa leaped up to a rocky ledge on the chamber wall. “I do not think I like this plan. Let’s quickplot another.”

But already it was too late for plans. With a roar so loud it almost knocked the Toa off their feet, the Rahi Nui emerged from the tunnel before the shocked eyes of Mata Nui’s defenders.

It was bigger than anything any of them had ever seen, at least three times the size of a Toa. Its shape was right out of a Matoran’s nightmare. The head of the beast was that of a Kane-Ra, the powerful Rahi bull, with long, sharp horns that could pierce solid rock with ease. Its forelegs were those of the Tarakava, the marine Rahi whose powerful arms could deliver a stunning blow to even a Takea shark.

Tahu instinctively cloaked the others in a shield as the creature padded into the chamber. Its body and hind legs were those of Muaka, the great cat whose powerful claws could shred solid protodermis. It also possessed the stinging scorpionlike tail of the Nui-Jaga, and a larger version of the Nui-Rama’s insectoid wings.

“I never imagined my destiny would be to be flattened by a walking zoo,” said Pohatu.

“Mata Nui is full of surprises,” Gali replied. “This is not one of the pleasant ones.”

The Rahi Nui looked from one Toa to another, as if trying to decide who posed the biggest threat. Strangely, its gaze lingered on Vakama, almost as if the beast remembered him somehow. Then Tahu moved between the Rahi and the Turaga of fire.

“Perhaps this creature is nothing but roar and bellow,” he said. “Let us see how he compares to the power of Hau Nuva.”

The Rahi Nui stared at the little being who dared to stand in its path. Then it lowered its head and charged, striking Tahu’s shield and sending the Toa of Fire flying across the chamber. Onua moved swiftly to put himself between Tahu and the stone wall, taking the impact on his own mighty body. Though neither was seriously hurt, both had the wind knocked out of them.

“Question answered,” said Kopaka.

Lewa leaped from his perch, smiling. “I have a smartplan. Rahi still needs to airbreathe… so take away his air and down he falls.”

Before anyone could react, Lewa had summoned the Mask of Speed and begun racing in tighter and tighter circles around the Rahi Nui. The Toa of Air could tell it was working, creating a vacuum around the beast. In another few moments, the Rahi would pass out from lack of air and the threat would be over.

The Rahi had other ideas. Its eyes tracked the green blur circling it for one pass, two, and then it lashed out with its foreleg. Lewa was moving too fast to stop when the long arm of a Tarakava suddenly appeared in his path. Tripping on it, he flew headlong into the chamber wall and slumped to the ground, stunned.

“We have barely begun, and already three of our number have fallen,” said Gali. The Rahi Nui turned at the sound of her voice, its stinger slicing the air as it drew closer to the Toa of Water.

“You are still working as lone Toa,” said Vakama. “The Rahi Nui is too powerful to be beaten that way.”

“Then stop warning us and help,” said Kopaka coldly. “If you know something about this beast, speak!”

Gali flipped through the air, narrowly avoiding the Rahi Nui’s tail. The stinger struck the spot where she had been standing, shaking the chamber.

“It was bred for power, not intelligence,” said Vakama. “That is how we were able to… that it is how it was trapped here.”

Lewa staggered to his feet, followed by Tahu and Onua. Kopaka gestured for them to stay where they were, then turned to Pohatu. “Brother, we could use a bit of your speed… and your aim,” he said, gesturing toward the ceiling.
“Gifts I gladly give!” answered Pohatu. The Toa of Stone shared the power of the Mask of Speed with his friends, endowing each with the ability to move at superspeed. “Let us give this beast’s dull brain something to think about!”

The six Toa now circled the Rahi Nui. As soon as it would focus on one, that Toa would disappear in a burst of speed only to reappear somewhere else. Soon, all six were appearing in one spot for an instant, then vanishing again and popping up in another. The Rahi Nui reacted as if it were under attack by a swarm of gnats, snarling and swiping at empty air.

Pohatu saw his opportunity. He joined his climbing claws into a ball and flung it at the ceiling, shearing through a dozen stalactites. The sharp stones rained down on the Rahi Nui, further enraging the beast.

“I believe we have upset this creature.” Onua chuckled as he allowed the power of the Mask of Strength to fill his comrades. “Perhaps it can use some time off its feet.”

Acting as one, the Toa slammed their fists on the floor. Their added strength created a massive shock wave that traveled to the center of the chamber, knocking the Rahi Nui onto its side. It bellowed and tried to right itself, but a second shock wave brought it down again.

“This is more joyfun than kolhii ball,” said Lewa. “At least until we run out of ideas.”

“Perhaps I can help,” said Vakama. His voice filled the chamber, but there was no sign of him. The Turaga had invoked the power of the Mask of Concealment he wore. “Rahi! You have heard this voice before! It belongs to the one who trapped you so long ago!”

Tahu looked at Gali, both wearing expressions of surprise. Vakama, with his Noble Mask and his firestaff, had beaten this monster before? How was that possible?

The Rahi Nui rose again. It definitely did seem to recognize – and hate – that voice. Worse, it could not see where the voice was coming from. It roared in rage.

“Do you remember the last time we met? Or are you too slow-witted?” taunted Vakama. “You howled and roared and even succeeded in harming some of my friends. But in the end, your rage was your undoing, monster.”

The Rahi Nui was turning this way and that, trying in vain to find Vakama. Forgotten were the six Toa, who stood and watched as the beast grew more and more frenzied.

“Vakama does have a smartplan, doesn’t he?” asked Lewa.

“Besides driving the beast wild? One can only hope,” replied Onua.

“How long have you been down here, creature?” Vakama continued, still cloaked by invisibility. “How many suns have passed above? Did your master abandon you… or is he the reason we are here?”

Suddenly the shadows in the chamber grew darker still, and a cold wind chilled the Toa. A pair of massive, glowing red eyes appeared in the darkness of the tunnel and a harsh, grating voice said, “It has not been abandoned, Vakama. It has been waiting for your return.”

“Makuta…” Gali whispered.

“But this beast wears no infected Kanohi Mask,” said Tahu. “How does Makuta control it?”

“There is no need for a mask, Toa Tahu,” said the voice of Makuta. “It hates Toa and all who stand with them. That is enough.”

“And you skulk in the shadows, as you always have,” Vakama snapped. “Striking through pawns because you are afraid to face the light.”

Makuta laughed, a truly horrible sound. “Light? There is no light on Mata Nui. There never shall be.”

“You have been defeated before!” shouted Vakama. “You shall be again!”


“We can, and we shall!” Tahu said, stepping forward, magma swords raised.

“Then do so,” Makuta replied. “Defeat my Rahi, and you may leave this chamber. Fail, and Mata Nui is mine!”
The next instant, the eyes were gone, the chill had left the air, and the shadows were merely
shadows once more. Makuta had left the Toa to their fate, sure that his victory would be won.
After a long moment, the Toa heard Vakama say, “Go.”
Tahu, dodging a strike by the Rahi Nui, said, “What was that?”
“The beast can be distracted. Run for the tunnel.”
“Toa do not run!” answered Tahu.
“Well, actually…” Onua muttered.
“They do when their Turaga tells them to do so!” Vakama’s voice struck the Toa like a
hammer blow. “Now go!”
The Rahi Nui snarled and started toward Vakama’s voice. Gali grabbed Tahu’s arm. “Only as far
as the tunnel mouth, Tahu,” she said. “We will not abandon Vakama.”
“Would you make us cowards?” Tahu demanded.
“We don’t have time to debate!” said Onua. “Come, fire brother, let us see what your Turaga
has in mind.”
Vakama waited until the Toa had slipped past the angry Rahi into the tunnel. Then he stood with
his back to the chamber wall and willed himself to become visible again. He could hear Gali gasp and Tahu
shout a warning, but he ignored them. His entire being was focused on the monstrous Rahi that confronted
him.
“Come then, monster,” he said. “Let us see what time has done to your power.”
The Rahi Nui lowered its massive head, its claws pawing the ground. Its eyes locked on to
Vakama’s as it prepared to charge. Onua and Pohatu held Tahu’s arms, keeping the Toa of Fire from racing
into the chamber. “Trust him,” Onua urged. “Vakama must know what he is doing.”
The Turaga was not so certain. True, he had seen the Rahi Nui defeated once before. But that
had been a long, long time past, and Vakama had been very different then. Perhaps it was his power that
time had swept away, and not the Rahi’s.
But now the time for questioning was over. The Rahi Nui charged, horns lowered and aimed right
at Vakama. The Turaga counted the beast’s huge strides and waited until he could feel the Rahi’s foul
breath on him. Then he leaped aside, turning invisible as he did, and listening for the satisfying crunch of
Kane-Ra horns piercing stone.
He didn’t have to wait long. The Rahi Nui slammed headfirst into the wall, burying its horns in the
rock. Its charge had been so powerful that, once in, the horns couldn’t be withdrawn. Try as it might, the
Rahi Nui was stuck fast in the wall.
Cautiously, Vakama stepped away from the struggling creature and became visible once more.
The six Toa stepped into the chamber and stood by his side.
“Will it ever get free?” asked Gali.
“In time, yes,” said Vakama. “It will bring down the wall, if it must.”
“I would rather not be here to see that,” said Onua. “We have all our Kanohi Nuva Masks. The
time has come to return to the surface.”
“You took a great risk, Turaga,” said Tahu as they walked into the tunnel. “If you had failed…”
“Then someone else would have stepped into my place as Turaga,” answered Vakama. “Just as,
someday, someone else may become Toa of Fire when your destiny has been fulfilled, Tahu.”
“You knew what the beast would do.”
“I hoped,” said Vakama. “But I had to get it so angry it would forget how it had been trapped
before. Whenua would say it was defeated because it forgot the past… Nuju, that it did not think about
the future.”
The Toa reached a dead end. Above them they could see the sky through an opening in the ceiling.
“Now can we fly?” asked Gali, smiling.
The Mask of Levitation and the Mask of Speed combined to lift the Toa and Turaga aloft and carry
them through the hole back onto the surface of Mata Nui. The Toa’s quest for the masks was at its end,
but their true ordeal still lay before them. For now, questions about their future as a team, the secrets of
the Turaga, and what destiny held in store for Mata Nui had to be put aside. Somewhere the Bohrok-Kal were waiting, and six Toa, still lacking their elemental powers, had to find a way to defeat them.

Far below, deep in the darkness, Makuta laughed. "Ah, Vakama, Turaga of smoke," he rumbled. "Your secrets will be the end of the Toa yet."

When Vakama had finished his tale, Nokama walked up to him and laid a hand on his arm. "Now I understand, old friend, why you called this council."

"I never thought I would face the Rahi Nui again," answered Vakama. "Had I told the Toa about that beast long ago, perhaps they would not have been in such danger."

The other Turaga were silent. Even Onewa had nothing to say.

"We have told our tales," continued the Turaga of fire. "And we have learned from them. The time has come to share all with the Toa. Are we agreed?"

The other Turaga nodded.

"Very well," said Vakama as the others rose. "I propose that we speak with them after the kolhii ball tournament. Surely nothing will happen there that will distract us from our purpose..."

"We had best be going to the field, then, Vakama," said Nokama. "I am sure the Toa will have the wisdom and courage to understand all that we have to say."

With brief farewells to one another, the Turaga ended the council. They walked in silence to Ta-Koro, passing only Jaller on the way. The Captain of the Guard explained that his kolhii partner, Takua, had wandered off again and he was searching for him.

"Then search on, Jaller," said Vakama. "I am sure Takua has simply been distracted by some trivial matter. After all, what could be more important than the kolhii ball tournament?"

"Nothing!" Jaller shouted as he dashed away.
“Takua?” Jaller called urgently. “Takua?”
There was no answer. Jaller grumbled under his breath, then hurried toward the Wall of History, a stone carving that decorated one side of the village of Ta-Koro. The wall was covered with the brave deeds of the great hero Toa Tahu, who had been foretold through legends long before he and the other five Toa had ever appeared on the lush tropical island of Mata Nui.

Jaller reached the Wall of History. He saw Takua’s kolhii stick leaning against it. Kolhii was the island’s most popular sport, and Takua and Jaller were supposed to be on their way to a match.

“Takua!” Jaller shouted, annoyed. He hurried through the door carved into the wall.

Jaller raced down the steps. At the bottom he found himself in a lava runoff tunnel. Ahead, he could hear a deep rumble, which grew louder and louder as he walked on.

Finally the tunnel widened into a cave. A wide river of lava flowed through it, tumbling relentlessly toward a steep drop-off—the spectacular thousand-foot Lava Falls.

But Jaller paid no attention to the falls. He had just spotted a small figure hopping from rock to rock across the lava flow. The figure was wearing a blue mask and carrying a lava board under one arm. On the shore at the edge of the cave, a crablike Ussal was waiting patiently. Jaller recognized her as Takua’s faithful pet, Pewku.

“Takua!” Jaller yelled. “What are you doing down here?”

Takua winced. He’d forgotten all about the kolhii game.

“Oh, yeah,” he said. “Sorry, Jaller. Hang on a sec, I just want to check out that totem.” He pointed to a stone pillar just ahead.

Jaller glanced toward it. “You’re hopping across lava to look at a stupid warning totem?”

“I got curious,” Takua grinned.

Jaller sighed. “Do you know what Turaga Vakama would say?”

Takua shrugged. “Can’t say exactly,” he said lightly. “But I’m betting the word irresponsible would come up.”

Takua hopped to the next rock, trying not to think about what Vakama, the leader of the village, would say or do if he found out about this.

Now that he was here, Takua wasn’t about to turn back before reaching his goal.

Soon he was only one jump away from the edge of the island. It was a long jump, but he didn’t hesitate. He flung himself toward the shore. His hands scrambled for a hold as one foot slipped back toward the lava. He felt the sizzle of heat and yanked his foot to safety. Leaping to his feet, he grinned and bowed.

Jaller couldn’t help smiling. “Very impressive,” he said. “Now let’s go!”

Takua barely heard him. Now that he was closer, the totem sign on the stone pillar looked stranger and more interesting than ever. He pulled it loose and turned it over in his hands.

“Huh,” Takua murmured as he stared at the symbol inscribed upon the stone. It was like nothing he’d ever seen before.
Suddenly there was a rumble, loud enough to overcome the distant roar of the falls. Takua glanced up just in time to see the stone pillar beside him sink into the ground. The island and its surroundings began to quake violently.

“Whaa — oof!” Takua cried as the sudden quake knocked him off his feet. The totem slipped from his grasp. Takua lunged for it, but he was too late. The totem slipped into the lava and disappeared. “Aah,” Takua groaned in disappointment.

“Hurry up!” Jaller called, as the cavern’s stone ceiling began to crumble under the force of the quake.

A section of the wall cracked and collapsed. Lava spurted through the opening, swelling the river within the cavern. Takua gulped as the rising river wiped out the path of stones he’d used to reach the island. How was he supposed to get back to shore now?

Before he could figure that out, he was nearly blinded by a sudden beam of brilliant light. What in the name of Mata Nui is that? he wondered, squinting toward the source of the light.

It was a mask. A mask like the ones he and Jaller and every other Matoran wore – but different. This mask glowed with the light of a thousand suns. It was floating in the lava, unharmed by the intense heat.

_Only a Toa’s mask can do something like that_, Takua thought in awe.

“Jaller!” he called. “Look!”

Jaller’s eyes widened as the mask floated past the spot where he and Pewku were standing. “A Great Kanohi mask!”

Takua leaned out over the edge of the island. He had to get that mask!

The Kanohi mask danced and whirled just out of reach. If he could just stretch a little farther…

_Got it!_ he thought with triumph as he finally grabbed the edge of the mask. Pushing himself back from the edge of the river, he sat and studied his prize, which seemed to glow more brightly than ever. He was barely aware that the quake was fading away as quickly as it had come. He turned over the mask to reveal strange, incomprehensible writing on the other side.

“Wow,” he murmured curiously. “Never seen this language…”

“Takua!” Jaller called.

Takua had almost forgotten about his friend. Glancing up, he recognized the look of impatience on Jaller’s face. He climbed to his feet, still holding the mask.

“Hold your Rahi, I’m coming,” he called back.

“Oh, really?” Jaller replied. “Learned to fly, have you?”

Takua grimaced, remembering that his path of stones was now under the lava. He was stranded. Or was he? “Here,” he called to his friend. “Take the mask.” Without waiting for an answer, he heaved the mask across the river.

Jaller caught the mask. _Hmmm_, he thought. _It looked much brighter from a distance. Must have been a reflection from the lava…_ As he looked up again, he saw Takua holding up his lava board and suddenly realized what his friend was planning to do. He gulped.

“Are you sure about this?” Jaller called nervously.

“Not at all!” Takua replied cheerfully. He grabbed a flat, paddle-shaped stone. Then he took a deep breath and flung his lava board forward. “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!” he cried.

As the board landed in the lava at the river’s edge, he leaped onto it. The motion sent him skimming forward over the bubbling lava. But he soon started to lose momentum. The current tugged at the board, turning it toward the falls.

_Uh-oh_, Takua thought. Using the flat stone he was holding, he started to paddle. He kept his gaze on Jaller and Pewku, who were watching anxiously from the shore.

Suddenly there was a new rumble. The cavern wall collapsed into the river with a splash, freeing a torrent of lava from behind it. The lava burst forward in a huge wave, rushing down the river toward the helpless Takua.
Jaller froze in horror. There was no time to shout a warning – and no time for Takua to get away.
Takua stared at the wave rushing toward him, mesmerized by its size and power. Suddenly a huge red figure appeared at the far side of the river, blending in with the fiery color of the lava. He surfed across the river, impossibly fast, heading directly toward Takua as the wave crested.

A moment later, Takua felt himself grabbed and yanked out of the path of the wave.

“Tahu Tahu!” he exclaimed in surprise.

Tahu flung Takua onto his back.

“Chronicler!” Tahu said over his shoulder as he surfed expertly across the lava.

Sightseeing, were you? Let’s take a closer look at those falls.”

Back on the shore, Jaller saw the huge figure of the Toa of Fire suddenly emerge from in front of the lava wave.

He watched as the Toa shot straight off the edge of the falls and disappeared. A split second later the wave of lava crashed down, spurring over the falls.

Jaller shuddered with horror, feeling his knees go weak. Takua! There was no way he could have escaped the lava. Toa Tahu was too late, he thought bleakly.

Meanwhile, Tahu surfed down the sheer vertical face of Lava Falls.

Takua clung to the Toa’s shoulders, hardly daring to keep his eyes open. Tahu’s skill had carried them this far—how was he going to save them from plunging into the lava at the base of the falls?

Then he made the mistake of glancing up. He gulped in terror as he saw the enormous lava wave rushing toward them.

Their fall suddenly stopped short. Scrambling to keep hold of Tahu’s shoulders, he saw that the Toa had broken his lava board into two pieces—twin magma swords. He had plunged those swords into the solid rock behind the falls.

“So, Takua,” the Toa said teasingly. “Is this view close enough?”

Takua was too petrified to speak. Finally he found his voice again. “Incoming!”

Tahu glanced up at the lava wave, which was nearly upon them. A translucent red force field shot out from his mask, surrounding him and Takua in a glowing sphere of energy.

The lava wave thundered over and around them, but the red force field protected them from its touch.

As the shielding force field faded, Tahu pulled one of his swords out of the rock. He reached up and stabbed it back in a little higher, pulling himself and Takua up the cliff like an ice climber. Takua held on as the Toa climbed steadily upward, one sword’s length at a time, trying to calm the wild, terrified beating of his heart.

At the top of the falls, Jaller was kneeling in grief beside a sobbing Pewku. Why did he have to do it? he wondered. Was this stupid mask really worth it? We could all be safe at the kolhii tournament right now...

His grief was interrupted by Toa Tahu somersaulting into view from over the edge of the falls. Jaller jumped in surprise.
“Toa Tahu!” he cried with a sudden burst of hope. But there was no sign of Takua at the Toa’s side, and Jaller quickly slumped into sadness again. “Takua?” he asked quietly. “He didn’t…”

Suddenly Takua hopped to the ground from somewhere behind the Toa’s back. He was grinning from ear to ear. Pewku jumped toward her master happily, nearly knocking him over.

Jaller leaped to his feet as well, flooded with relief. “You’re alive!” he cried. “Kolhii-head! You could’ve been lava bones!”

“Could’ve been,” Takua said, gently pushing away the enthusiastic Pewku. “But I’m not.”

Tahu was staring at the mask in Jaller’s hands. He reached over and grabbed it.

“A Great Kanohi mask,” he said in surprise.

“It was in the lava,” Jaller told the Toa. “Takua—”

“This could be important,” Tahu interrupted, handing the mask back to Jaller. “Take it to Turaga Vakama.”

Jaller nodded and turned away, ready to do what the suddenly stern Toa had ordered. But Tahu stopped him with a smile.

“After you’ve won the kolhii match,” Tahu finished. “Now get going, and no sight-seeing!”

“Yes, Toa Tahu!” Jaller said happily. He raced toward the steps back up to the village, with Takua and Pewku right behind him.
“Today is a great day for our village of Ta-Koro,” Turaga Vakama proclaimed. His gaze wandered over the crowded stadium. Villagers from three of the six villages of Mata Nui were crowded into the carved stone bleachers. One section of the bleachers overflowed with a rowdy, brown-masked group from the desert village of Po-Koro, while the quieter, more thoughtful residents of the watery village of Ga-Koro watched with amusement. The hosting Ta-Matoran were scattered throughout the crowd.

Three of the six Toa Nuva sat on a special dais overlooking the scene. The Turaga smiled and bowed slightly toward them.

“We are thankful to the Great Spirit for his gift of six guardians who represent the elements,” he continued. “Fire. Water. Earth. Air. Ice. And Stone. Our mighty Toa, whose valiant quests and heroic deeds have saved us many times from the forces of Makuta…”

There was a visible shudder from the crowd as the Turaga spoke the name of the island’s dark, mysterious enemy.

“… and given us hope for the future, for our history’s next chapter.”

Turaga Vakama bowed to the Toa. “Three of these protectors are with us today. Let us welcome them,” he announced. “First, the spirit of Fire, Toa Tahu!”

As the Turaga spoke his name, Tahu stood and leaped onto the wall behind the Toa’s box. He waved his magma swords, sending a ribbon of fire searing through the air.

The crowd roared with delight.

“From the village of water,” Vakama proclaimed, “Toa Gali! And from the village of stone, Toa Pohatu!”

Gali stood, raising her blue-handled aqua ax in salute to the cheering crowd. Nearby, Pohatu did the same, giving a friendly wave with his bronze-tinged climbing claws.

Vakama continued, praising all the Toa for their brave deeds. As he spoke, Tahu turned and bowed to Gali, who was still standing. “Pleasure to see you again, Gali,” he said.

“Thank you, Tahu.”

The Fire Toa gestured to the seat beside his own. But Gali sat down in a different seat, leaving an empty one between the two of them.

Rolling his eyes, Pohatu leaped over Tahu and sat down between them. He put a friendly arm over the shoulders of each of them.

“You two,” he said with a shake of his head. “Still so ill at ease?”

Gali raised one eyebrow playfully. “I think my brother is afraid of having his fire extinguished,” she said, glancing past Pohatu at Tahu.

“Sister,” Tahu responded, his own tone just as light and playful, “against me you’d be nothing but steam – hot air, as they say.”

Below, the Turaga were watching the Toa’s exchange. Onewa, the Turaga of Po-Koro, shook his head worriedly. “The Toa squabble like Gukkos over a berry,” he remarked.
Turaga Nokama of Ga-Koro nodded. “Their recent victories are a blessing,” she said, “but they’ve forgotten how they need one another.”

Turaga Vakama had paused in his speech just long enough to hear them. “Indeed, Nokama,” he said, glancing up at the Toa with concern.

Then he stepped forward once again. He raised his arm, and the crowd quieted.

“We dedicate this new kolhii field to the Great Spirit, Mata Nui,” Vakama said. “And to the three virtues: unity, duty, destiny.”

“Unity, duty, destiny!” the gathered Matoran cried in unison.

Turaga Vakama smiled. “Let the tournament begin!”
“Ta-Koro welcomes three teams!”

Takua shivered with anticipation as the kolhii announcer’s voice rolled over the stadium. A section of the arena wall spun around to reveal a kolhii goal – a large stone carving of the face of the Great Spirit, Mata Nui. Two brown-masked players strode out.

“From the desert village of Po-Koro,” the announcer said, “Copper Mask winners and undisputed kolhii champions… Hewkii and Hafu!”

The players raised their sticks in salute, and the crowd cheered wildly. Another section of the wall spun and revealed another goal. This time a pair of blue-masked players stepped out onto the field.

“From Ga-Koro, the challengers – Hahli and Macku!” the announcer cried.

As the crowd cheered, Takua gripped his kolhii stick tighter. They were next. The third and final goal spun into view, and Takua bounded onto the field with his friend and teammate beside him.

“And from Ta-Koro, the Captain of the Guard and the Chronicler, Jaller and Takua!”

Takua waved his kolhii stick at the crowd, enjoying their applause.

“Try your new move,” Jaller whispered to him. “The crowd’ll go crazy.”

Takua shrugged. “Nah,” he replied. “It only works in practice.”

He raised his stick toward Jaller. Jaller clunked it with his own. Then they parted and took their positions – Jaller in front of the goal, and Takua in the center of the field facing the other offense players.

“Play well,” Hewkii said. Hahli and Takua repeated the words.

Then the three of them huddled around the circle in the center of the field. They didn’t have long to wait before the circle spun open and a pair of kolhii balls shot out and into the air.

Takua moved instantly, lunging at one of the balls. But Hahli was faster – she scooped up the ball and jumped away. Takua spun toward the second ball. Hewkii was leaping toward it, too – both of them swatted at the ball with their sticks, trying to knock each other aside.

Finally Takua saw the net on the end of his stick swoop the ball out of midair. Yes! He had it! He spun around… a little too fast. His foot hit his own kolhii stick, and he tripped and fell. The ball rolled out and Hewkii jumped forward, kicking it away.

Disgusted with himself, Takua raced after Hewkii. The two of them dodged and weaved, their feet flying as they battled for control of the ball.

Jaller saw Hahli sprinting toward him, pushing the second ball with the hammer end of her stick. She flipped the ball into the air, using the stick to smash it toward the Ta-Koro goal.

Jaller swung his stick – interception!

Hahli smiled and raised her stick to salute Jaller’s defense. “Not bad,” she said breathlessly.

Jaller crossed his arms and tilted his head. “Nothing gets by the Captain of the Guard,” he bragged playfully. He smiled. “Unless he wishes it.”
Hahli returned his smile. Then she turned and walked away.

Hewkii had gained control of the other ball. He raced across the field toward the Ga-Koro goal with Takua in hot pursuit.

With a burst of speed, Takua darted past and flung himself on the ground directly in Hewkii’s path. Without missing a step, Hewkii vaulted over him. Takua looked sideways just in time to see Hewkii flip the ball into the air and kick it toward the goal. The Ga-Matoran defensive player, Macku, dove for the flying ball, but it sailed past her.

“And Hewkii scores!” the announcer shouted.

It’s just one goal, Takua told himself. There’s still plenty of time for us to catch up.

Some time later, Takua was feeling less optimistic. There were two lightstones on the scoreboard for Po-Koro now, along with two for Ga-Koro. The Ta-Matoran team had yet to score a goal.

Kolhii was played to a winning score of three goals. To catch up, the Ta-Matoran had to sink three goals in a row. Such a thing was almost unheard of in the sport.

Takua clutched his kolhii stick, preparing himself as he waited for the balls to emerge.

When they popped out of the circle, he dove toward them. But Hahli was ready. Ducking low, she quickly swiped her stick back and forth, sending both balls skittering out in different directions.

When the balls hit the ground, Takua leaped toward one. So did Hewkii. The two of them smashed into each other in midair, each falling back with a grunt as the ball went flying upward again.

Both players leaped to their feet and again dove for the ball. Takua managed to scoop it up just before Hewkii reached it.

Yes! Takua thought, using the stick to vault into the air and over Hewkii’s head. As Takua somersaulted in midair, he flung the scoop end of the stick forward, shooting the kolhii ball out of it in a blur.

But the shot was wide—so wide that it sailed right over the top of the Ga-Matoran goal and into the stands. The spectators in that section dove for cover as the ball careened into the seats.

“Ooh!” the announcer said. “I don’t think we’ve seen that move before!”

Takua sat up and spit out a mouthful of dust. So much for his special move! I told Jaller it wouldn’t work, he thought in disgust.

As he looked around, he was just in time to see Hahli sprint past, still kicking the second kolhii ball in front of her. She closed in on the Ta-Matoran goal and whacked the ball with her stick. Jaller dove at it, but it sailed past his out-stretched hand—and straight into the goal.

“Hahli scores!” the announcer cried. “Goal and tournament to Ga-Koro!”

The Ga-Matoran section of the crowd went wild, jumping up and down and cheering loudly for their team.

In the Toa box, Pohatu turned to Gali and offered his fist. She clanked it with her own, grinning widely. Then Gali turned and held out her fist to Tahu. Tahu stared down at the ground, not returning the gesture.

Back on the field, Takua dragged himself after Jaller, who was hurrying to join the other players after grabbing his kolhii bag from the sidelines. He couldn’t believe they’d lost—and it was all his own fault!

Jaller extended his stick to Hahli. “Not bad,” he said with a grin. “For a Ga-Matoran.”

Hahli tapped his stick with her own, ignoring the joke. Then she turned to Takua. “Good effort, Takua,” she said warmly. “Nice move back there—a little more practice and you’ll have something amazing.”

“Thanks,” he said tonelessly, not bothering to look up. It would be a long time before he got over this. A very long time.

Turaga Vakama stepped forward. “Congratulations to Ga-Koro!” he said. “And well played by all.”
The players all turned and raised their sticks in salute to the hosting Turaga. As Jaller raised his stick, the motion jostled the kolhii bag he’d slung over his shoulder. The mysterious Kanohi mask fell out and landed on the ground, rolling against Takua’s foot.

The crowd cried out in amazement as a beam of brilliant, clear light shot out of the mask – aiming straight at Jaller.
Jaller staggered backward, briefly blinded by the beam glaring right into his face.

The crowd was murmuring in amazement. Turaga Vakama stepped forward, his eyes filled with awe. “Come,” he said, reaching for the mask. “We must take this to the suva immediately.”

A few minutes later most of the crowd was gathered around the suva, a small, domelike shrine in the center of the village.

Nokama, the Turaga of Ga-Koro, was chanting under her breath as she stretched her hands toward the floating mask.

“Mapaku una-kanokee wehnuahakeeta ah-keelahe hanoni rahun-ahk toa-nak panokeeta makuta-tahkee onnoh-koo,” she mumbled.

“What’s she doing?” Jaller whispered.

“Translating?” Takua guessed.

Finally Nokama reached up and pulled the mask out of the air.

“This is the Great Kanohi Mask of Light,” she said solemnly. “A mask to be worn only… by the Seventh Toa, the Toa of Light.”

The onlookers gasped. A Seventh Toa?

Turaga Vakama stepped forward. “Legends foretell the coming of a Seventh Toa, who would bring light to the shadows and awaken Mata Nui.”

Tahu leaped down from his perch on the nearby village wall. “What are we waiting for?” he cried. “We should prepare for this Toa’s arrival! When will it be? And where?”

Turaga Onewa shook his head. “Ah, this Toa will not simply appear as you and the others did,” he said. “The Seventh Toa must be found!”

The crowd murmured in amazement. The original six Toa had not needed finding— they had appeared suddenly on the island just when the Matoran needed them most.

“The Mask of Light chose who would find it,” Nokama said. “Perhaps it also chose who would deliver it to its master.”

“Wait,” Tahu exclaimed. “At the stadium, there was a sign! The mask threw all its light upon one Matoran.” He pointed. “Jaller – he must be the Herald of the Seventh Toa!”

“B-but I didn’t…” Jaller stammered. He turned to Takua. “Tell them the truth!” he whispered urgently. “Say something!”

Takua knew what his friend wanted— to tell the crowd that it had been Takua, not Jaller, who had found the mask. But Takua wasn’t about to take responsibility for this. Who knew how he would manage to mess up such an important quest? No, this was a job for someone responsible. Someone mature. Someone like Jaller.

Takua raised his kolhii stick. “Hail Jaller!” he cried. “Herald of the Seventh Toa! All hail Jaller!”

The crowd joined in with enthusiasm. “HAIL JALLER!”

Vakama pointed his firestaff at Jaller. “Captain of the Guard!” he called. “Approach!”
Jaller had no choice. He started toward the group of Turaga… then paused just long enough to grab Takua.

Vakama held the Mask of Light out to Jaller. “It seems the mask has chosen you,” he said solemnly. “Will you seek the Seventh Toa?”

Jaller glanced at Takua, who refused to meet his eye. “I – I will,” Jaller said. “And Takua has volunteered to join me!”

As the crowd thinned out, the Toa gathered on the wall above the Suva. “A Seventh Toa…” Tahu said, sounding puzzled. “But why now? All the Makuta’s threats have been defeated.”

Pohatu nodded. The six of them had battled a series of enemies sent by Makuta, but all had fallen before the power of the Toa. The island was peaceful, with no threat in sight. Why would a Seventh Toa be needed now?

“Who can fathom the wisdom of Mata Nui?” Pohatu mused aloud. “I am simply happy to take good news to the north.”

“Will you travel with Gali?” Tahu asked, glancing around for the Toa of Water. But Gali was nowhere in sight.

Pohatu smiled. “No,” he said. “She has gone to ponder her great thoughts.”

Gali sat at the edge of the Amaja Circle, the sacred storytelling area that was part of the island’s main temple, the Kini-Nui.

What can it mean? she wondered. How can it be? A Seventh Toa… It’s nothing any of us ever imagined…

At that moment a constellation caught her eye. Six stars gleamed brightly, overpowering the light of the weaker stars all around them.

Suddenly a new point of light, even brighter than the rest, sailed through the constellation. Gali gasped.

“A seventh star!”
Deep beneath the island’s surface, where no hint of light had ever penetrated, lay the lair of Makuta. Only his glowing red eyes and the shadowy outline of his hulking form were visible as he stalked around his lair.

“The earth shudders, my brother,” he rumbled, speaking to the enormous mask on one wall of the chamber, a carved image of the face of the Great Spirit, Mata Nui. “The Seventh Toa has begun its approach.” He sighed. “Again the prophecies of the Matoran oppose my will.”

Makuta paced restlessly, clutching a stone tablet in one hand. The Toa were about to interfere with his plans. And this time, he intended to defeat them once and for all.

He paused beside three massive carved stone pillars. The pictographs on them showed the masks of those who served Makuta’s brother, the Great Spirit, Mata Nui. Makuta touched a pillar lightly.

“Has it come to this?” he mused. “Must I release those who should never see the light of day?”

Makuta plunged his hand into his chest. When he pulled it out, it clutched three writhing, snakelike creatures. The kraata.

“I must strike the foundation of the Matoran soul,” Makuta hissed. “Their unity can be poisoned.”

He slapped one of the kraata onto the first pillar. A beam of dark energy burst from the pillar as chunks of stone crumbled and crashed to the floor. Gradually, a dark, terrifying figure appeared from the rubble. A Rahkshi. The Rahkshi’s body quivered with energy. Dark eyes burned behind the ghastly mask, eyes filled with ruthless determination.

Makuta smiled grimly. Welcome, Lerahk, the Poison-Rahkshi, he thought. Your stinger full of deadly poison will sicken anything it contacts.

He moved on to the next pillar. “Their duty will be broken,” he murmured as he slapped on another kraata.

As the kraata burrowed its way into the creature at the heart of the pillar, a long, sinewy blue leg burst out of the stone. With a burst of dark energy, the pillar collapsed, revealing a second Rahkshi. Its eyes glowed. Its limbs twitched with energy.

The Disintegrator-Rahkshi, Guuhrahk, Makuta thought with pride. Your disintegrator beam has the power to crack any structure.

Makuta stepped over to the third column. “And their destiny,” he whispered, “I must shatter.”

He slapped a third kraata onto the column. With a deafening roar, the column shattered. A brown Rahkshi burst through the stone.

Panrahk, the Fragmenter-Rahkshi, Makuta thought. The arc of your dark energy will cause anything in its path to explode into pieces.

Makuta stepped back from his creations as a door split open at one end of the chamber.

“Go, my sons,” Makuta told them. “Use the shadows.” He glanced at the mask of Mata Nui with grim resolve burning in his eyes. “And keep my brother asleep.”
Jaller faced Hahli, gathering his courage to say what he wanted before leaving on his quest. Hahli cleared her throat. “Look, don’t get mushy, Jaller,” she said. “I have no time for long good-byes.”

“I was just going to say…” Jaller took a deep breath. “You owe me a rematch on the kolhii field.” Hahli’s eyes softened.

“Well then, you’d better hurry back,” she said. “Cause I’ll be practicing.” She touched him on the arm, then turned and walked away.

Jaller watched her go. How long would it be until he saw her again? Would he see her again? Trying not to think about that, he joined Takua on Pewku’s back.

“The shadows of the Makuta are powerful,” Turaga Vakama warned before they could leave. “Do not take your journey lightly. It will tolerate none of your foolery.”

“How will we know where to start?” Takua asked Vakama.

“Trust in the mask,” he replied. “Let it be your guide.”

Jaller pulled the Mask of Light out of his bag, holding it up. As he turned it in one particular direction, it suddenly began to glow brightly.

“Hard to argue with that,” Jaller said.

Takua tapped Pewku’s shell and the Ussal galloped off.

Turaga Vakama’s voice floated after them. “Remember your duty!” he called. “And walk in the light!”

Gali was still meditating in the Amaja Circle, gazing outward toward the surface of the temple pond.

Suddenly the bright sunlight was cut by a dark shadow. Thick gray clouds were rolling across the sky, turning ordinary day to eerie twilight.

Gali stood and made her way to a plateau overlooking the entire temple. What was happening? As she gazed down at the suva dome, there was a sizzle of energy. An instant later, the suva exploded into a million shards.

A claw reached out of the smoky hole where the suva dome had stood. A moment later three horrifying figures climbed out of the hole and stood surveying the destruction.

Gali gasped. One of the figures swiveled his head in her direction. It banged its staff on the ground, sending sparks of dark energy arcing up. A zigzag lightning bolt shot into the air.

Gali somersaulted backward off the plateau. A split second later, the energy bolt struck the spot where she had stood.

The three Rahkshi climbed higher, seeking their target. But Gali was nowhere to be seen. Hising with frustration, the trio gave up. The Rahkshi floated upward on the force of their dark energy, hovering over the ground. They flew away, disappearing from the temple area.
A moment later the still surface of the temple pond rippled, and Gali emerged. She had no idea what sort of creatures they were, but one thing was obvious— they did not come in peace.

She glanced down the mountain. Her eyes widened as she spotted the Rahkshi in the distance, hovering purposefully along.

“Ta-Koro!” Gali murmured in alarm.

Diving back beneath the water, she swam in the direction of Tahu’s village, determined to warn him in time.

As she followed the river, she spied the Rahkshi hovering along the base of the Mangai volcano. She took to the land and steamed footprints in her wake.

“Why have I been summoned?” Tahu said impatiently as he leaped onto the village wall. He glanced down and spotted Gali.

Before she could answer his question, thunder rumbled in the distance. A huge dark cloud rolled over the village, obscuring the sun.

On the far side of the lake, the three Rahkshi appeared, seeming to shimmer through the heat rising off the lava. They hovered over the ground, moving smoothly toward the Lake of Fire.

Turaga Vakama had been summoned by the guards as well. He had brought along Turaga Nokama, who had lingered in the village after the kolhii tournament. The two of them squinted into the hazy heat.


Vakama nodded. “Shadows that cower in the depths. Exactly as foretold.”

Tahu leaped off of the wall. “None have breached Ta-Koro’s gates before,” he proclaimed. “And none shall this day!”

The Rahkshi didn’t even pause at the edge of the lava lake— but merely floated on, moving as easily over the fiery surface as they had over the solid ground.

Tahu blinked in surprise. Then he pulled out his magma swords, holding them at the ready. As the Rahkshi reached the shore, the Fragmenter raised its staff. A lightning bolt of dark energy arced from its end, zigzagging toward Tahu.

The Fire Toa reacted quickly. A red shield appeared around him in an instant before the bolt reached him. The bolt of dark energy hit the shield with awesome power, sending the Toa flying backward through the gates and into the village courtyard.

“Mata Nui protect us!” Vakama cried in horror.

Tahu slid to a stop, dazed. My shield, he thought blearily. What happened? Why didn’t it deflect that bolt? What sort of enemy is this?

His thoughts faded as he slipped into unconsciousness.
The Rahkshi hovered through the wrecked gates and into the village. Suddenly Gali dropped into view from atop the village wall, her aqua axes at the ready.

She looked up at the Rahkshi as the Disintegrator-Rahkshi swung its staff toward her.

She blocked the blow with her axes, then grabbed for the staff, trying to yank it out of its owner’s hand. But the Disintegrator was too strong. Gali went flying, tumbling to the ground.

The Disintegrator-Rahkshi touched its staff to the courtyard wall. A shimmer of dark energy poured into the wall, and cracks spread outward like a spiderweb, moving through the structure with awesome speed. The village guards barely had time to leap off before a huge portion of the wall collapsed into a heap of stone debris.

The Disintegrator stepped closer, scanning the wreckage. Meanwhile the Poison-Rahkshi twirled its staff, then poked the stinger end into the ground. Poison flowed out of it, turning the earth a sickly yellow-green.

Tahu was finally regaining his senses. He sat up just in time to see the Fragmenter-Rahkshi walk by, scanning left and right as it went. As Tahu watched, the creature pointed its staff toward a lavastone hut, blasting it into pieces. Approaching the wreckage, the Fragmenter poked at it with the staff, shifting through it.

"Rahkshi!"

The creature turned at Tahu’s bold shout. The Toa’s swords burned with flames as he spun them and then planted them in the ground at his feet. Twin streaks of fire shot out of them, racing along the ground toward the Rahkshi. Splitting apart when they reached the creature, they formed a wall of flame around it.

Tahu approached warily. He jumped in surprise as the Rahkshi suddenly stepped out through the flames, unharmed.

The Toa and Rahkshi fought furiously. Tahu was matching the creature blow for blow – for now. But he could feel its fearsome power. How long could he stand against it?

The Disintegrator-Rahkshi slammed its staff into the wall near what had once been the village gate. Dark energy spidered through the columns and stones. The Rahkshi turned away, preparing to retreat. But Gali blocked the way.

The Water Toa held her axes crossed in front of her. A geyser of water erupted from the earth, beneath the Rahkshi’s feet. The creature raised its staff in defense, but it was too late. The hard ground dissolved into sticky mud, and the Rahkshi’s weight made it sink quickly until its feet were trapped.

The Disintegrator hissed angrily, fighting to free itself. Suddenly there was a rumble from behind it. The Rahkshi looked up in alarm – just as the gate wall tumbled onto it, burying it beneath a shower of rubble.
Satisfied that the Rahkshi was trapped – for the moment, at least – Gali turned away. She saw Tahu across the courtyard, locked in battle with the Fragmenter-Rahkshi.

Tahu was fighting hard. He managed to trick the Rahkshi with a false move, then flipped it onto the ground. Then he planted his magma swords in the ground. The earth beneath the Rahkshi split open and lava bubbled up. Tahu leaped away as the Fragmenter sank out of sight.

Hearing someone approach, Tahu glanced over to see Gali hurrying toward him. When he turned his gaze back to the lava pit, he was shocked to see the Fragmenter pulling its way out, dripping with lava but undamaged.

Gali saw the terrible sight, too. “We must get the Matoran to safety – now.”

Tahu frowned. “Retreat? Surrender?”

“This battle is lost, Tahu!” Gali insisted as the Fragmenter stepped free of the lava. “We need to regroup!”

Tahu growled. But he realized that Gali was right. “So be it.”


Tahu and Gali exchanged a glance, then raced toward the sound of the Turaga’s voice. They arrived to find Vakama weakly waving his firestaff, trying to hold off the Poison-Rahkshi.

“Well done, wise one!” Tahu called to him, leaping forward. “I’ll take it from here.”

Gali jumped forward to join him. She sent a blast of water toward the Poison-Rahkshi. But the creature dodged at the last moment, and the blast hit Tahu, knocking him off of his feet.

“Brother!” Gali cried out. She watched in horror as the creature loomed over the fallen Tahu, striking at him with its staff. But Tahu somersaulted away, away, then knocked the Rahkshi’s legs out from under it. The creature crashed to the ground and tumbled down to the base of the wall.

Tahu landed on his feet, then dropped to his knees. A faint greenish-brown scratch glowed on the surface of his mask, then faded and disappeared as if it had never been.

Gali rushed up to the Fire Toa. “Tahu, I’m sorry –” she began.

“It’s nothing.” Tahu cut her off.

He grabbed Vakama as the Poison-Rahkshi planted its staff into the wall beside him. The Toa leaped away just ahead of the poison that was already spreading outward from the wall.

Gali, Tahu, Vakama, and Hahli stood together on the shore, watching as the entire village sank into the lava. The Rahkshi hovered away, disappearing into the steam on the far side.

Tahu took a deep breath. Ta-Koro was no more. But as he glanced around at the crowds of Matoran huddled nearby, he realized that the entire population of the village had escaped.

“They could have destroyed us,” he said. “Why didn’t they?”

Turaga Vakama shook his head. “They are seekers,” he said. “Whatever they came for they did not find.”

“So what were they after?” Gali asked.

“Makuta fears for his spell of shadows,” Vakama replied.


“Then they seek the Seventh Toa,” Tahu said. Suddenly realizing what that meant, he gasped.

“Jaller and Takua!”

“We’ll summon the Toa to find them,” Gali said.

Tahu stopped her. “Don’t trouble the others, sister,” he said. “I will see to their safety myself.”

Gali was surprised. “No, Tahu,” she said. “We must remain united.”

Tahu turned away from her. For an instant, a sickly yellowish-brown glow flashed through his eyes. Then it was gone. He sighed and turned back to Gali.

“If you insist,” he said.
Deep in the jungle of Toa Lewa’s home region of Le-Wahi, a trio of figures wandered slowly, dwarfed by the ancient trees.

Takua glanced around from his vantage point on Pewku’s back. “I hate the jungle,” he said. “It’s all sticky and”—he paused to slap at something on his neck—“full of bugs.”

“How can you say that?” Jaller exclaimed. “It’s incredible! Geez, is there any place on Mata Nui where you do feel at home?”

“I don’t complain about Ta-Koro.”

“But you wander off every chance you get, looking for stories,” Jaller reminded his friend. “What about your story?”

“I don’t have a story,” Takua insisted with a shrug. “Only ’cause you won’t stand still enough to make one,” Jaller said. “We all have a destiny, you know.”

“You know me,” Takua said lightly. “Always different.”

Suddenly a fierce roar blasted through the jungle. Pewku stopped short, trembling. Takua gulped. “Yet another reason to hate the jungle,” he whispered. “Go that way, Pewku!”

Pewku changed direction. The Mask of Light, which Jaller was still holding, began to fade.

“No,” Jaller said. “The mask says this way. Back on track, Pewku.” He waited, but the Ussal continued in the new direction. “Pewku!”

Pewku whined nervously. Slowly, she turned back to the original track.

The Ussal stepped forward. She blinked as something—a large shape, blurred with speed—passed in front of them.

Takua didn’t notice. “Will you stop with the duty thing and use your head?” he said to Jaller. “Or do you want to be jungle snacks?”

“Guess I should listen to the real Herald,” Jaller retorted sarcastically. He smacked himself in the forehead. “No, wait! You weaseled out. So I’m in charge.”

Pewku stopped short as a fierce-looking creature stepped out in front of them. It was an ash bear, all teeth and claws.

Takua noticed it. “Fine,” he told Jaller, his voice shaking slightly as he pointed to the ash bear. “You’re doing great so far.”

The ash bear let out a mighty roar. Takua, Jaller, and Pewku shrieked in response. Takua and Jaller ducked as the ash bear’s claws swatted at them. Pewku turned and fled, scampering behind a large tree.

The ash bear lunged around the tree in pursuit. Pewku changed direction, heading back the other way around the tree’s trunk. But the ash bear was too quick, blocking their way once more. It swiped at them again, missing by the merest fraction. Its claws met the tree trunk instead, leaving deep gashes in the bark.

“Keep him busy!” Jaller said, grabbing the trunk and starting to climb. “I’m….”
“Running away and leaving me!” Takua finished for him.
The ash bear made another lunge, backing Takua and Pewku against the tree. Jaller swung up onto a branch directly overhead.

“Just watch!” he called down to his friends. “Toa Tahu does this!”
He jumped out of the tree – right onto the ash bear’s broad back. But he’d misjudged his leap and wound up facing the creature’s hind-quarters. The ash bear turned away from Takua and Pewku. It grunted and roared angrily as it leaped and twisted, trying to dislodge Jaller.

Takua and Pewku raced out of range. “Toa Tahu does that!” Takua muttered, turning to watch as Jaller hung on for dear life.

“Whoa!” Jaller cried, feeling his grasp slip. He had to hold on! If he fell off now…

Before he could finish the thought, a sudden gust of vine swirled through the leaves. At the same time, a vine snaked out of the brush, coiling around the ash bear’s front foot.

The ash bear growled in surprise as another vine followed the first, wrapping around the creature’s back feet and looping them together. The vines tightened, and the ash bear was hoisted off the jungle floor. Jaller finally lost his grip and crashed to the ground, landing face-first.

“Oof!” he grunted.

A tall green figure dropped down out of the foliage above.

“Toa Lewa!” Takua cried.
He bowed to the Toa, while Jaller rolled painfully to a sitting position. Lewa grinned.

“Mata Nui!” he exclaimed to Jaller. “Where’d you learn to bearfight like that, little man?”
Jaller rubbed his sore back. “Right here,” he said with a groan.

Lewa playfully grabbed Jaller, setting him gently on his feet. “Well, I’d say you’re a natural, brave firespitter,” the Toa said.

He released the vines, lowering the ash bear to the ground. The ash bear immediately leaped up and growled.

Takua and Jaller stepped back, leaving Lewa alone to face the ash bear. The Toa spoke soothingly to the creature. “Go on now, sisterbear.”

The ash bear hesitated. Then she turned and lumbered off into the jungle.

Jaller and Takua were amazed. But now that the ash bear was gone, Lewa had other things on his mind. “Word is deepwood that you seek the Seventh Toa,” he said.

Takua gestured toward Jaller. “He seeks, I follow. He’s the Herald. I’m just his biographer.”
Jaller scowled at Takua, but Lewa didn’t notice. “If Toa Lewa helped on your search, might he be a spiritlift?”

Takua and Jaller glanced at each other in amazement. The mighty Toa wanted to travel with them?

“You?” Takua said. “With us?”

“We’d be honored to have you walk with us!” Jaller added eagerly.

Lewa glanced upward. “Walk?” he said. “Not never! If you ride with me, there’ll be no footwalkin’…”

There was a whoosh from overhead. A giant, hawklike Gukko bird swooped out of the trees and hovered above them. Lewa grinned at the two Matoran.

“Just airflyin’,” he finished. “Ever windfly a Gukko bird?”

Jaller shook his head, his eyes wide. But Takua shrugged. “I’ve been a second,” he said. “But I’ve never flown one myself.”

Lewa grabbed Takua and Jaller and tossed them up onto the Gukko. They landed sitting right behind the bird’s head, with Takua in the front.

“Then today’s for quicklearnin’,” Lewa declared as the Matoran yelped in surprise. “Stay sharp, and follow-well!” He spread his arms, the air katana blades he carried locking into his shoulders. Then he leaped into the air.

As the Gukko wheeled to follow the Toa, Takua glanced down and noticed Pewku watching anxiously from the ground. “Sorry, Pewku,” he called to her gently. “No room. Go on home.”
Pewku’s head drooped sadly. She let out a soft whine as the Gukko bird flapped through the treetops and disappeared.

Takua and Jaller soon got the hang of following the Gukko’s movements as it swooped and glided through the air after Lewa. “Hey, I’m good at this!” Takua cried out as the bird dove through a grove of trees. Takua ducked just in time, but Jaller ended up with a mouthful of leaves. He spit them out. “As compared to what?” he asked Takua.

The Gukko veered again. Nearby, Lewa did an amazing loop-the-loop in midair, then swooped over to glide along beside the bird and its passengers. “Ha!” the Toa exclaimed. “I was so eager to join your search, I forgot I’m not the wayfinder. Herald, do the honors!”

Jaller raised the mask. It glowed brightly, leading them up through the jungle canopy and over the treetops toward the steep, snow-covered peaks of the Ko-Wahi region, where Kopaka’s people made their home.

Soon they reached a snowy plateau. In the background, sheer cliffs rose into ice-covered peaks. The Gukko glided to a landing, stopping abruptly as its feet touched down. Taken by surprise, Takua and Jaller flipped forward over its head, landing face-first in the snow.

Jaller sat up and glared at Takua. Takua shrugged. “What?” he said. “We’re here.”

Jaller raised the Mask of Light and spun slowly in place. The mask brightened as he faced a ravine between two snowcapped peaks.

“Hey!” Jaller said to Takua in surprise as the Gukko flew off. “You even kept us on the right path. Not bad for a kolhii-head.”

He glanced around, looking for Lewa. The Toa was standing at the cliff’s edge, looking out over the jungle with an expression of concentration. As Takua and Jaller stepped toward him, they heard the faint sound of tribal drums in the distance.

Lewa turned toward them, looking unusually solemn. “The drums of Le-Koro bring a sorrybad story,” he told them. “Your village has… fallen. To Rahkshi, the Makuta sons.”

Jaller could hardly believe his ears. “My village, in trouble?!” he cried, stricken. “I should have been there! I must return!”

“Sorry, firespitter,” Lewa said gently. “Past-late to help now. The mask most needs you.”

Jaller turned, shoving the mask into Takua’s hands. “Takua will continue in my place.”

“Uh-uh, no way!” Takua said quickly. “You accepted this duty.”

“I accepted your duty!” Jaller shot back.

“Stop!” Lewa ordered sternly. He stepped between them. “What’s this dutyquarrel? We all have a duty to Mata Nui. No time to infight.”

Takua and Jaller exchanged a guilty glance. “I must go be with the Toa,” Lewa said. “But then I’ll go to your village, Jaller. Heartpromise.”

Jaller bowed to the Air Toa. “I… can’t thank you enough, Toa.”

Lewa leaped into the air and glided out of sight. Jaller grabbed the mask back from Takua and headed for the ravine. Takua shrugged and followed.
Dark storm clouds gathered over the mountain peaks as Jaller and Takua struggled through the snowdrifts. On a ridge overlooking the valley, a dark shape watched their progress. Jaller and Takua never noticed it as they clambered through the icy drifts.

Takua paused as the whirling snow cleared just long enough to offer him a glimpse of an odd-looking stone with writing carved on it. “Stop!” he called breathlessly to Jaller. “Does something look familiar here?”

“You mean besides everything?” Jaller panted, gazing around at the whiteout conditions. “I mean this.” Takua pointed at the stone. “We’ve passed this at least a million times. And look…” He pointed again, this time to footprints in the snow leading off ahead of them. “Those are either our footprints or the steps to a Le-Matoran dance.”

“Well, don’t blame me!” Jaller said. “I’m following the mask.”

“Fine! Let’s all freeze to death because the mask says to,” Takua retorted.

Jaller turned and kept walking. Neither he nor Takua noticed as the mask gradually dimmed. “Well, maybe our path would be straighter if the real Herald had the mask,” Jaller snapped.

“The real Herald has the mask,” Takua returned. “I couldn’t find water if I fell out of a canoe.”

“Well, what do you think I can find?” Jaller said. “I – oof!” His words cut off as he slammed into a tall white figure, almost hidden in the blowing snow.

Takua’s eyes widened as the ominous shapes of six white creatures towered over them. “Uh, so far you’re good at big scary… Bohrok!”

Jaller’s heart was pounding with fright. The Bohrok were among the most terrifying creatures ever to threaten Mata Nui. But these… why did they just stand there, as still as the mountain itself?

“Frozen,” he murmured as he realized the truth. “What could do this to them?”

Suddenly one of the Bohrok lurched forward. Jaller and Takua jumped in fright. The Bohrok crashed to the ground… revealing a very different figure standing behind it.

“Kopaka!” Jaller exclaimed. “Toa of Ice! H-how did you find us?”

“It was you who were following me,” Kopaka replied, his icy voice full of suspicion.

Jaller kept a nervous eye on the Toa’s ice blade. “We were?” Jaller said.

Kopaka finally put his blade away. He turned and walked off without another word.

Takua and Jaller exchanged a glance. Both were thinking the same thing – the Toa of Ice would make a very useful guide in this frozen wasteland. They hurried after him.

“We didn’t mean to,” Takua called after Kopaka, struggling to keep up with him in the deep snow. “We were lost.”

“We’re on a mission!” Jaller added, holding up the Mask of Light. “We’ve been sent to find the Seventh Toa,” he said, the words tumbling out of him eagerly. “You see, Takua here was in the tunnel where the lava break is, where he’s not supposed to be, by the way, and I told him –”

Kopaka halted, silencing him with an upraised hand.
“Ulp,” Jaller blurted. “Sorry.”
“You are the Chronicler,” Kopaka said to Takua.
Takua was a bit unnerved by the Toa’s icy gaze. “Uh, yes,” he stammered.
Kopaka looked thoughtful. “Your stories have aided the Toa in the past,” he said. “I will take you to my village of Ko-Koro. State your purpose to the Turaga.”
He strode off, not bothering to look and see if they were following.

At the main temple, Lewa glided to a landing in front of Tahu and Gali. He held up his fist, which Tahu clanked with his own in greeting.
“Ta-Koro is gone, Lewa,” Tahu said heavily. “Buried by the very lava that sustained it.”
Gali’s gaze rested on Tahu. She reached out to touch the scratch on his mask, which appeared to be spreading. “Tahu…” she began.
Tahu brushed away her hand. “You worry about scratches?” he said angrily to Gali. “My village is gone! Your power was nothing! My power was…” He sighed in defeat. “Nothing.”
Lewa put a hand on Tahu’s shoulder. “We are samehearted, brother. And that heart will quicken us to stop the evilspread.”
“But first we must be united,” Gali said. “Together we are strong.”
Without answering either of them, Tahu turned and stalked away.
Takua, Jaller, and Kopaka rounded a hill of ice. Before them spread a snowy valley. Steep cliffs rose on the far side. Set into one of the cliffs was a village, accessible only by a bridge of ice. But something was wrong. The village wall had fallen. Huts were in shambles, and smoke rose from the ruins. There was no one in sight.

Jaller and Takua raced toward the ice bridge, wanting to help. Kopaka glanced up as a dark shadow fell over the valley. “Stop!” he shouted. Takua and Jaller skidded to a halt. The bridge was just ahead, stretching over a deep chasm. From below the lip of the gorge, three terrifying figures hovered into view.

The trio of Rahkshi landed in front of the awestruck Matoran, unfolding their legs to stand at full height. Takua and Jaller goggled up at the hideous creatures, frozen with fear.

The Fragmenter-Rahkshi planted its staff in the snow. A zigzagging bolt arced into the air, then down toward the helpless pair.

Kopaka slid toward them, his shield up. The ice shield deflected the bolt, its energy knocking the Toa backward. The bolt blasted back toward the Rahkshi, shooting a plume of snow into the air as the creatures dove for safety.

Kopaka let out an angry roar. Kopaka climbed to his feet and raced away with Takua and Jaller close behind him. The Rahkshi chased them, launching bolt after bolt of energy, which rained down all around the fleeing trio.

Suddenly Kopaka stopped short, flinging out his blade to block the Matoran’s path. Takua and Jaller slid to a stop, realizing that they were about to race right off of a steep cliff that dropped away into a treacherous ravine.

“Prepare,” Kopaka ordered, turning to face their pursuers.

Jaller and Takua blinked, confused, as the Toa tossed his shield facedown onto the snow beside them. Suddenly realizing what Kopaka meant for them to do, Jaller shook his head. “The Captain of the Guard never runs awaaaaaaaay!”

His last word was lost in a cry of terror as Takua pushed him onto the shield and jumped aboard himself. The momentum carried the shield skidding toward the cliff. It toppled on the edge, then tipped down, sliding faster and faster along the impossibly steep incline.

Kopaka hardly heard their fading screams. He faced the Rahkshi as they closed in on him.

The Fragmenter-Rahkshi sent yet another bolt of energy arcing toward him. Kopaka somersaulted away, dodging the bolt. As he came down, he tossed his twin blades onto the snow. He landed on them, turning them into power ice skates, on which he glided down the cliff face.

The Rahkshi watched him go, their burning eyes sparking with anger.

Jaller clutched the edge of the shield-sled, now too terrified to scream. The shield sped down the cliff at an awesome speed.
He was relieved to see Kopaka appear beside them. As they neared the bottom of the slope, Takua pointed ahead. “Dead end!” he cried.

The base of the cliff sloped into a sheer rock face. Only a narrow ravine leading to a small lake offered a path through.

Kopaka zoomed ahead of the shield. Bending his knees, he reached back and grabbed the front edge, pulling it behind him as he veered into the ravine.

“Whooaaaa!” Takua and Jaller yelled as they felt themselves skid up the ravine wall.

But Kopaka yanked the shield back onto the icy path. They sped down the ravine.

**BOOM!** An arc of dark energy smashed into the snow right in Kopaka’s path. The shock waves knocked him off his feet, sending him rolling into the snow.

The shield flipped over, dumping Takua and Jaller as well. They tumbled head over heels, landing on the very edge of the lake.

The Fragmenter-Rahkshi hissed triumphantly as it hovered down toward him. The other two Rahkshi were right behind the first.

Takua sat up. “Jaller?” he said.

Jaller looked at him, his eyes widening as he spotted the Rahkshi. The creatures hovered right past Kopaka, who appeared to be unconscious, heading straight for the two Matoran.

“Why us?” Jaller said. “What did we do?”

Takua spotted the Mask of Light in his friend’s hand. “The mask!” he cried. He grabbed the mask, which started glowing brighter than ever. Pushing Kopaka’s shield onto the cold water of the lake, he jumped on, using the mask as a paddle.

Left behind, Jaller watched nervously as the Rahkshi approached. He dove out of the way as they hovered toward him. But they didn’t even glance his way. Their glowing eyes were focused on Takua. They hovered out over the water, following him.

Takua paddled as hard as he could. But with every glance back, he saw the Rahkshi gaining on him. Finally they were close enough to reach out for him with their clawed arms.

Takua held the mask close to his chest as the creatures hissed threateningly, grabbing at him. I **guess this is it,** he thought hopelessly as a clawed hand snapped only a whisper away from his face.

Just then his gaze caught motion back on the lakeshore. Kopaka was awake—he was swinging his ice blade overhead. A second later a blast of elemental ice spun through the air, heading straight for the Rahkshi!

The icy blast hit the Fragmenter-Rahkshi and knocked it off balance. It crashed into the other two creatures, and all three of them toppled and landed in the lake with a splash.

“Ha!” Takua cried excitedly, leaning over the edge of the shield to look at the spot where the Rahkshi had disappeared.

A clawed hand shot up, only inches from his face.

“Yaaaah!” Takua yelped, pulling his head back.

Kopaka twirled his blade, then stabbed the point into the edge of the lake. The water crystallized instantly into ice, the deep freeze spreading rapidly until the entire lake was frozen solid. The Rahkshi, who were just reaching the surface, were trapped in place.

Kopaka and Jaller walked out onto the ice. “Good moves,” Kopaka said when they reached Takua. Takua shrugged. “Even I get lucky sometimes,” he said, a little awed by the words of praise from the Toa.

“Not luck,” Kopaka corrected. “It is what you do that makes a hero.”

There was a sound from behind them. All three whirled around to look.

“Pewku!” Takua cried in amazement as he saw the familiar form of the Ussal crab trotting across the ice.

Pewku ran toward him. Her feet skidded on the slippery ice, and she wound up crashing into Takua, knocking him over.
Takua laughed and hugged her. “Wow!” he said. “She must have come all the way through the jungle.”

“Not bad,” Jaller said with a smile. “Maybe Pewku should be the Herald, eh, Toa Kopaka?”

He turned to glance at the Toa. But the spot where Kopaka had been standing just a moment before was empty. The Toa was back on the shore, leaping up the sheer face of the icy cliff.

Jaller blinked. “He just left us here!”

Takua nodded, remembering the distressing view of Ko-Koro. “He needs to see his village.” He held the Mask of Light toward his friend. “Here.”

Jaller started to reach for it, then hesitated. “You were looking pretty Herald-like back there. Sure you don’t want to hang on to it?”

Takua slapped the mask against Jaller’s chest. “Tempting,” he said as the mask’s glow slowly faded. “But no.”
A few hours later, Takua, Jaller, and Pewku stopped beside a small tunnel entrance dug out of an icy mountainside. Takua leaned closer to read the writing on a battered old totem that marked the entrance.

“Onu-Koro,” he read. He glanced at Jaller. “It doesn’t look like it’s been used in a while. And we don’t have a lightstone.”

Jaller held up the faintly glowing mask. “Who needs lightstones?”
He led the way into the tunnel. Pewku followed. Takua hesitated, then climbed down into the darkness after them.
The tunnels were too low to allow the Matoran to ride Pewku, so all three of them walked along on foot. Takua was lagging behind. He didn’t want to admit it, but being underground made him nervous. It was too still. Too close. And much, much too dark.

_Takua_

Takua stopped short. Was he hearing things? He peered into the darkness behind him. But there was no sign of life or movement.

By the time he turned around, Jaller and Pewku had disappeared.

“Uh, guys?” Takua called. “Where’d you go?”

_Takua_

Takua gulped. That time he’d definitely heard it. But who? Where? Why?

He wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answer. “J-Jaller?” he called, racing forward. “JALLER!”

_Oof——_

In the blinding dark, he crashed into a wall and fell.
Suddenly an eerie red glow lit up the tunnel. A pair of red eyes appeared in the dimness.

“Shadows are everything,” a voice hissed. “And where they are, so am I.”

Takua backed away from the eyes. His heart was pounding. The Makuta. It had to be. “I know who you are,” he said, trying to keep his voice from quavering. “I—I’m not afraid.”

“Even my shadows cannot hide your fear,” Makuta said. “Or the truth.”

“What truth?” Takua asked.

“That you will not find the Seventh Toa. And deep down, you know it.”

“So I won’t,” Takua said uncertainly. “Maybe Jaller will.”

“And if he doesn’t?” Makuta’s voice was more ominous than ever. “He will die, because of you. Bring me the mask, Takua. Bring it to me and you won’t lose your friend.”

Takua was horrified. Was this his choice? Betray all of Mata Nui — or allow Jaller to die?

_Makuta is said to be the master of lies, he thought. Maybe this choice is a lie, too…_

“N-no!” he cried, trying to sound bold and sure. “I won’t let everyone down.”

“You fail them more if you refuse,” Makuta said. “For the mask, your villages and Jaller will be spared. Don’t be a fool.”

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“N-no,” Takua stammered, confused. “I can’t…”

Suddenly a flash of light flooded the tunnel. “Hey!” Jaller’s voice called from somewhere ahead. A second later he and Pewku appeared. “Keep up, kolhii-head,” Jaller chided. “I found some better tunnels!”

Takua stared around wildly. But there was no sign of Makuta. Unable to speak, he merely nodded and followed as Jaller and Pewku turned and headed down the tunnel again.

“So where’d you wander off to?” Jaller asked over his shoulder as they walked.

“Jaller,” Takua said. “Um, about the mask…”

“What about it?” Jaller asked. “You ready to take it? Finally?”

Takua paused, struggling to make up his mind. “I can’t…” He took a deep breath. “… go with you.”

“What?” Jaller exclaimed, clutching the mask, which faded slightly. “Why?”

Takua could only shake his head hopelessly “I… can’t explain,” he croaked.

Jaller frowned. “Oh, that’s just great,” he said angrily. “First you stick me with your duty and then you ditch me?”

Takua couldn’t meet his friend’s eyes. “My duty is to myself,” he muttered, turning away. “I quit. Just take the mask and go.”

At that moment, the last of the mask’s light faded. “Fine,” Jaller said. At his words, the mask’s glow returned – at least a little. “But I won’t give up. I will find the Seventh Toa, whether you’re the true Herald or not.”

Pewku stood still, staring first after Takua and then Jaller. She turned and followed Takua.

Makuta watched Takua’s retreat from his lair deep beneath the tunnels, his red eyes glowing with anger. “My fairness spurned…” he hissed, turning toward the giant mask of Mata Nui on the wall. “My gentle sons bound in ice.” He glared at the mask. “So, my hand is cast.”

He turned to face three stone pillars, nearly identical to the ones from which the Rahkshi had emerged. As Makuta walked by them, three shadowy forms burst out of them.

“Now I must pierce that which the Toa hold dear,” Makuta said. He stopped in front of one of the new figures – another Rahkshi, this one white in color. Its name was Kurahk – the Anger-Rahkshi.

“Anger among them will threaten their precious unity.”

Makuta walked on. This time he paused before a Rahkshi that was as black as night. Vorahk – the Hunger-Rahkshi.

“Hunger will consume their duty,” Makuta said as the creature’s staff quivered with energy. The third Rahkshi was colored in fearful shades of red. This was Turahk, the Fear-Rahkshi.

“And fear will keep them from their destiny.” Makuta turned away from the three new Rahkshi, once again facing the still mask of Mata Nui. “They will not disturb your sleep.”
Onua and Pohatu were conferring in the center courtyard of Onu-Koro when they heard steps approaching from one of the tunnels.

Pohatu saw an exhausted-looking Ussal crab trotting toward him. His eyes widened in surprise as he recognized the figure riding atop the Ussal’s back.

“Chronicler!” Pohatu exclaimed as Takua and Pewku made their way toward the Toa. “Where is the Herald?”

Takua looked tired and uncertain. “Uh, we got… separated,” he said. “After we met the Rahkshi.”

Before Takua could continue, the ground shuddered. The villagers around them cried out in alarm. Suddenly the cavern wall burst open – and three tall, horrifying figures leaped into view, hissing angrily.

“Those!” Takua cried, pointing to the Rahkshi. He blinked, realizing that the colors were different.

“Except… different ones.”

“Clear the cave!” Onua shouted. “And close the tunnel behind you!”

The Onu-Matoran scattered, racing for the tunnels leading away from the cavern. Meanwhile Onua and Pohatu faced the three Rahkshi.

“Let me show you a real Onu-Koro welcome,” Onua rumbled. He slammed his fists onto the ground, creating an elemental tidal wave of earth and stone. The wave rippled toward the Rahkshi and swallowed them.

But when the wave had passed, the Rahkshi rose up again, unharmed.

Onua grunted in surprise. The Hunger-Rahkshi leaped toward him, wielding its staff. Onua grabbed at the staff, trying to pull it away.

Meanwhile Pohatu raced toward the Fear-Rahkshi. The creature raised its staff, sending dark energy waves rippling out from it. As soon as Pohatu hit the circle of energy, he stopped in midstride, his eyes filled with dark fear.

“No…” he whimpered, mesmerized by the overwhelming, inescapable fear. All of his worst fears seemed to be exploding within him. “Water, sinking, drowning…!”

The Hunger-Rahkshi hissed at Onua as they struggled over the staff. The creature activated the staff. Dark hunger energy flooded into Onua, instantly draining him of power, channeling it instead back into the Rahkshi’s staff.

“My strength,” Onua whispered weakly. “My power…”

His eyes dimmed and he fell over backward, landing with a mighty crash. He couldn’t move – his energy was completely gone, replaced by a gnawing, devastating hunger.

“Onua!” Pohatu cried.

Still imprisoned by a wall of fear, Pohatu was unable to help. And the more he struggled against it, the more the terror overwhelmed him – until, with a final moan of helplessness, he collapsed to the ground.
Takua tried to avoid the fleeing villagers as he and Pewku searched for escape as well. The three Rahkshi turned and spotted him in the crowds. Knocking other Matoran out of the way, they stalked after him with a hiss.

Pewku found her way to a tunnel while the Rahkshi were still halfway back across the large cavern. Takua breathed out in relief. They were going to make it!

Then he turned and saw the scene behind him. The Rahkshi were stomping on huts and shoving aside terrified Onu-Matoran. Onua and Pohatu were still sprawled motionless on the cavern floor.

This is my fault,' Takua realized. They’re destroying everything in their path – to get to me.

His eyes hardened with resolve. Grabbing a kolhii stick that was leaning against a hut nearby, he turned Pewku to face the approaching Rahkshi.

“Yah, Pewku!” he shouted, urging the Ussal onward. “Yah!”

Pewku tried to do as he said. But so many villagers were fleeing, flowing around them in their race for the tunnel, that they could hardly move forward. Finally Takua gave up. Slumping to the ground, he closed his eyes and waited for the Rahkshi to reach him.

Pewku whined frantically, trying to get him to move. But he pushed her claw aside.

“Go find a real hero,” he mumbled miserably. “What can I do?”

Tahu, Lewa, and Gali raced through a tunnel, heading toward the main cavern of Onu-Koro. They skidded to a stop as they reached the end of the tunnel and saw the mayhem in the cavern.

Tahu’s eyes flashed with anger as he took it in. The poison taint, which had spread to cover half of his face, glowed angrily as well.

He leaped into the cavern without a word. “Tahu!” Lewa cried, grabbing at him. But it was too late.

“RAHKSHI!” Tahu bellowed furiously, racing toward the creatures. He charged at the Anger-Rahkshi first.

The Anger-Rahkshi banged its staff on the ground. A ring of dark energy rippled across the cavern floor, hitting Tahu and knocking him off of his feet.

The Fire Toa landed with a grunt on the hard ground. Gali and Lewa leaped out of the tunnel and raced toward the action. Lewa spotted a small figure huddled on the ground near the Rahkshi.

The Chronicler, he thought in surprise. And his crab friend, Pewku. Looks like they’re in badneed of a rescue.

He glided toward them, grabbing Takua in one arm and Pewku in the other. The Rahkshi hissed in frustration as they saw their quarry fly away across the cavern. They turned and stalked after him.

Tahu’s eyes glowed dark, anger-energy flashing across them. The poison taint had spread once again and now covered his entire mask.

He leaped to his feet. Gali gasped as she saw that it wasn’t just Tahu’s mask that was poisoned now. The taint had spread across his entire body!

The Rahkshi’s anger-energy must have caused it to spread more rapidly, she thought in alarm.

She took a step toward him. “Brother!” she said with concern.

“FIRE HAS NO BROTHERS!” Tahu howled. “FIRE CONSUMES ALL!”

He slammed his swords into the ground. Jagged fissures of lava burst into life and tore across the ground in all directions. Gali balanced on a pillar of earth as fire consumed the ground on either side.

Tahu looked at her, but there was no recognition in his eyes – only anger. He slammed his swords down again, sending another fissure of lava right at Gali. She somersaulted away just in time as the ground exploded into flame.

Across the cavern, Lewa glided down and deposited Takua and Pewku beside Onua and Pohatu.

“No thought-thinking,” the Toa ordered Takua breathlessly. “Quickspeed to Jaller. Warn him!”

“... er... will,” Takua called as the Air Toa glided away, heading toward Tahu and Gali.
Takua led the way as he and Pewku raced toward an escape tunnel. But a few strides away, the
Ussal veered suddenly, heading through a narrow foundry doorway instead.
“Pewku!” Takua cried. “Where are you going?”
He followed her. A moment later, the Rahkshi disappeared through the foundry door as well.
At that moment back in the cavern, Pohatu finally came to and sat up. He glanced at Onua, who
was pushing himself upright nearby. “Rise and shine, brother,” Pohatu joked weakly.
Onua merely groaned in response.

The heat rolled over Takua in waves as he followed Pewku into the depths of the foundry. Several
fires blazed beneath narrow exhaust chimneys cut into the rock ceiling. Mine-cars loaded with lightstones
sat on their tracks, waiting to move out.
Dead end, Takua realized as he stared around the chamber. There’s no way out except the way we
came… and we can’t go that way.
The trio of Rahkshi emerged from the entry tunnel into the foundry chamber with a loud hiss.
Pewku raced toward one of the chimneys. She grunted urgently at Takua and leaped up, scrambling for a
hold on the rough rock sides.
Takua took a deep breath. What choice did he have? He leaped up, following the Ussal into the
soot-blackened chimney.
As he struggled to climb up the chimney, he heard the Rahkshi hissing directly beneath him. He
tried to climb faster, but it was no use — the Fear-Rahkshi was right behind him. It lunged up, grabbing for
his foot.
Suddenly a claw spun into view, pinning the Fear-Rahkshi’s arm to the wall just before its clawed hand closed around Takua’s leg. It was one of Toa Pohatu’s mighty climbing claws! The other two Rahkshi charged toward the Toa. Onua slammed his fists outward into the cavern walls. The section of ceiling directly over the Rahkshi collapsed, piling rocks and stone dust over them. Breathing a sigh of relief, Takua pulled himself up to safety.

In the courtyard cavern, Tahu swiped his swords at Lewa, who dodged them easily. Tahu lunged at Lewa again.

Rocks rained down on him from the ceiling, mixed with snow. Suddenly a stream of water struck Tahu from behind.

Howling with anger, he turned to find Gali behind him.

“Tahu,” she called. “Remember who you are! Remember your destiny.” She unleashed another stream of water. Tahu’s armor steamed as the cool water hit it.

“I HAVE NO DESTINY!” he roared furiously. “I – agh?”

He jumped in surprise as a shape plummeted to the ground behind him. Kopaka! The Ice Toa touched his blade to the ground. A layer of frost washed over the ground, trapping Tahu in a thick coating of ice.

Lewa stepped forward. He and Kopaka each took one of the frozen Tahu’s arms, carrying him toward an exit tunnel.

Gali looked around for the others as she raced after them. She saw Onua’s quake-breakers smash through the stone of a collapsed foundry entrance and breathed out with relief as he and Onua emerged into the courtyard chamber.

Lewa and Kopaka carried the unconscious Tahu into a tunnel. Gali followed. Once inside the tunnel, she turned back to check on the others’ progress. Pohatu and Onua raced across the chamber toward her. They were steps from safety when there was an ominous rumble. A split second later, the entire cavern collapsed on top of them.

Gali gasped in horror. “Our brothers!” she cried as rocks and earth rained down, burying everything in a deep layer of debris.

She tried to leap out, to go help. But Kopaka stopped her.

He gave her a somber look. Gali returned the look for a long moment, then glanced out at the caved-in courtyard area. There was no sound, no movement except the settling dust.

She bowed her head sadly and turned to follow the others.

With a grunt and a clatter, Pewku pulled herself up and out of the top of the chimney. She fell to the snowy ground outside with a sigh of relief.
A moment later, Takua clambered out after her. He flopped to the ground, exhausted. He wished he could just lie there, sleeping in the soft snow. But he knew that he couldn’t do that.

Pewku grunted questioningly as Takua climbed to his feet. “No time to rest,” he told her. “We’ve got to find Jaller. Come on!”

A short distance away, on the shores of a frozen glacial lake, the setting sun’s rays touched the end of a staff protruding out of the ice. As the last light faded and dusk fell, the staff and everything else fell into dark shadow.

For a long moment, nothing moved. Then a flicker of dark energy burst out of the end of the staff. The ice around it splintered and began to crack and melt.
Chapter 22

As the sun rose above the horizon, Jaller tried to keep his gaze on his goal – the craggy top section of the Mangai volcano. He struggled up a rocky slope, clutching the Mask of Light.

As he crested the slope, he groaned in dismay. Another steep cliffside still lay between him and the top of the volcano!

His legs ached, and his eyes strained in the bright morning sunlight. Would he be able to make it? And even if he reached the top of the volcano, what then? Would he find the Seventh Toa there – or would the mask lead him off in yet another direction?

“Mata Nui,” he cried. “Show me where my destiny lies!”

Suddenly the ground quaked beneath him. Jaller was thrown off his feet – and off of the ledge. He barely managed to grab onto it and avoid falling.

He sighed and glanced upward, rolling his eyes. “Well,” he said to the sky, “I guess I asked!” The ground shook again. But this time, Jaller realized it was the rumble of galloping footsteps coming toward him.

“What now?” he wondered aloud.

Jaller’s eyes widened as Pewku galloped onto the ledge. Takua was riding on her broad back, holding a kolhii stick in one hand.

Takua leaned over Pewku’s side, stretching the kolhii stick down toward Jaller. Jaller grabbed it, holding on tightly as his friend pulled him to safety.

Soon Jaller was seated behind Takua on Pewku’s back. “What happened to ‘I quit?’” he asked breathlessly.

Takua grinned. “I tried that,” he said. “But no one will let me.” His face grew serious. “Bad news. More Rahkshi. They’ve taken Onu-Koro.”

“The Mask of Light was never at Onu-Koro,” Jaller said, confused.

Takua shrugged. “They don’t want the mask,” he said. “They’re looking for the Herald.”

Jaller still looked puzzled. “You’re sure they were after the Herald?”

Takua glanced at him over his shoulder. “Oh, yes,” he said. “Very sure.”

Tahu roared, struggling to free himself from the vines that trapped him. He crashed from side to side, the large, flat stone beneath him glowing hot with the force of his fury.

“The poison is destroying him,” Gali said quietly, watching from nearby.

Lewa and Kopaka stood beside her near a tunnel entrance in the jungle.

“We must act,” Gali continued. “Let us summon all the healing powers we possess.”

The three of them gathered around Tahu. The Fire Toa hardly seemed aware of their presence as he growled and fought against his restraints.

Lewa raised Tahu’s magma swords. They burned weakly, with nothing more than a sputtering flicker.
“His flame is but an emberglow!” Lewa noted in alarm.

“Kopaka,” Gali said.

Kopaka produced his own blade. He crossed it with the magma swords in front of Tahu’s face. The energy of two Toa’s blades exploded in a blinding flash of light, then flowed down into Tahu’s body. Tahu roared defiantly as the energy flooded him. He was soon enveloped in glowing white steam.

“Enough!” Gali cried.

Kopaka and Lewa pulled back the swords. The steam dissipated, revealing Tahu – and the poison taint still covering his body. The Fire Toa lay still, his eyes dark.

“Brother!” Lewa cried, fearing the worst.

Gali brought her hands together. Water droplets rushed together at her call, forming a liquid sphere that spun in front of her. Liquid of life, do your magic, she thought, focusing all of her energy on the water’s cleansing power.

She unleashed the water at Tahu in a gentle mist. A rainbow formed as the droplets danced over his still form.

The water bathed him, washing away the poison along with the scratch on his mask. Within seconds, healthy red armor shone out.

Gali slumped, exhausted. Kopaka caught her, carefully helping her move away to rest.

Lewa gazed down at Tahu. The Fire Toa still lay motionless, but Lewa could see that Gali’s efforts had worked. There was no sign of the poison taint.

Lewa very gently clanked his fist against Tahu’s hand. “I’m right here, Toa brother,” he murmured.

Gali was kneeling beside a jungle pond. She held her hands beneath the water, taking energy from it. Kopaka stood behind her, watching.

“Kopaka,” Gali said with a sigh as she felt herself recharged. “Do you think the Turaga were right about us? Have we lost our unity?” She paused, gazing down at the still water. When the Ice Toa didn’t answer, she turned her head. “Kopaka?”

But he was gone. Gali sighed.

Just then Lewa called out for her. “Sister, he is open-eyed!”

Gali hurried back to the clearing. Tahu was sitting up, unwrapping the vines from his wrists.

“Brother,” Gali greeted him. “Are you well?”

Tahu glared at her. “No, I am not well.” Then his eyes softened. “But I am alive and in your debt… my sister.”

He tentatively lifted his fist toward her. Gali smiled and gently clanked it with her own.
Jaller breathed out, awed by the sight that lay before his eyes. “Kini-Nui!” he whispered. “The Great Temple!”

The temple and the surrounding mountains were bathed in the colorful rays of the setting sun. The Mask of Light glowed as they crossed the Amaja Circle. As they approached a giant head carved into the stone at the edge of the plateau, the mask’s light faded.

“No way,” Takua said. “We’ve been all over the island, just to wind up here?”

“Why not? It’s a sacred place,” Jaller pointed out.

Takua grabbed the mask, which immediately glowed brightly again. “You sure you’re working this right?”

At that moment a beam of brilliant light shot out of the mask. It landed on the giant stone head. The ground quaked, shaking loose countless years’ worth of dirt and grime from the carving. As the outlines of a mask began to be visible underneath, the sun dipped beneath the horizon, plunging the temple into dusky dimness.

“Wow, this is it,” Jaller said. “The Seventh Toa must be here.”

An ominous hiss rose nearby. Takua and Jaller turned toward the sound in fear. Three Rahkshi stepped out from behind a rock – Fragmenter, Disintegrator, and Poison.

Jaller gasped. “Give me the mask, Takua,” he said grimly, grabbing it from his friend’s hands.

“Jaller, no!” Takua cried. “We both know the mask chose me. I am the true Herald.”

“Are you still sure, even now?”

Takua held out his hand. “Yes!” he said firmly. “I’m the Herald.”

Jaller hesitated briefly, then handed over the mask. Takua nodded. “And I say… run!” he cried.

Takua, Jaller, and Pewku raced down toward the lower plateau. The ground quaked again at the base of the steps. A fissure erupted in a shower of rocks and earth, and three more Rahkshi burst out of the ground!

Takua and Jaller turned to race back up the steps. But the first trio of Rahkshi were already descending from the top. They were trapped!

Suddenly a flare of brilliant fire rocketed overhead, illuminating the entire temple.

The Rahkshi shielded their faces against the glare. An urn atop the enormous stone head ignited, illuminating Lewa and Gali, who stood on either side. Tahu stepped in from the shadows, the fire reflecting off of his bright red armor.

Takua let out a breath of relief. “Great!” he called to the three Toa as they leaped into the air. “You can get us out of here!”

Tahu pulled out his swords. “We are done running.”

The Fragmenter-Rahkshi hissed, unleashing an arc of dark energy from its staff. Tahu lifted his shield, enveloping all of the Toa and Matoran in a protective force field. He staggered backward as the Rahkshi’s bolt hit, but recovered quickly.
“We will not be broken!” the Fire Toa shouted defiantly.
He and Lewa stood side by side as the Fragmenter-, Poison-, and Disintegrator-Rahkshi approached. Behind them, Gali led Takua and Jaller down the steps toward the lower temple.
“This way!” she cried.
Lewa summoned a whirlwind, sending it spinning down to grab the sand from the Amaja Circle. The sand cycloned feverishly, enveloping the advancing Rahkshi. Tahu crossed his swords, sending a blast of fire into the swirling sandstorm. The sand particles glowed red, then white-hot. When Tahu and Lewa both lowered their arms, their creation remained – the Rahkshi were trapped from the neck down in a prison of glass!
In the lower temple, the other three Rahkshi moved toward Gali and her charges, cutting off their escape. The ground between them suddenly rumbled and exploded. Three figures erupted out of the quake, landing beside Gali and the others.
Gali cried out in amazement as she recognized the Ice, Earth, and Stone Toa. “Brothers!” she shouted to Pohatu and Onua. “We thought we lost you.”
“You might have, but for our frosty friend,” Onua replied, gesturing toward Kopaka.
Kopaka shrugged. “It was… on the way.”
Gali raised an eyebrow. “Kopaka had to dig out the chief miner?”
Onua looked sheepish. “Well, he needs to get his hands dirty from time to time.”
The Hunger-, Anger-, and Fear-Rahkshi had recovered from the surprise of the Toa’s arrival. They advanced again, hissing menacingly.
The Anger-Rahkshi banged its staff on the ground, sending a ring of dark anger energy toward the Toa. But the energy passed right through them, leaving them untouched. The Rahkshi hissed in surprise.
“Our anger is no more, Rahkshi,” Tahu said. “We are united!”
Lewa and Pohatu leaped into action, somersaulting around the three Rahkshi faster than the eye could follow. The creatures swung their staffs wildly at their tumbling foes – but wound up striking one another instead!
The Fear-Rahkshi squealed in dismay as the Hunger-Rahkshi’s staff hit it. Its fear energy drained from its body, sending it tumbling helplessly to the ground.
The Hunger-Rahkshi hissed. Turning away from the circling Toa, it leaped toward Takua and Jaller.
In the blink of an eye, Tahu and Gali joined together and summoned their elemental powers. A blast of steam burst from their tools, catching the Hunger-Rahkshi in its mighty stream and lifting it into the air.
The Toa moved in on the Anger-Rahkshi. The creature backed away, hissing in frustration.
Behind the Toa, the Fear-Rahkshi stirred. Its eyes began to glow as energy flowed back into its body. The creature climbed to its feet and started up the steps toward Takua and Jaller.
The Toa didn’t notice. All of their attention was focused on the Anger-Rahkshi in front of them.
“Now,” Tahu shouted. “As one!”
The others knew what to do.
Onua slammed the ground, sending a wave of earth toward the Anger-Rahkshi.
Pohatu transformed the rolling wave of earth into a wave of boulders.
Tahu transformed the boulders into a wave of lava, which broke over the Rahkshi, enveloping it.
The Anger-Rahkshi tried to escape the lava. But suddenly the jet of steam dissipated, sending the Hunger-Rahkshi plunging back to earth – right on top of the Anger-Rahkshi!
Kopaka jumped forward, striking the lava with his sword and instantly freezing it solid. Both the Hunger- and Anger-Rahkshi were frozen along with it.
Tahu stepped toward them, examining the Toa’s handiwork. “They’ve been trapped before and were still able to escape,” he reminded the others.
Kopaka leaned in, yanking the kraata out of the Rahkshi’s armored bodies. “Not this time.”
A frightened squeal erupted from somewhere above. Glancing up, the Toa were just in time to see Pewku tumble down the steps, tossed aside by the Fear-Rahkshi. The creature turned with a hiss, backing Takua and Jaller up the steps.
“Hang on!” Gali shouted.
Takua looked down, trying to see the Toa. Instead, his gaze caught the beam of dark fear energy emanating from the Rahkshi’s staff. He fell to his knees, instantly transfixed.
The Fear-Rahkshi rose up on its long legs, towering over Takua. It swung its staff toward the helpless Matoran.
But Jaller had seen what was happening. He leaped forward, swinging the kolhii stick he was holding.
Takua snapped out of his fear trance as Jaller intercepted the Rahkshi’s blow. “Jaller!” he screamed as dark energy sizzled through his friend’s body.
The Fear-Rahkshi turned toward him, its eyes glittering wickedly. But before it could strike again, Gali and Pohatu leaped in and grabbed it by the arms.
Takua dropped the mask, racing over and cradling his fallen friend. “What have you done?” he cried as Jaller’s eyes dimmed. “I’m supposed to make the sacrifice! I’m the Herald!”
“No,” Jaller said weakly. “The duty was mine. You know…” He paused, gathering the last scraps of his fading strength. He took in a ragged breath.
“…who you are,” he whispered faintly. Stretching out his hand, he picked up the Mask of Light and put it in Takua’s hands. “You were always different.”
Jaller’s hand dropped limply onto the stone. Gently lowering his friend’s head to the ground, Takua stood, lifting the mask. It glowed more brightly than ever.
Takua stood still for a moment, his eyes distant. Nearby, the Fear-Rahkshi struggled free of Gali’s and Pohatu’s grip. The two Toa lost their footing and tumbled down the steps, crashing into the other Toa, who were on their way to help.
Takua turned the mask over in his hands again. His eyes narrowed purposefully. As he lifted it to his face, the mask’s glow brightened again. As it made contact with his own mask, it burst forth with brilliant beams of white light.
He was the Seventh Toa! He could feel his body transforming as the mask’s power flooded through him. He became taller, stronger, brighter. Light emanated from him, freezing the Fear-Rahkshi in its tracks.
The other six Toa gazed up at him in awe. They fell to their knees.
“Hei! Hei! Hei!” they said in one voice.
Takua stared at his own hand, which glowed white-hot with light energy. He picked up Jaller’s kolhii stick, and a small spark jumped from his hand to the stick, transforming it into the Kolhii Staff of Light.
He turned to face the other Toa, his eyes filled with awe and power. “I am Takanuva,” he declared. “Toa of Light!”
As the white light bursting from him illuminated the entire temple, he bent and picked up Jaller’s body. He carried it down the steps past the other Toa. Each of them raised his or her weapon in salute, then followed the Toa of Light with their heads solemnly bowed.

The next morning, Takanuva stood gazing down at the suva-style grave dome that had been raised in a quiet spot overlooking the Kini-Nui temple. A memorial pillar rose from the top of the dome, and Jaller’s mask rested upon it.

Turaga Vakama stepped toward the Toa of Light. “You have finally found your own story,” he said quietly, “and still you seek answers.”

Takanuva stared at Jaller’s mask. “All this, just to discover who I am?”

Vakama shrugged. “Mata Nui is wiser than all,” he replied. “The path you walked was not to be here…” He paused and gestured at the temple. “But here.” He tapped Takanuva on the chest. “You understand you have but one destiny.”

Lewa helped Tahu attach a pipe to the vehicle they were building. “How will this wayfind the Makuta?” he asked.

Takanuva stepped forward, holding the six kraata in his fist. “What is the Makuta’s shall return to him.” He inserted the kraata into the slot they’d created for that purpose. They writhed angrily in their restraints.

Tahu looked up at the vehicle, which they were calling an Ussanui. They had created it out of parts of the defeated Rahkshi. Would it work?

Before long, all seven Toa were gathered around the completed Ussanui vehicle. Hahli walked up to them, carefully carrying Jaller’s mask.

“Jaller was your Herald,” she told Takanuva solemnly. “Let him continue to lead you to victory.”

She stepped to the front of the vehicle, attaching the mask to it. Takanuva nodded.

“Well said, Hahli,” he told her.

Pohatu cocked his head at the vehicle curiously. “Not much room in this transport,” he said.

“Where will we all sit, brother?”

Takanuva shook his head. “You won’t,” he replied. “You shall not join me.”

The other Toa reacted with surprise. “But united, our power defeated the Rahkshi!” Pohatu reminded him.

Tahu nodded. “Certainly it will take nothing less to defeat Makuta!”

Takanuva turned away from them, staring at the transport. “I have but one destiny,” he said.

“My life lie with the Matoran and the Turaga. Gather them and wait for my return.”

He stepped forward, climbing into the Ussanui vehicle. At last, he turned to look at the Toa gathered below.

“Farewell,” he told them.

The Ussanui rocketed through the tunnels beneath the Kini-Nui. Takanuva held on grimly, not thinking or moving. Just waiting.

Finally the Ussanui rounded another corner. An immense door blocked the tunnel, but the vehicle never slowed. It crashed straight into the door, cracking it open before bouncing off, skidding to a halt at last.

Takanuva opened his eyes. As he climbed out of the wrecked vehicle, there was a rattling sound behind him.

His eyes widened in amazement as a piece of the damaged vehicle was tossed aside and a familiar figure climbed out from the wreckage.

“Hahli!” Takanuva cried.
Hahli walked to the front of the vehicle and removed Jaller’s mask. “Let me be your Chronicler,” she told Takanuva with determination in her voice.

Takanuva hesitated, then nodded. Reaching into the wreckage long enough to pull out the six kraata, he turned and stepped through the cracked door into the dark chamber beyond.
Takanuva held the kraata tightly in his fist as he looked around the chamber. Behind him, Hahli started to step through the door, but he stopped her with a gesture. She backed off, watching through the crack.

By the light emanating from his own mask Takanuva could see several massive carved stone columns holding up the stone ceiling.

Takanuva opened his hand. The kraata slithered free, writhing their way across the floor and around the pools, heading toward a dark doorway on the opposite end of the chamber. Two large red eyes opened in the darkness, staring toward the Toa.

“You can no longer hide in shadow,” Takanuva said, his eyes tightening in resolve.

“I am shadow,” Makuta's sinister voice rang out from the darkness. “The shadow that guards the gate. Now run along, or accept your doom.”

Takanuva stepped forward boldly. Suddenly he realized what he needed to do.

“I am done running. Mata Nui will be awoken this day.” He turned to Hahli, still peering through the doorway behind him.

“Hahli, summon the Matoran.”

Hahli's face registered her shock at the request. But she nodded and hurried off.

Takanuva waited calmly as Makuta started to move out of the shadows. “Toa of Light,” the dark one hissed. “Now so bold. But at heart, you are still just Takua.”

He stepped into the light. The Mask of Shadow on his face glared down at Takanuva. Makuta was nearly twice the Toa's height.

“Are you truly prepared to face me?”

Though he tried to hide it, Takanuva was shocked at Makuta's size. But he held his ground as Makuta approached him.

“You failed to save your friend,” Makuta said. “You didn't even warn him. Perhaps for your next great failure…” He paused, holding out his arm. A Kolhii Staff of Shadow grew out of it. Then he motioned toward the doorway behind him. “A simple game of kolhii? Win and you may try to open the gate. When you lose, I'll have that mask.”

“I will not lose!” Takanuva retorted, clutching his own staff tightly.

Makuta nodded, accepting the challenge. The surface of the nearest pool of energized protodermis rippled. A silvery ball slowly rose out of it, hovering in midair between Makuta and Takanuva.

Both players leaped toward the ball. Takanuva was faster and reached it first, snatching it in the scoop on one end of his kolhii staff. Dodging Makuta's swiping blow, he darted past him.

He landed on a perch along one of the pillars. Makuta followed, perching on another pillar. The ball of protodermis in Takanuva's scoop transformed suddenly into a glowing ball of light. Takanuva launched it toward Makuta.

Makuta dodged the ball of light, which exploded against the pillar behind him.
Another ball of protodermis rose out of the pool. This time Makuta was the faster one. He grabbed the ball with his kolhii staff, and it immediately transformed into a ball of dark shadow energy. He flung it at Takanuva.

The Toa leaped to the side. The ball of shadow crashed against another pillar; splintering it. The kolhii match continued. Neither player spoke; neither hesitated. And neither managed to score a hit on the other. Every time a ball crashed out of the game, another rose from the protodermis to take its place.

Finally Makuta launched a ball of darkness that flew toward Takanuva faster than ever. The Toa dodged it just in time, but the ball smashed into the pillar behind him with full force. The impact was too much for the structure—it splintered and came loose from the ceiling, plummeting into a hole that suddenly yawned open in the floor below it.

Takanuva managed to leap to safety, rolling to a stop inches from a pool of protodermis. Makuta jumped down and swooped on the next ball of protodermis before the Toa could react. Then he stalked toward Takanuva.

He laughed with dark triumph. “You know I cannot be beaten!”

With that, he launched the ball of shadow straight at Takanuva.

Hahli ran through the tunnels as fast as she could, still clutching Jaller’s mask. The thought of her fallen friend gave strength to her legs and courage to her heart. Ahead of her, finally she saw a pinprick of daylight.

A moment later she burst out of the crater of the ruined suva dome into the main temple area at Kini-Nui. The six Turaga and the six Toa stood around the dome crater, waiting. The entire population of the island was gathered behind them on the hillsides surrounding the temple, waiting to hear the fate of the Toa of Light.

“I bring word from Takanuva!” Hahli blurted. She climbed out of the hole, breathing hard. “He wants us to follow. We are to awaken Mata Nui today!”

The crowd, hearing the news, murmured uncertainly.

“A light among the shadows,” Turaga Yakama said in a faraway voice. “The prophecy is fulfilled. We must go!”

Turaga Onewa’s face was grim. “If we descend into those tunnels, we will never again return!”

The crowd’s murmurs grew louder. The villagers looked by turns nervous, excited, and uncertain. Hahli climbed up onto a chunk of stone and held up Jaller’s mask. “This island is a great and wondrous place,” she declared. “Never has any people been as blessed as we are to live in such a paradise.”

All around her, Turaga and Matoran nodded in agreement. Taking strength from her own convictions—and her memories of Jaller—Hahli continued.

“I love my home,” she said. “And Jaller loved it, too. But above all Jaller respected his duty. Let us repay him by doing our duty. Let us remember him by fulfilling our destiny! Let us go forward together.”

She glanced around at the crowd, which was hanging on her every word. “Let us awaken the Great Spirit!”

The crowd burst into loud cheers. Hahli sighed with relief. She had done her duty. Now it was time for the island’s people to do theirs.

Takanuva barely managed to escape the ball of shadow. The effort of dodging it sent him flying off a pillar into space. He adjusted in midair, swinging his feet around until he was running straight down the pillar. The momentum carried him over to the protodermis pool just as another ball rose from it.

He grabbed it in his kolhii net. As soon as it transformed into a ball of light, he turned and hurled it toward Makuta.

But the dark one was ready. He swung his own kolhii stick, catching the ball of light in his net and transforming it into darkness.

Takanuva gasped in shock. Then he leaped to the side as the ball came hurtling back toward him, shattering another pillar and sending it collapsing into the floor. Once again, the Toa of Light barely dodged
in time, jumping over to another pillar – one of only two left standing in the cavern. He was growing tired. How much longer could he continue this game?

Makuta grabbed the next protodermis ball and transformed it. Then he walked toward the two pillars, searching for his quarry.

“An audience gathers for your final failure, Toa of Light,” Makuta said.

Takanuva leaped high up the pillar, staying just out of his opponent’s sight. “Maybe they will not see me win today,” he said. “But the Matoran will go on, and someday they will triumph.”

“You actually believe I would let them return?” Makuta said. “After all the trouble they have been?”

Just outside the cavern, Hahli rode Pewku toward the door, leading the six Toa, the six Turaga, and the Matoran crowd behind her. The Toa gathered around the crack in the doorway, looking through into Makuta’s cavern.

There was only one pillar left standing now. Takanuva clung to it, while Makuta stood at the base, a ball of darkness quivering in his net. The dark one turned, glancing toward the doorway.

“Now that I have them,” he said with malicious satisfaction, “they will not leave.”

With a sudden horror, Takanuva realized the truth – he had led his people into a trap!

“No!” he cried.

Makuta launched the ball of darkness toward the voice overhead. Takanuva ducked it. The ball struck the pillar, which started to collapse.

Takanuva landed on the ground on one side of the protodermis pool. Makuta stood on the other. Without hesitating, the Toa of Light flipped himself over the protodermis toward his enemy.

A ball of protodermis rose out of the pool, and Takanuva grabbed it in midflip, transforming it into a ball of light. He immediately rolled into his special kolhii move, somersaulting and throwing the ball at the same time.

This time it worked – the ball of light flew right into Makuta’s chest!

The force of the impact knocked Makuta backward across the chamber. He staggered, then dropped to his knees with a mighty crash. Light energy flashed through his body.

Makuta roared in pain as the light energy weakened him. “Well played, Toa,” he croaked.

Takanuva stepped forward. He had done it! He had finally defeated his enemy!

But Makuta wasn’t quite finished yet. As the Toa approached, the dark one suddenly flung out his hand, shoving Takanuva backward with surprising force.

Takanuva grunted, startled. He fell back hard, landing near the pool of protodermis.

Makuta climbed to his feet. “Now I will protect Mata Nui from you,” he snarled, marching toward the Toa of Light.

“Protect him?” Confused, Takanuva lowered his staff.

“Sleep spares him pain!” Makuta said. “Awake, he suffers.”

He continued stalking toward Takanuva, who found himself backing closer and closer to the pool of protodermis. The Toa of Light wasn’t sure what to think of the dark one’s words. How could he think that Mata Nui was better off remaining asleep? How could he think that was best for the island?

“But he does not live,” he protested, still perplexed.

Makuta raised his kolhii staff. Utter determination danced in his red eyes. “My duty remains to the shadows.”

Suddenly Takanuva smiled. The light had dawned in his mind – he knew what he had to do.

“Then let’s take a closer look at those shadows,” he said.

He dropped his kolhii staff and leaped toward Makuta, landing on his chest so that the two of them were face-to-face. With one hand Takanuva grabbed the Mask of Shadow, yanking it off of Makuta’s head. His other hand pulled his own mask free. Before Makuta could react, the Toa had switched the masks, shoving the Mask of Light onto the dark one’s face and placing the Mask of Shadow over his own face.

“No!” Makuta howled.
Makuta staggered in a circle, the mask pulsing on his face. Then he toppled backward into the protodermis pool, pulling Takanuva along with him.

The other six Toa rushed into the room, followed by the Turaga and the others. They all gathered around the pool. The still, silvery surface remained unbroken for a long, long moment. The Toa exchanged glances, not sure what to think.

Suddenly arcs of dark and light energy shot out of the protodermis and danced across the surface. The Matoran took a wary step back.

Then a huge head rose from the steaming protodermis. Makuta? No, it wasn’t the dark one – at least not completely. It was the merged face of Takanuva and Makuta – half Mask of Light, half Mask of Shadow. An enormous merged figure continued to rise slowly out of the pool, half light and half shadow.

Takutanuva. The light side of the mask spoke. “Light has revealed the will of Mata Nui,” Takanuva’s voice said. “Our brother must be awakened,” the Makuta side added.

The Toa, Turaga, and Matoran glanced at one another. None of them knew what to do or think now.

Takutanuva stepped out of the pool and walked toward the huge door set into the wall on the far side of the cavern. He crouched down, his fingers gouging the metal of the door as he tried to lift it. The door creaked and groaned, then slowly began to rise.

As Takutanuva struggled under the weight of the giant door, the Toa and the others stepped forward uncertainly and walked through into the chamber beyond. Hahli was still carrying Jaller’s mask as she stepped past the giant two-sided figure.

“Hold, little one,” Makuta’s voice stopped her. “That mask needs life.”

The shadowy side of Takutanuva reached out a hand. A powerful pulse of dark and light energy shot out from his fingertip, blasting into Jaller’s mask.

Hahli stepped back as the mask took on a life of its own. As she watched in amazement, Jaller’s body quickly regenerated from the mask – his head, his body, his legs bursting into existence out of nothing. A dim glow lit up the eyes behind the mask, and a moment later Jaller fell backward weakly.

Hahli caught him, stunned by what she had just seen. Could it really be? Could her friend have been brought back?

“Jaller!” she cried.

Jaller merely groaned in response, trying to take in what was happening.

But the energy of re-creating the brave Matoran had taken too much out of Takutanuva. He strained against the weight of the door, but it was no use. The metal door smashed down on him, sending up a thick cloud of dust that obscured the onlookers’ view.

The Toa and Matoran bowed their heads sadly. Jaller stepped forward, heartbroken.

“Takua!” he cried as Pewku whined sorrowfully nearby.

The cloud of dust swirled vigorously. Suddenly, a figure stepped out of it – Takanuva!

As Hahli gasped in surprise, Jaller raced toward his friend. Pewku ran even faster, leaping onto Takutanuva with joyful cries.

“You’re alive!” Jaller exclaimed gleefully, hardly seeming to notice his friend’s new form. Then he frowned. “Kolhii-head! You could’ve been Makuta bones!”

Takanuva grinned. “Could’ve been, but I’m not.”

Turaga Vakama raised his staff, interrupting the friends’ moment. “Let us awaken the Great Spirit.”

Hahli, Jaller, and Takanuva followed the Turaga to the far end of the new chamber. There, a ledge plunged away into dark nothingness.

“Unity!” Turaga Vakama said solemnly. “Duty! Destiny!”

As he spoke, Takanuva’s power illuminated his companions and himself. Their light shone down into the abyss, revealing what lay below.
The Matoran gasped in amazement as they saw a strange new world stretching out below them. The chamber at the bottom of the cliff was indescribably huge – it stretched farther than the eye could see. Strange structures dotted the landscape, and flashes of energy danced here and there.

Takanuva nodded as he surveyed. *This is it*, he thought as a feeling of certainty settled through him. *Soon we will understand everything. Who we are. Where we come from. Who sent us.*

*Our destiny.*