Chapter 1

Vezon walked between worlds.
At least, that's how he saw it. Lately, it seemed like every step he took left him somewhere completely different. One moment, he was out in the sunshine, seeing Matoran and Dark Hunters working together in perfect harmony (granted, they were building a giant cannon, but they were still getting along well). The next moment, everything had shifted and he was in a quite different place. Here, a group named the Great Beings had built a 40 million foot tall mechanical being they named Makuta. Unfortunately, his brother, Mata Nui, was plotting a rebellion against him.

How had this all begun? He tried to remember, never the easiest thing for Vezon to do. He had donned a Kanohi Olmak, the Mask of Dimensional Gates, which he had found on Destral. A portal opened up in front of him then. Eager to escape the island, he stepped through it – only to find himself facing an oncoming tidal wave. It washed over him, but he did not drown. Instead, he fell through another portal, winding up in the middle of a swamp. And then another, and then another …

It took him quite some time to figure out what had happened to him – that his body, his essence, had fused to that of the Olmak. He was now, for all intents and purposes, a walking dimensional gateway.

There was still a lot to learn, of course. Was the effect permanent? Could he ever learn to control the power, so he could pick and choose where he went to? If he was holding something or someone, would they travel with him?

Wouldn't that be interesting? he thought. First thing I'd do is find Makuta Teridax and give him a great… big… hug.

Tahu used his elemental powers to light a small campfire. It was foolish, he knew. There were Exo-Toa in the area and they would zero in on the heat. Then again, being a Toa of Fire, they probably couldn't miss him anyway.
He glanced around the camp at his "team." It was not a sight to inspire confidence. In the days since Teridax took over the universe, the Toa Nuva had scattered (they were too easy of a target if they stayed together). Hooking up with other fugitives as they went, they made for places of relative safety in order to regroup and plan.

This explained why Tahu was sitting in the blasted ruins of Karzahni with a Ko-Matoran, Kopeke; Johmak, a female Order of Mata Nui member with the ability to shatter and

reassemble her body; Krahka, female shapeshifting Rahi; and two Dark Hunters, Guardian and Lariska.

Not exactly Gali, Lewa and Kopaka, thought Tahu. But they will have to do.

“We’ll stay here a few more hours, then move out,” he said. “Onua said there were a few Order of Mata Nui agents somewhere south of here, looking for a cache of weapons and supplies. We’ll hook up with them.”

“And then what?” grumbled Guardian. “Throw rocks at the sky? Challenge the wind with Cordak blasters? All we’re doing is delaying the inevitable – and we all know it.”

“And the alternative?” asked Johmak. “Bow and scrape before Makuta, begging him for one more moment of life in which to serve him? Let me die, then, as long as I do it as a free being.”

“Tahu … what are we going to do?” Kopeke asked, in hardly more than a whisper. “Guardian is right. We’re trying to fight the universe itself.”

“No, we’re not,” said Tahu. “We’re fighting a madbeing who controls the power of a universe. And it’s not like learning a new machine at a Ta-Metru forge – it takes time and practice to master a system so complex. And we’re not going to give him that time … we’re going to do a Pohatu on him.”

“A Pohatu?” asked Kopeke.

Tahu smiled. “That’s right. ‘When in doubt, smash everything and hope you’re somewhere else when it all goes boom.’”

Guardian got up and walked away from the fire. He had nothing against Tahu, but there had to be a better way. Maybe instead of running from place to place, they should be trying to find a way out of this universe. Could be this place was lost, and it was time to accept it and move on. It wasn’t an easy choice, but those weren’t the kind he was used to making anyway.

Beneath his feet, the ground opened. Bonds made of solid stone wrapped around him, yanking him down into the hole even as he screamed. Then the barren earth slammed shut again, and he was gone.

The team was on its feet. “It’s Makuta,” said Tahu. “He knows where we are. He’s toying with us!”

“Tell us something we don’t know,” snapped Lariska. “Like what do we do about it?”

Before Tahu could answer, a dozen Exo-Toa appeared on the rise. Their missiles were loaded and aimed at the fugitives. The lead machine spoke in the voice of Makuta Teridax.

“Citizens of the Makutaverse, you are in an unauthorized area. You will accompany these Exo-Toa to Metru Nui, where you will be … retrained for new work that will benefit all my people. You will live out your lives there, in peace and prosperity, wanting for nothing … or you die, now.”

“You know what?” said Lariska. “This may turn out to be the shortest revolution on record.”

Chapter 2

Axonn had been running for many days and nights. After being teleported from Metru Nui by the power of Teridax, he had found himself in a vast, barren landscape. At first, there was no sign of any life at all, Matoran or Rahi, or any habitation. That changed when he began to hear the screams. They were cries of agony and they were coming from Brutaka, though his old friend was nowhere to be seen.
The warrior had raced off in the direction of the screams. That had been – how long ago? A week ago? A month? He had crossed the wasteland that never seemed to end, but had been unable to find Brutaka. Strangely, he had felt neither hunger nor thirst on the journey, just an overpowering need to keep searching.

A few things had begun nagging at him, though, like the buzz of a fireflyer in his ear. The landscape never changed. He could swear he had seen the same rock formations time and time again, as if he were running in a circle. And Brutaka – not even he could endure what he seemed to be for weeks at a time. His screams should have died out long ago.

Then the crack appeared in the sky. It was only a small one, but bright light flowed through it from somewhere outside. That, too, made no sense. No sooner had Axonn said that to himself then the crack got bigger. Then more cracks started to appear, in the sky, in the ground, all around him.

This can't be happening, Axonn thought. This can't be real. This... isn't real!

The next instant, Axonn was sitting on a beach. Water lapped against the shore in front of him, and behind, a gentle breeze stirred jungle trees. Flying Rahi circled in the sky overhead, now and then diving down to steal a fish from the sea. There was no sign of the endless waste had been in before.

Of course not, he thought. I was never there. With his powers increased by being in Mata Nui's body, Makuta can pierce even an Order member's mental shields. My days and nights of running, Brutaka's screams … all an illusion.

Axonn rose. He still had his armor, his mask, and his axe. He wondered if perhaps his mask, which could see through any deception, had been the difference between his escaping Makuta's trap and being lost in the fantasy forever.

He didn't know for certain where he was, nor did he care at the moment. All that mattered to him was where Makuta was, and he knew that answer. Somehow, some way, he was going to make it back to Metru Nui – and Makuta was going to pay for what he had done, even if it cost Axonn his life.

Far away from Axonn's island, Tahu and his ragtag team were facing the potential end of their own lives. The group was confronted by a squad of heavily armed Exo-Toa,

prepared to imprison or execute them. Tahu doubted the machines much cared which option they pursued.
He calculated the odds. Lariska, Krahka, Johmak and he could take out four Exo-Toa, maybe even eight if they caught a break. That would still leave four of the machines free to cut them down. In the past, he would have just accepted the situation and vowed to go down fighting. Now he was trying to use his brain as much as his brawn, because the fight against Makuta could not afford to lose warriors to needless sacrifice.

He had settled on a plan – a mock surrender, followed by an escape attempt before they reached Metru Nui -- when the ground began to shake. At first, he thought it was another attack by Makuta. Then the tremors became more violent and some of the Exo-Toa lost their footing. They didn't have to bother getting up again. A chasm opened up directly under the machines and swallowed them up. Tahu ran to the edge of it, and saw nothing but darkness. At least, at first...

"Brother! Can you give me a hand?"

Tahu smiled. Onua Nuva was clinging to the rocky wall of the crevice. The Exo-Toa had not been so lucky, having tumbled down into what looked like a bottomless pit.

The Toa of Fire helped the Toa of Earth back to solid ground. He nodded toward the chasm, saying, "You still do good work."

"I have been keeping in practice," said Onua.

"We were just about to head south to find those Order agents you mentioned, the ones looking for weapons," said Tahu.

Onua shook his head. "Don't bother. Rahkshi got them, and the supplies."

"Then we pick another direction," said Tahu, "and we keep moving."

Lariska walked over, sheathing her dagger. "So. Any bright ideas? There are more Exo-Toa where those came from."

"And more Rahkshi," agreed Tahu.

"Onu-Matoran," said Onua, smiling.

"What are you talking about?" asked Lariska.

"Onu-Matoran live underground most of their lives," explained the Toa of Earth. "The first time they come to the surface, the bright light overwhelms them. Most are blinded for a short time, until they get used to the environment. That's how Teridax is now. He's

not used to all this new power yet, or trying to see in every direction at once. He needs other eyes and ears within the universe – the Rahkshi and the Exo-Toa."

"What do you have in mind, and does it include explosions?" asked Tahu, hoping it did.

"Oh, it does," Onua assured him. "A Toa of Earth learns to … excuse the pun … keep his ear to the ground. Makuta may be all-powerful, but he still needs to make Rahkshi the same old way – by making worm-like kraata who then turn into his warriors. And I think I may know just where those kraata are coming into being."

"We strike there," said Tahu. "Maybe we can cut off his supply of Rahkshi, temporarily. It's a start."

"How far?" asked Lariska.

"We'll get there," said Onua. "Makuta picked the one source of energized protodermis the Order of Mata Nui wouldn't think to try and shut down – the one on their own island of Daxia. He leveled their fortress and seized control of the island. That's where we have to go."

"Guarded?" asked the Dark Hunter.

"Like it's the treasure of the Great Beings," said Onua. "Bring an extra dagger."

Lewa's mission was simple and straightforward. With the help of information from a surviving Order agent, he was headed for the island of Artakha. Somehow, the powerful ruler of that land had to be convinced to do more than sit back and make armor and weapons. They needed him in the fight.
As he came within sight of the island, he could tell he was already too late. Shattered Rahkshi littered the coastline, but more were advancing on the fortress. Artakha's Matoran workers were fighting a desperate holding action, but it was a lost cause. The only hope was to somehow pull off a rescue of Artakha himself before Makuta's forces overcame him.

Lewa was about to launch himself into a power dive when a voice echoed in his head. Do not, it said. It is too late. But there is another who can aid you, if I have fallen. Go to him. Persuade him to join your fight.

"Who are you talking about? And where do I find him?" said Lewa.

"There is still time", said the voice of Artakha. "I will send you to him. The rest is up to you."

The world spun, and then Lewa was no longer in the air above Artakha. Instead, he was

standing in a dark cave, facing a blank wall of stone. He could feel something behind him, the way one could feel a bog leech crawling up the back of the neck. Lewa wanted to turn around and see what was there – and at the same time, he knew he really didn't want to see.

Turn. This voice was also in Lewa's mind only, but it had none of the comfort and assurance that could be found in Artakha's. If it was possible for a voice to have a scent, this one reeked of death and decay.

"Who are you? Where am I?" said Lewa, staying right where he was.

You are at the end of your journey … the end of all journeys, Toa. And my name is Tren Krom.

Chapter 3

Kapura moved swiftly (for him) through the shadows of Metru Nui. His destination was the outskirts of Ga-Metru, specifically a portion of the Archives underneath that spot. The sign carved into the wall outside his shelter had told him where to go, and even who was to meet him there, but not the most important answer: why.
Cautiously, he peered around the corner of a building. The way seemed clear. Rahkshi stood guard over most entrances to the Archives, but not this one. It led to a section of the vast museum that had been deemed unsafe decades ago and abandoned. Even when Matoran and Toa retreated below in the days right after Makuta's take-over of the universe, they had avoided this region.

He slipped across the street and, with great effort, raised the hatch. It let out a shrill creak he was sure every Rahkshi in the city could hear. Kapura froze. Was that the whistling sound of Rahkshi flying through the air toward him? No, it was just steam escaping in Ta-Metru. He waited a moment more, and when no hostile force appeared, he ducked into the tunnel and closed the hatch behind him.

It was dark and dank inside. The faint stench of Muaka lingered in the air. Kapura found himself remembering another recent visit to the Archives, when he had gotten lost in the maze of passageways. That time, he had almost wound up a meal for an escaped exhibit and it was only the timely arrival of Toa Takanuva that saved him. He wished that his friend had picked a different place for their meeting... but then remembered that only this sort of a spot would do.

"You're late."

Macku stepped out from a recess in the wall. Her blue armor was stained with mud and she moved with a slight limp, a souvenir of an escape from some Exo-Toa a few days before.

"Sorry," said Kapura. "I had to make sure I wasn't followed."

"We'll wait a few more minutes for Hafu," Macku said. She sounded tired... no, beyond tired, Kapura thought. More like she was barely holding herself together.

"Is he working today?"

Macku nodded.

Kapura frowned. All of the Po-Matoran carvers had been put to work carving statues of Makuta for placement all around the city. The order hadn't come from their new "Great Spirit," but rather from the new "Turaga" of Metru Nui – Ahkmou. No, he wasn't a true Turaga – he had never been a Toa, after all, which was the prerequisite – but his past

association with Makuta had put him in a position of power in the city.

“We should have killed that lousy traitor long ago,” Macku muttered.

Every Matoran remembered Ahkmou’s crimes on the island of Mata Nui, involving the sale of kodan balls tainted with Makuta’s darkness. Many had heard the tales of his sins on Metru Nui as well, in the weeks before the Great Cataclysm. Although he had largely kept to himself for the past year, no one really trusted him. But Turaga Vakama insisted he not be exiled. “Better to keep a doom viper beside your bed than to let it wander free. At least then, you will know from which direction its strike will come.”

The hatch opened again with a screech. A shaft of dirty light pierced the gloom of the Archives. Macku and Kapura instinctively hid until the light was gone. Then they heard the reassuring sound of Hafu’s voice, saying, “Anyone remember why we wanted to come back to this city?”

Macku laughed, though there really was nothing to laugh at. But it felt good to be around these two Matoran again. So many of the others up above had given up. Rahkshi and Exo-Toa were everywhere, and the only Toa visible were the Toa Hagah, who seemed oblivious to everything going on around them. When questioned, they insisted that Makuta Teridax had been defeated and all was well on Metru Nui. Worse, one could tell they really believed this delusion.

“What’s the situation?” asked Hafu. “You know that symbol is only supposed to be used in an emergency.”

“This is an emergency,” Macku assured him. She had taken a great risk drawing the “help” symbol – a crude sketch of a Rahkshi – near the homes of her friends. Ahkmou had forbidden the creation of any unauthorized art.

The Ga-Matoran turned and headed deeper into the Archives. Hafu and Kapura followed. She led them all the way down into the sub-levels, moving as if she knew the place as well as Ga-Metru. Kapura was completely lost and he suspected Hafu was, too.

“In here,” Macku said quietly. She beckoned them to follow her into a large chamber that had once housed a particularly nasty specimen of Rahi primate. There was someone else in there now – a Toa of Water, wounded, stretched out on the stone floor. But it wasn’t Gali or Gaaki or any other Toa Kapura recognized.

“Who is she? Where did she come from?” asked Hafu. Suspicion colored his voice. He had seen too many Makuta tricks to believe anything at first glance anymore.

“She says her name is Tuyet,” said Macku. “And that she’s here to help.”

Hafu had heard the name once... something to do with Toa Lhikan, if he recalled correctly, but he didn't know the tale. "She doesn't look like she can help herself, let alone us."

"You might... be... surprised," the female Toa said, lifting her head to look at Hafu. "So might a lot of people. Tell me, where is Toa Lhikan?"

"Dead," said Kapura. "Killed by Makuta."

Hafu shot him a look. It wasn't smart to share information with strangers like that.

"And Toa Nidhiki?"

Kapura glanced at Hafu and shrugged. Then he turned back to Tuyet. "Dead, too. Makuta... ate him, I guess."

"Look, we're happy to see you and all," said Hafu. "But one Toa more or less isn't going to make a difference here. Not unless you have a super-weapon hidden away that can cleanse Metru Nui of Makuta's forces."

Tuyet sat up. She reached into her pouch and pulled out a piece of crystal about the size of her fist. "As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I do have."

"And do you think Makuta will give you the chance to use it?" asked Macku. Half hopeful, half skeptical.

"Makuta is the Great Spirit, correct?" asked Tuyet. "And the Great Spirit knows all about everyone who lives in his universe... where they are, what they're doing... all he has to do is think about them?"

Kapura nodded.

Tuyet smiled. "Then I am the perfect ally, little ones. I am dead... and have been for some 2000 years."

Chapter 4

Makuta Teridax, in the huge robotic body that once belonged to Mata Nui, surveyed the world he stood upon. There was nothing but water for as far as the eye could see – and when one is 40 million feet tall, reflected Makuta, one can see quite far.
It was, he decided, quite a dull world. Oh, it was true that beneath the surface of the vast ocean, escaped prisoners of the Pit still struggled to survive. But they were so unimportant as to be beneath the notice of so great and powerful a being as himself. While it was true he could not affect their fates in the same way that he could one of the living things that dwelled inside his body – the Toa, Matoran, etc. – his new body had enough power to vaporize this ocean, if need be. Perhaps he would do it before he left this world, just for amusement.

And make no mistake – he would be leaving this planet of endless sea. There were other worlds out there, teeming with life, waiting to be conquered. Why should he be satisfied with ruling a "universe" inside this body, when he could master a true universe of planets and suns and stars? This robot body had the power to lay waste to cities, to shatter mountains, and yet Mata Nui had never used any of it. Well, Makuta would not be so foolish.

Naturally, there would be preparations to be made. He would need to extinguish any last bits of rebellion within the universe of the Matoran first. It would be stupid to risk some critical breakdown in his systems in the middle of a war, just because some tribe of Matoran decided to value the concept of freedom over the hard, cold facts of death. When this was done, Makuta would beckon to the red star above and begin his journey.

The thought sparked another, an even more wonderful idea. He had expelled the Mask of Life from inside him, with the mind of Mata Nui trapped in the mask. The powerful Kanohi had gone flying into space, perhaps to burn up, or shatter against an asteroid... or, somehow, to find refuge on some other world. Though far away, it was still a part of this body, and Makuta knew he could find it again. He could track it down, no matter where, and extinguish any flickers of hope that Mata Nui might be feeling. The mask and all its powers were a dust mote in Makuta's eyes now, and he would prove it by crushing it to powder with his armored heel.

It was a pleasant fantasy, but there were realities that had to be dealt with first. He had sensed the presence of another Makuta among the Matoran, which should have been impossible. All the other Makuta had been slain, either by him or by Order of Mata Nui agents. Well, that was not strictly true, he supposed... Miserix was still alive, though that former leader of the Makuta did not know it. As far as Teridax's old enemy knew, he had been changed into a two-dimensional drawing on a wall, and that was how everyone else saw him too. In the old days, it would have taken a considerable amount of energy to maintain such a successful illusion, especially for another Makuta. But with his powers amplified by his new form, it was practically effortless.

But the Makuta he sensed was not Miserix. No, it was one who was totally unfamiliar... and yet disturbingly familiar at the same time. And since he could not be an existing one, nor one who was just created, there was only one answer.

He has come from another dimension. My enemies have recruited a Makuta to use against me. How... enterprising of them. I must give their new recruit a proper welcome.

Mazeka and his newfound Makuta ally found themselves in an uninhabited portion of the southern continent. The valley they stood in was actually quite lush and beautiful, but Mazeka remembered well the tales of this place. The tall grasses that swayed in the light breeze were guardians of this place. They could sense movement and responded by wrapping themselves around the offending foreign object and strangling it. The remains would then be pulled underground and the valley would go back to looking beautiful and unspoiled.

“Stay still,” he advised the white-armored Makuta beside him. This was an alternate universe version of Makuta Teridax, from a world where the Makuta had never gone bad. In return for agreeing to leave his old enemy Vultraz there, he had been given the opportunity to bring one inhabitant of that dimension back with him. He had chosen that world’s Teridax, hoping the double would be able to predict the actions of the original.

“We have such things in our world too,” said the alternate Teridax. “We know how to deal with them.”

As Mazeka watched, darkness began to creep over the valley. Wherever it passed, the grasses withered and died. “Wait a minute,” said Mazeka, suddenly suspicious. “You told me that Makuta in your world had banished all trace of shadow from inside them. How can you control the darkness then?”

The alternate Teridax gave a whisper of a smile. “I cannot. But I can absorb the light... and what is darkness, but the absence of light? And now, I believe we have someplace else we need to be.”

Walking down the now darkened path, the two allies made their way out of the valley as their quest truly began...

Toa Tuyet could hardly believe her good fortune. Thousands of beings she might have encountered in this universe, and she had found two who did not remember her or her

deeds. That would make things so much easier.

Her momentary weakness, the result of a difficult journey to get here, had passed. Now she walked through the Archives behind the two Matoran, Kapura and Macku, listening to them talk. It had not taken her long to grasp the situation here. Her old fears had been proven right. The Makuta had rebelled against Mata Nui and now controlled this universe. If Lhikan and Nidhiki had listened to me, none of this would have happened... because there would have been no Makuta left alive, she thought.

How well she recalled how it had all come about. She had been a Toa in Metru Nui, millennia ago. Using a powerful artifact called a Nui Stone, she had tried to make herself mighty enough to destroy those she perceived as threats to peace – the Dark Hunters and the Makuta. She knew other Toa, like Lhikan, would object to her plans, so she had to keep it all a secret.

Unfortunately, it could not stay hidden for long. Dark Hunters arrived in Metru Nui, seeking the Nui Stone they believed she had. To neutralize them, she framed them for murders of Matoran that she herself had committed. Toa Lhikan and Toa Nidhiki captured the Dark Hunters, but later tumbled to the fact that she was the murderer and had the Stone. In the ensuing battle, the stone was shattered and she was captured.

The Toa locked her up in the Coliseum until they could decide what to do with her. One night, a golden figure appeared in her cell, identifying himself as Botar of the Order of Mata Nui. He told her what she had already figured out for herself: pieces of the Nui Stone were embedded in her body now, making her a living battery of Toa power. No conventional prison would be able to hold her for long, not as long as there were Toa anywhere around from whom she could drain power. But the Order wanted more than a more efficient way to lock her up – they wanted the secret of the Nui Stone so they could make more.

This was an effort so secret that only the highest ranks in the Order knew about it. So a complicated plot ensued. Botar teleported Tuyet to another dimension, one where no Toa existed for her Nui Stone to drain. To keep this concealed from lower-ranking Order members, a second Tuyet – from yet another dimension – was taken to the Pit in her place. This double was even altered so that she had crystals embedded in her, although not from a Nui Stone. She would remain in the Pit, while the original Tuyet would be locked up and interrogated about the nature of the Stone.

For 1500 years, the Order tried to pry the secret of the Stone out of her, with no success. All the while, she plotted her escape. Working on one of her guards, she managed to convince him of the justice of her cause (after all, the Order disliked Dark Hunters and Makuta as much as she did). Finally, the guard was sufficiently on her side to help her fake her own death in an explosion. Believing her body was vaporized, the Order didn't bother to search for her. Meanwhile, she used technology from that

dimension to escape.

With no map, it took her two thousand years to make it back to her own universe... two thousand years filled with visiting worlds teeming with Toa from whom she could draw strength. Finally, she found a way back home, ending up in the Metru Nui Archives.

As for what had happened to her double in the Pit, she had no idea. She supposed the Order would know, and one day, if she was bored, she would squeeze the information out of them. But for now, she had bigger tasks ahead of her.

Tuyet had no doubt she could organize and lead a successful rebellion against Teridax and bring him down. But she had no intention of allowing Mata Nui to regain control. Thousands of years to think about it had convinced her that Mata Nui was weak, or he would have wiped out the Makuta himself long ago. No, what this universe needed was a ruler who was strong, decisive, unafraid to do what had to be done.

Someone like me, she said to herself. Yes, someone very much like me.

Chapter 5

The all-too familiar blurring of reality and wave of nausea struck Vezon. He really did have to find a way to control this new power, if for no other reason than it was starting to make him feel really sick. He wasn't sure how beings like Brutaka managed to move between dimensions all the time without losing their sanity... then again, like Vezon, maybe Brutaka didn't have that much sanity to lose?
Anyway, here he was. He was here. Which, of course, begged the question – where was "here," this time? The Kanohi Olmak that had become fused to his substance opened dimensional gates the way Matoran open gift boxes on Naming Day, and it was impossible to predict where one might end up.

He looked down. There was sand under his feet. In fact, there was sand in every direction. At first, he thought he was on a beach, but there was no water nearby. He could see trees and buildings in the distance, though, so he started walking in that direction.

The desert, as it turned out, was not very big. It gave way to a lush jungle, filled with a number of beings doing one of those things Vezon did his best to avoid: hard work. Some were obviously Le-Matoran... the others, Vezon did not recognize, though they had the look of villagers. He hated villagers. They were so... industrious.

One of the villagers loped over to him, using his arms as forelegs. He looked up at Vezon and said, smiling, "Are you a friend of Mata Nui?"

Vezon performed a complicated and challenging feat – he didn't laugh. "Why, yes, little... whatever you are. I am."

"Are you a Toa, then?"

"Nothing but," Vezon said, giving his best "noble and heroic" smile.

"Come on, then," the villager said, dashing off. "You're late."

Intrigued, Vezon followed along behind. This place had a Mata Nui and Toa, so it had to be something like home. But who were these other little runts? And just where was he?

"Um, excuse me, villager," Vezon began.

"Tarduk!" the villager shouted back at him. Vezon ducked, like he was told, but saw no sign of any tar flying through the air. It took him a moment that it wasn't "Tar, duck!" he had heard.

"Right. Whatever. Where am I?" said Vezon.

Tarduk paused and looked over his shoulder. “Oh, you must be from up north. This is Tesara. Now, hurry up, please – Gresh and Toa Kongu need more help.”

Gresh? Vezon said to himself. What’s a Gresh? But Kongu... him, I know.

They pushed their way through some undergrowth, and Vezon stopped short. There were Toa – a lot of them – and some other warriors he didn’t recognize. They were repairing a huge, metallic shelter. Jaller was using his fire power to weld shut a seam, while a female in blue armor urged him to hurry up. She wasn’t a Toa of Water, at least Vezon didn’t think so – Toa of Water usually weren’t that pushy.

Vezon knew he shouldn’t go into the clearing – after all, he wasn’t extremely popular with Toa. Then again, if they saw him and attacked, it might make things interesting. It had been all of two days since someone had tried to kill him, and he was getting antsy.

Head held high, he marched up to where the Toa were working. A few nodded in his direction. One smiled. One Toa of Stone even waved! Vezon decided that he really hated this place.

“So who are you, exactly?” asked Tarduk.

“My name is... ah... Toa Vezon,” he said, loud enough for all the Toa to hear. “I’m the Toa of... of... Anarchy.”

Tarduk frowned. “Okay. I see. We were really hoping for Ice... gets pretty hot doing this work.”

Vezon looked around. No one had reacted at all to his name... not even Jaller. Was it possible --? No, it was too horrible to think about. Such a tragedy, such a loss, was beyond comprehension. But he had to face the fact:

This universe didn’t have a Vezon. It had never had one. Otherwise, surely someone would be shooting at him by now.

“We don’t get a lot of, um, news up north,” he said to Tarduk. “What exactly goes on here?”

“You don’t know?” said Tarduk. “Well, I suppose I should send you over to see Takua, but I think he is up in Roxtus today. It’s pretty simple really – the Great Beings, through Mata Nui, made things right around here. Then Mata Nui went up north, and a few months later, the Toa and Matoran and all the rest showed up.”

“And what happened to Mata Nui?”

Tarduk shrugged. “Tahu Nuva said something about the Valley of the Maze and power going back where it belonged. I didn’t catch too much of it. I’ve never been one for history, you know?”

Vezon turned at the sound of marching feet. A tall figure, unmistakably a Makuta, was leading a column of black-armored warriors in a drill.

“They’re early,” said Tarduk. “Ever since Tuma got deposed and the Makuta took over the Skrall, they’ve been nothing if not efficient. I’m glad they’re on our side!”

A few more questions spelled things out for Vezon, or at least came close to it. In this universe, the Makuta had never rebelled against Mata Nui. The Great Spirit had been allowed to proceed with his mission – whatever that was – without incident. After it was finished, he let at least some of the Toa and Matoran leave and live with the natives. That included the Makuta, who had smashed the ambitions of some local warlord but held onto the army.

Vezon was wondering what they even needed an army for in such a happy, peaceful, idyllic, mind-numbingly boring place as this when his question was answered, in very dramatic fashion. Coming over the dunes in the distance was an army, marching right for Tesara. Some of them he recognized – other Skakdi, like the Piraka, Roodaka and her Vortixx, and Makuta Miserix in dragon form. The black-armored riders on the two-legged reptiles were new to Vezon, but he doubted they had come to deliver fruit baskets.

“It’s an attack!” yelled Tarduk. “Quick, Toa Vezon – go help the Makuta. Use your power. I’ll get the others.”

Use my power. Right, thought Vezon. My power is to get the heck out of here. I just have to figure out how to turn it on.

The invaders smashed through the ranks of the Skrall warriors and headed for the village. The Skakdi in the lead hurled torches, setting the jungle ablaze.

Now would be a really good time for a dimensional gate to... anywhere! Vezon said to himself. Come on. Come on! I don’t want to die in a universe where I never lived... who will remember me, then?

But the power of the Olmak was strangely absent. And all Vezon could do was stand and watch as an onrushing horde surged toward him...

Chapter 6

Vezon had had better days. His newfound ability to travel to other dimensions had landed him on an alternate world called Spherus Magna, where Makuta, Toa, and some other race called Agori were happily living together. Well, mostly – a pretty good sized army of Skakdi, Vortixx, and Spherus Magna natives was headed for the right village in which Vezon stood.
It seemed a good time to leave. But Vezon had not yet achieved any mastery over the powers of the Kanohi Olmak that had been merged with him. It didn't work just because he wanted it to, and right now, he was starting to wish he had never seen the miserable thing to start with.

For the sixth time in the last minute, he willed the Olmak's power to take him away from this reality before the onrushing horde trampled him underfoot. This time, he felt the now familiar sensation of dizziness that preceded a dimension jump, and saw the world waver around him. But then something happened that had never happened before: everyone around him froze in place. When he tried to reach out and touch a Toa, his hand passed right through. Worst of all, he wasn't "traveling" – he seemed to be stuck in a realm of statues.

"This is better than being killed," he said to himself. "Not much better, but better."

His addled mind ran through all the possible scenarios. This wasn't much help, as he knew next to nothing about Masks of Power or how to repair them. If something had gone wrong with the Olmak, he might well be stuck forever.

Would that be so bad? The voice was in his head – this wasn't an unusual experience for Vezon, although normally the voices he heard were his own.

"If it doesn't get any more entertaining than this, yes," Vezon replied. "Who am I speaking to?"

My given name wouldn't mean anything to you. The people of Spherus Magna would call me a "Great Being."

"And what makes you so great?"

I do not speak to the beings of this world. They never see me, or hear me, and so it is left to their imaginations to conjure what I am like, how I think, and what I believe. The imagination has an infinite capacity to fill in the blanks with what it wants to be there.

"That's nice," said Vezon, impatiently. "Can you help me get out of this situation?"

Why would I? I got you into it. My people created the first Masks of Power. We certainly

know how to shut one off. You don't belong here … in fact, I strongly suspect you don't belong anywhere. And so, now you are nowhere.

"Is this what Great Beings do all day? Stick their phantom noses into things that don't concern them and get in the way of a perfectly good lunatic rampaging through realities?" asked Vezon.

I am, perhaps, not a typical Great Being, the voice replied. Eons ago, I made the error of touching the Mask of Life. As a result, everything around me – furniture, equipment, rays of light – came to life. For their own safety, my fellow rulers imprisoned me. Now all I need fear are my living chains … living blocks of stone … and the screams of light as the darkness extinguishes it.

Vezon didn't know anything about what pains a living light might feel, but he did know a light at the end of the tunnel when he saw one. "So you're in prison, and so am I. Would you set me free … if I could set you free?"

The voice in Vezon's head was silent for a long time.

Lewa stood stock still. Artakha had teleported him into a cavern, but he was not alone there. No, evidently he was sharing it with some being named Tren Krom … and something told Lewa he really didn't want to get a look at his host.
Turn, Tren Krom said again. His telepathic "voice" reminded Lewa of a nest of slithering borer worms.

"I am ever-fine right here, thanks," said Lewa. "Artakha said --"

I can guess why you have come, Toa, Tren Krom replied. I too heard the voice of Makuta Teridax coming from every corner of the universe. But what would you have me do? I have knowledge that could be used as a weapon against him, but knowledge without the experience to use it is less than useless. And I am bound to this island by the Great Beings, unable to venture forth.

"And if the Great Beings did it, I doubt I have the power to quick-free you," said Lewa. "So this journey was another waste of time."

Perhaps … and perhaps, said Tren Krom. There may be a way. But it would involve great risk … and success, for you, might be worse than failure.

"Everyone I care about is at risk," Lewa answered. "Everything that matters to me has been poisoned by Makuta's corruption. I'll do whatever it takes to stop him."

You may live to regret your choice, said Tren Krom. But the choice has been made just the same.

Lewa felt a tentacle wrap around his neck. His arms went up to tear it away, then stopped halfway there. The next instant, the world began to spin and he felt as if his insides were being yanked out a piece at a time. There was light and pain and impenetrable darkness. And when the shadows cleared away, Lewa was staring at ... himself.

He looked down, for only a micro-second, long enough to see a huge tentacled mass grafted to stone. Instinctively, he knew that was Tren Krom's body – and his mind was inside it.

"Freedom." The word came from Lewa's mouth, in Lewa's voice, but it was spoken by Tren Krom. "After so long, I have a body again … a strong, powerful body that can take me from this wretched place … thanks to you."

Lewa tried to speak and couldn't. At first, he panicked. Then he recalled that Tren Krom had spoken to him telepathically. He concentrated and his words echoed in "Lewa's" brain.

What have you done? I didn't quick-agree to this!

"You said 'whatever it takes,'" Tren Krom replied. "This is what it took. But do not fear – I will honor our bargain. I will use what I know to stop Teridax. All I ask in return is freedom. Is a life spent in exile here so high a price to pay for the safety of all you know and love?"

Before Lewa could form an answer, Tren Krom – in the body of the Toa Nuva of Air – had left the cave. Lewa tried to pursue, but the great bulk of this body was a part of the island itself. He could not move.

And if I don't find a way to get my body back, he said to himself, I'm going to be ever-trapped here for good.

Chapter 7

Tren Krom stood on the shore of what had been "his" island for so many thousands of years – his home, his prison, his place of torment. For almost as long as he could remember, he had been trapped here by the power of the Great Beings. By all rights, he should hate them and their creation, Mata Nui, and want revenge.
Strangely, he did not. Yes, he had raged against his imprisonment and vowed vengeance more than once. But as time passed, he grew wiser, recalling the old saying that "no one fights in a burning house." Pulling down the Great Beings' creation would not profit him at all. In fact, it would mean his death as well. And, despite having been pushed aside for Mata Nui more than 100,000 years ago, Tren Krom still felt a sense of responsibility for the universe he once looked after.

That was why he had tricked Toa Nuva Lewa into swapping bodies with him, so he could escape the island at last. What he hadn't counted on was that he would not get Lewa's power over air in the bargain. Without this, and with no boat or air vehicle, he had no way to leave the shore. Still, that was no worry. He knew who had sent Lewa to him, and so he knew the answer to his power.

Artakha, hear me.

It was a telepathic message projected over an unimaginable distance. Yet the answer came within seconds.

I am here, Tren Krom. I see you are still … resourceful.

The body will be of use, Tren Krom conceded, but only if I can travel in it to Metru Nui. You can make that happen.

And should I unleash you on the universe, then? wondered Artakha. The Great Beings bound you for a reason, so that Mata Nui could rule with no rivals.

Tren Krom cursed. Stop wringing your hands, you ancient fool. If you did not need me free, why did you send the Toa? You knew what I would do.

Artakha sent no message back. Instead, the world around Tren Krom began to shimmer and fade. When his vision was clear again, he was standing in a subterranean tunnel filled with a collection of broken equipment and dust-covered artifacts. He had never physically been to this place before, but he knew what it was: the Metru Nui Archives.

My thanks, he thought.

Artakha's reply was stern. See that you carry out your end of the bargain, Tren Krom. And do not even think of keeping a body that is not yours. I will find a way to destroy it

before I will let you steal it for all eternity.

Tren Krom ignored him. He was more concerned with finding his way to where he needed to go before Makuta Teridax acted to stop him. The Archives were a labyrinth of tunnels and none of the minds he had read recently knew the layout. He reached out, looking for a sapient being nearby who might know how to navigate the maze.

He found something else entirely. His mind brushed against another, one of incredibly strong will and ambition. Before he could probe deeper, he heard figures approaching. Readying Toa Lewa's weapon, Tren Krom braced for an attack.

"Lewa! Look, it's Toa Lewa!"

The happy cry came from a Matoran villager. A quick scan of his mind revealed his name was Kapura, and his companion was Hafu. But it was the blue-armored female that traveled with them that most intrigued Tren Krom.

"Isn't it great, Hafu? Now we have two Toa with us – Lewa and Tuyet."

Tuyet? Tren Krom took the time to read her mind, being none too subtle about it. He saw her past efforts to take over the universe, and her plans to try again in future. This one was powerful and dangerous … but she might be useful, as well.

For her part, Tuyet just smiled. She knew this was no Toa of Air who stood before her. She had never met Lewa Nuva, but no Air warrior wearing a Mask of Levitation had the kind of mental powers she sensed. So who was this, really, and why was he disguising himself as a Toa Nuva?

"If you are opposed to Makuta, then your help would be very … ever-liked," Tren Krom said, hastily adding in some treespeak for the benefit of the Matoran.

"I'm sure," said Toa Tuyet. "You have a plan, I take it?"

"If I did not, I am sure you would," Tren Krom replied, looking her right in the eyes. "Perhaps we can … quick-help … each other?"

"What a break," Kapura said, smiling. "Don't you think so, Hafu?"

The Po-Matoran looked from Toa Tuyet, who he didn't trust, to Lewa Nuva, who didn't seem like himself. "Yeah. Wonderful," he muttered.

The small group waited until nightfall. Then they slipped out of the Archives, heading for the Coliseum. Along the way, they passed Toa Pouks and Toa Bomonga casually strolling through the city as if nothing was wrong.

“Who are they?” asked Tuyet. “Traitors to the Toa cause?”

“They’re the Toa Hagah,” Kapura explained. “Something happened to them … no one knows what. But they walk right past Rahkshi like the monsters aren’t even there.” He shrugged.

Intrigued, Tren Krom touched the minds of the two Toa Hagah. Ah, he thought, a simple trick. Teridax made these Toa see a false reality where all is peace and serenity. For them, it’s an iron-clad illusion they could never break free of on their own. But for me …

A fraction of Tren Krom’s mental power tore Makuta’s artificial reality to bits. Pouks and Bomonga shook their heads, as if waking from a dream. Even as he restored them to the real world, Tren Krom sent his power cascading to the minds of the other Toa Hagah, freeing them as well.

“Perhaps fortune will smile on Metru Nui, and these Toa will return to their senses soon,” Tren Krom said. “Time will tell.”

“It usually does,” said Tuyet. “What will time tell about us, I wonder?”

Tren Krom looked at her. “Hopefully, nothing either of us would regard with shame.”

“Oh, no, of course not,” she replied, with a chuckle.

“Where are we going?” asked Hafu. “And do I really want to know?”

Tren Krom pointed to the Coliseum. “There. I have a message for Mata Nui. It may mean the difference between life and death for everyone.”

“Mata Nui?” asked Hafu, incredulous. “But Mata Nui isn’t there. Makuta Teridax exiled him from the universe, maybe killed him. How are you going to get a message to him? And what could he do to help us now, anyway?”

Tren Krom looked at the Po-Matoran. A strange smile came to Lewa Nuva’s mouth, the corners of it bent at an odd angle. “The answer to both those questions is the same … you would be surprised, Hafu. Very surprised.”

Chapter 8

Toa Helryx had made a decision.
Alone in her prison, with only the thoughts of Makuta Teridax and a portrait of Makuta Miserix for company, she'd had time to think. Teridax had made a point of telling her what he planned to do – harness the power of the Great Spirit's body and use it to conquer worlds. She had no doubt he could do it, too, unless he was stopped.

But how?

The obvious answer lay with the Matoran. There was an obvious connection between their labors and the health of the mechanical in which they lived. Simply put, if they stopped working, the robot would die, and Makuta Teridax with it. The problem was that Teridax would not tolerate a strike. No doubt he would slaughter some Matoran, in particularly agonizing ways, until the rest gave in. Brave as they were, the Matoran couldn't be counted on to stand firm in the face of their friends' suffering.

There was, of course, another problem too. The robot's death would inevitably mean the death of everyone that lived inside it – Matoran, Toa, Vortixx, Skakdi, everyone. The planet outside had no known land masses, and so no place to flee to. The inhabitants of the Matoran universe would suffocate or freeze in the darkness.

As leader of the Order of Mata Nui, Helryx had often had to make decisions that sent agents to their deaths. It came with the job. But could she make a decision that would send an entire universe to its grave?

Yes, as it turned out. She could.

Teridax had to be stopped before he killed or enslaved billions of innocents in the universe beyond. She wasn't certain she could bring him down, but she had to try. Her prison was near a sensitive area, whose destruction might be enough to slay the Makuta. A nova blast using her water power might do enough damage. Even if all she could do was cripple him, perhaps others could finish him off.

She closed her eyes and drew upon all her power. If she had any doubt or regrets, she pushed them aside. Helryx would do what she had always done: whatever was necessary.

An impossibly loud pounding broke her concentration. Had Teridax already discovered what she was about to do?

The next moment, a wall caved in. Stepping through the rubble were two Matoran, Toa Nuva Lewa, and a figure Helryx never thought she would see again: Toa Tuyet.

"You!" the Order leader snapped. "What are you doing here?"

"You're welcome," Tuyet replied. "I had no idea you were locked up here, Helryx. Poetic justice, considering how your kind imprisoned me for centuries, isn't it?"

Helryx looked to Lewa. Tuyet, free, was potentially a terrible menace. Perhaps if she and the Toa Nuva of Air acted quickly, they could take the rogue Toa down. But Lewa was paying no attention to Helryx. Instead, he seemed to be fixated on the picture of Miserix. Makuta Teridax had transformed his old enemy into a painting on the wall in a unique and nasty act of murder.

"Lewa? What are you doing?" she asked.

The Toa of Air ignored her. Instead, he muttered, "Interesting. Not dead, but so convinced that he is that he might as well be."

"Don't mind him," said Tuyet. "He's not this Lewa. I'm not sure who he is, only that he knew how to get us here. And now that we are here, I am sure I can find some way to use our arrival to my advantage."

Helryx glanced back at Lewa. The Toa of Air had his eyes closed and was reaching out with his right hand. But no cyclone erupted from his outstretched palm. In fact, nothing was happening at all.

And then, suddenly, something did.

The portrait of Miserix warped, as if it was folding in on itself. An instant later, Makuta Miserix himself stood in the chamber, in full reptilian glory. The Makuta looked dazed at first, then his eyes filled with rage.

"Where is Teridax?" he bellowed, so loud the walls shook.

"Well," said Tuyet. "That was a surprise."

"Shut up," Helryx barked, "all of you." She turned to the two Matoran. "Hafu, Kapura … this is no place for you. Go back to Metru Nui and get word to the resistance. Tell them to be prepared to act, and tell them … to make their peace with the Great Spirit and each other."

Hafu took a step forward, ready to argue for staying. But Kapura laid a hand on his arm and shook his head. There was no fight coming that they could be a part of ... somehow, he knew that this Toa of Water was talking about the end of everything.

Now it was Lewa Nuva's turn to speak. “A message must be sent. Mata Nui must be

prepared.”

"Who are you?" demanded Helryx.

"You knew of me as Tren Krom," said the Toa. "Like Tuyet, I am recently escaped from my prison. Now I have a task to perform."

He advanced past Helryx, walked to wall panel, and tore it off. A small bank of machinery had been hidden behind it. As he started to manipulate the controls, Helryx, Tuyet and Miserix all moved to stop him.

"Hold!"

Everyone in the room whirled to see who had spoken. Standing in the opened wall were Brutaka and Axonn. Brutaka was levitating and a greenish aura surrounded him. Axonn's left arm hung useless at his side. Both looked like they had been through a war.

"Tren Krom must do what he set out to do," Brutaka said. "The three must be one. This universe must live so that a world can be whole once more."

"This universe must die, and Teridax with it!" Helryx replied. "Axonn, Brutaka, I order you to subdue these three."

Brutaka smiled. "We no longer take orders from you, Toa Helryx. We take our orders from destiny."

"Just so you know," Axonn added, "Brutaka's his own 'we' these days. Long story."

Tuyet had stopped paying attention. She was eavesdropping on Tren Krom. Whatever message he was sending was for the most part not an audible one, but now and then he would mutter something she could catch. So far, she had heard the words "Ignika" and “golden armor." Both were intriguing, to say the least.

"Enough talk," growled Miserix. "Teridax is inhabiting this metal shell, and that means it gets destroyed, along with anyone who gets in the way."

"Don't start something you can't finish," warned Tuyet. "I may have use for this universe."

"Brutaka, maybe Helryx is right," said Axonn. "Maybe this is the only sure way of stopping Teridax. Maybe it's what Mata Nui would want us to do."

Before the startled eyes of the Kapura and Hafu, battle lines were drawn. On one side stood Helryx, Miserix and Axonn – on the other, Tuyet, Lewa Nuva, and Brutaka.

"If it must be, it must," said Brutaka. "To save this universe, then ... Axonn, Helryx and Miserix must die."

Chapter 9

Mazeka stood on a ridge. Down below, he could see the remains of a dead village. He recognized it as having once been home to a small group of Ba-Matoran, those whose element was gravity. It looked like it had been overrun some time ago, but there were no sign of any Matoran corpses. Perhaps the villagers escaped into the hills, he thought, or maybe they were just captured.
"Your universe is very … turbulent," said Makuta Teridax. The white-armored warrior stood beside Mazeka. He came from an alternate universe in which the Makuta had never rebelled, but had instead stayed loyal to the Great Beings and helped save a world. He had come to this universe with Mazeka to try and free it from the control of his evil counterpart.

"That's one word for it," replied Mazeka. "It's hard to remember a time in my life when I wasn't fighting. I've been lucky. I'm still alive. Not sure that can be said about the Matoran who lived down there." "If they died, maybe it was a mercy," said Teridax. "Maybe they are better off not seeing what their universe has come to."

"Now you sound like our Teridax," said Mazeka. "I guess you two aren't as far apart as I'd like to think." Teridax shook his head. "A turn to the left instead of the right, a wound received or avoided, rising from slumber an hour too early or too late … these are the little things lifetimes hinge on, Mazeka. Your Teridax took a step on a path that circumstances allowed me to avoid. If circumstances had been different, who knows?"

"Meaning that if you took control of this universe instead of him …?"

"I might be just as wicked," Teridax answered. "It is always a possibility."

Around them, the winds rose. In a moment, they had gone from gentle breeze to a screaming maelstrom, so powerful it knocked Mazeka off his feet and sent him tumbling toward the edge of the ridge. Teridax fought to stay focused, ignoring the storm as he used his power to keep Mazeka from falling. But the ground erupted beneath his feet, shattering his concentration. Mazeka fell down the slope, followed swiftly by Teridax.

They landed among the ruins. Mazeka's impact shattered the long dead corpse of a Visorak into fine black powder. Teridax hit hard, but rolled with the fall and was back on his feet in an instant. Now that he looked around, he could see other bodies of Visorak spiders scattered here and there. The villagers who had lived here had gone down fighting.

Then a voice came from the dead mouths of the Visorak all around. Teridax recognized it as his own voice, but touched with madness and evil. "I see you have brought company, Mazeka … and such company."

“It’s Makuta,” Mazeka said. “He’s found us.”

“Yes, I never noticed your entry, I must admit,” Makuta said through the dead spiders. “But did you really think a pale and weak version of myself could stop me now?”

“Weak?” said the white-armored Teridax. “Stronger, I say, for I resisted the temptations you could not.”

“Indeed. Then let us see just what you are capable of resisting.”

The air crackled with ozone, and then before Mazeka and Teridax’s eyes, three figures appeared. Each resembled Takanuva, the legendary Toa of Light, but their armor was jet black and shadow energy swirled about their hands.

“I have been a poor host, brother,” said the voice of Makuta. “Allow my new friends to welcome you properly to my universe.”

Helryx avoided Tuyet’s slashing attack and landed a side kick in her mid-section. The corrupt Toa of Water staggered backwards, only narrowly avoiding being accidentally struck by Brutaka. The battle had begun only moments before, but already the chamber in which they fought was a shambles.
The issue over which they fought was deadly serious. Helryx, Makuta Miserix, and Axonn had decided that Teridax’s control of the universe had to be ended, even if that meant destroying the universe itself. Tuyet, Brutaka and a possessed Lewa Nuva believed there was still hope of driving Makuta out without killing millions of Matoran in the process.

Miserix thought he would have the easiest opponent. He could sense that Lewa Nuva was not himself, but was under the control of another. Whoever that was, they had no access to the Toa’s air power. That would make him ripe for defeat.

Unfortunately, Lewa’s body was now home to Tren Krom, an ancient entity with enormous mental powers. Miserix’s first solid blow knocked Lewa to the ground. The fallen “Toa” responded with a mental shock blast that came close to turning Miserix’s brain to ash. Still, Miserix had been through a lot in the past millennia – imprisonment, torture, humiliation – and no mind power was going to be enough to stop him. He gathered Lewa up in his claw and slammed his foe against the wall, once, twice, three times.

Axonn’s heart wasn’t in this fight. He had only recently rediscovered Brutaka and regained their old friendship. He couldn’t believe they were already at each other’s throats again. And he wasn’t certain that Brutaka was wrong – maybe Helryx’s plans were too extreme. Maybe duty lay in protecting the Matoran until the very last moment.

For this moment, though, he had to concentrate on protecting himself. One good hit from Brutaka would take his head off.

Helryx had not wavered in her determination, but she also knew that this battle was sure to draw Makuta Teridax's attention. Her chance to act could disappear at any moment. She had to do the nova blast now, before anyone could stop her.

Tuyet could guess what was about to happen. She slammed an elbow into Axonn even as Brutaka struck at him. Taking advantage of the moment, she wrested the warrior's axe from him. With a yell, she vaulted into the air and smashed Miserix with the axe. With a roar of pain, the reptilian Makuta fell backwards, right towards Helryx.

The mad Toa hit the ground and turned to watch the end of her handiwork. But to her surprise, just as Miserix was about to crush Helryx, the ancient female warrior vanished. The Makuta landed in a heap, but was barely slowed by his wound and already seeking out his attacker.

Tuyet never got a chance to defend herself. Helryx was suddenly behind her, catching Tuyet in a headlock. "Time to say goodbye," said Helryx. "We'll all go down together, and the universe will be better for it."

The world began to blur in front of Tuyet's eyes. At first, she thought that Helryx must be choking the life from her. But then she realized that everyone was looking toward the chamber's entrance, where space itself seemed to be warping. The next instant, a massive figure stepped out of the distortion and stood before them.

"You… imbeciles," the figure said, in a voice both old and young at the same time. "You ignorant stone apes… is this how you try to save existence?"

No one in the room had ever seen the newcomer before. But there were some who knew his voice, and all felt a chill of fear at the sound of it. Only Helryx had the presence of mind to give their visitor a name, and even she spoke it in a whisper.

"Artakha."

Chapter 10

At the sight of Artakha, the chamber went silent.
He stood at least 10 feet tall. His armor was gray-green and covered in runes carved at the beginning of time. His mask was the most ornate anyone had ever seen – more than just a Kanohi, it was a true work of art. The metallic protodermis from which it was forged was arranged in intricate patterns and designs, each reflecting one of the many cultures that flourished in the universe. The eye slits were angular and pointed, giving him an air of both wisdom and a vague sense of menace.

Artakha stood in the shattered doorway, facing some of the most powerful beings in existence. His stance made it clear he was their equal, if not their superior.

His cold eyes fell first on Lewa Nuva. “Your task is done,” he said. “Return whence you came.”

Lewa Nuva stared at Artakha for a moment, then turned without a word and started to exit, only to be blocked by the newcomer.

“Without the body,” said Artakha.

Lewa Nuva shrugged. “Payment for services rendered?”

“The mind of Lewa Nuva is trapped within your old body, Tren Krom, as you well know,” Artakha replied. “He deserves better than to suffer a fate meant for you.”

The mouth of Lewa Nuva smiled, though it was the mind of Tren Krom that made it so. “The words come easily to you, Artakha. You chose to live as an exile. I did not.”

“None of us choose our destiny,” Artakha replied. “And none of us can defy it. Go, Tren Krom. Have faith Mata Nui will reward you when all is said and done.”

Lewa Nuva nodded. “Faith, yes … a drop of water in place of an ocean.”

Artakha reached out and placed the palm of his right hand on Lewa Nuva’s forehead. “It’s more than time.”

The Toa’s body spasmed, then dropped to the floor. After a moment, Lewa’s eyes opened and he looked around, dazed. “Where …? I was … in a cave … in an ever-ugly body … and …”

Artakha ignored him. Helryx had advanced up to him, staring up at his masked face and making no effort to contain her fury. “This is no affair of yours, Artakha. Actions must be taken to contain the threat of Makuta, here and now.”

“Creation is my essence,” Artakha replied. “And you would destroy all that exists. I can’t allow that.”

“You can’t stop it either --”

“But I can.”

The voice reverberated throughout the chamber. It belonged to Makuta Teridax.

“Oh, who invited him?” muttered Lewa.

“Invited me?” asked Teridax. “As I recall, you are all guests in my home. And you have been most rude and destructive ones. I am afraid I am going to have to ask you to leave.”

“And if we refuse?” bellowed Axonn. “What will you do then, you formless freak?”

Teridax gave a low, mocking laugh. Then he said softly, “Why, then … I will have to insist.”

One instant, Axonn, Brutaka, Helryx, Artakha, Miserix, Tuyet, Lewa Nuva and two Matoran were inside a half-ruined chamber deep beneath Metru Nui. The next, they were floating in the airless, icy void of outer space, watching as the robot Makuta commanded soared away from them toward a distant world.

“I told you this was a bad idea,” said Toa Kongu.
“Quiet,” hissed Toa Hahli.

“Is the Order sure of its information?” asked Nuparu.

“As sure as they can be, with things as they are,” replied Hewkii.

“Then we better get to work,” said Jaller.

The five surviving Toa Mahri were crouched on the western shore of the island of Zakaz, home to the murderous Skakdi race. Ordinarily, it wasn’t the sort of place any sane person wanted to visit, wracked as it was by a millennia-old civil war. Back when they were Toa Inika, Jaller and his team had battled six Skakdi, the Piraka, and barely escaped with their lives.

Their mission here was as simple as it was perilous. The Order had learned that

Nektann, a powerful Skakdi warlord, had allied with Makuta Teridax and led his army on a journey south. Now it was vital to find out if any of the other warlords were going to follow his lead.

On top of that, there was a mystery to be solved. Following the widespread destruction on Daxia, the sea snakes that were once the evil Piraka had vanished. It had been believed they were just buried in the rubble, but rumors were flying they had been rescued and spirited away to Zakaz. For what purpose, no one could say.

To accomplish either of these, they had to get past the Skadi guards on the shore. That was Kongu's job. Using his control of air, he robbed the guards of anything to breathe until they passed out. Once they were down, the Toa Mahri advanced.

Their next obstacle was a small encampment of warriors, surrounded by a wall of thick stone. "Want me to bring the wall down?" asked Toa Hewkii.

"Just like we planned," nodded Jaller.

Hewkii concentrated and extended his power over stone to the wall. The next moment, the rocks began to explode. The alarmed Skakdi, thinking they were under attack by another tribe, rushed to their defenses … but couldn't spot the enemy. After a few minutes of "bombardment," they scaled the rubble and fled into the night.

Jaller turned to the Toa of Water. "Hahli?"

"It's this way," she answered, taking the lead. The Toa moved swiftly across the uneven terrain until they reached the mouth of the cave. By now, they could all hear the rushing of water. Hahli led them inside, where they saw an underground river.

"Perfect," said Nuparu.

"The Order says that will take us right into one of the larger ruins," said Hahli. "All we have to do is swim."

"That again?" asked Hewkii, in mock protest.

The Mask of Life had transformed the Toa Inika into water-breathing Toa Mahri not long ago. Then it had changed them again, making them true amphibians. One by one, they dove into the river and began to swim through the cold, dark water.

After an hour or so, during which time Nuparu discovered that there were some very nasty fish under Zakaz, they emerged in another cavern. Just beyond the mouth of the cave was a large area of ruins, in which about 500 Skakdi were gathered. One, obviously a warlord, was addressing the gathering.

“The Brotherhood of Makuta is no more,” he bellowed. “The Dark Hunters are a battered ruin. The Toa are scattered and hiding like stone rats. Who is there left for anyone to fear?”

“The Skakdi!” yelled the crowd in response.

“I don’t like the sound of this,” said Hewkii.

“I think you’re about to like it less,” said Nuparu. He was crouched down, with one hand on the soil. “Something is moving underground, maybe 20 bio from where we are. Something big.”

“For too long, we have been penned up on this island, by the will of the Brotherhood,” the warlord continued. “And now one of their number controls our universe, and believes he controls us, as well. But we will show him he is wrong!”

“Okay, well, it doesn’t sound like he and Teridax will be playing kolhii together anytime soon,” said Jaller.

“And I think he’s just getting warmed up,” said Hahli.

“Let our salvation now rise,” shouted the warlord.

“Here it comes,” said Nuparu.

Now they could all feel the rumbling underground, and soon, they saw what was causing it. A huge tank was rising up in the center of the ruins. One glance and the Mahri knew all too well what was inside of it.

“That’s energized protodermis,” whispered Jaller. “How did they --?”

“Questions later,” said Kongu. “Look at who just joined the party.”

The Skadi were hauling prisoners toward the tank. One was a Zyglak, the savage race of outcasts known for being virtually invulnerable to the elemental powers of Toa; next came a Vortixx, the crafty race that had spawned the evil Roodaka; and after that, one of the brutish race that served as laborers on Stelt.

“This makes no sense,” said Hahli. “Even if they throw them into the liquid, the three of them might just be destroyed by it … probably will be. So what’s the point?”

“None,” said Nuparu. “Unless … unless, somehow they know those three are destined to transform.”

“But the only one who could know that would be --”

“Teridax,” finished Jaller. “They probably don’t even know he put this idea into their heads. It’s another one of his sick games.”

“Just got sicker,” said Hewkii. “Or are those not the Piraka I see?”

The Toa of Stone was correct. Five Skakdi were carrying five sea snakes, each of the serpents gasping to breathe. At the warlord’s signal, the three prisoners and the five snakes were thrown into the energized protodermis tank. So engrossed were the Skakdi that they failed to notice a strange, greenish cloud that emerged from the nearby lake, hovered in the air a moment, and then plunged into the energized protodermis tank.

The liquid began to froth and bubble. The Toa Mahri could see a shape forming in the silver fluid, something monstrous and horrible.

“Tell you what,” said Kongu, “call me when it’s over. I don’t think I want to look.”

“I don’t think the Order’s going to like this,” said Nuparu.

“I don’t think anyone is,” said Jaller.

And then, before their eyes, a new and terrible form of life began to climb from the tank...

Chapter 11

How long is a fraction of an instant?
Long enough for Lewa Nuva to see the others in the chamber – Artakha, Helryx, Miserix, Tuyet, Axonn, Brutaka, Hafu and Kapura – starting to shimmer and fade … and long enough to realize he was not teleporting as they were. Teridax was leaving the Toa of Air behind, no doubt for some sinister reason.

Lewa wasn't having it. Before that fraction of an instant was through, he had grabbed onto Brutaka. It was a risk – a big one – to try to latch onto a teleport in progress. But Lewa was determined that wherever the others went, he would go.

In the next split second, he found himself floating in the void of space alongside the others. Of them all, only Miserix wasn't succumbing to suffocation, since antidermis didn't need to breathe. But the cold of outer space would claim him eventually. Makuta Teridax had thrown some of the most powerful beings in his universe out like the trash, and it looked like they wouldn't survive the experience.

Lewa summoned his elemental power, an effort in this environment, and created a thin bubble of air linked around the heads of all the castaways except Miserix. "Join hands!" yelled the Toa of Air, seeing the group members already beginning to drift away from each other.

Helryx turned to see the Mata Nui robot sailing away from them toward a planet in the distance. The world of the endless ocean was far beneath them. "Artakha, can you teleport us back inside?" she asked.

Artakha closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again, shaking his head. "Teridax is blocking our return. I can try to get us to his evident destination, but I cannot guarantee any of us will survive the journey."

"More likely we will all find ourselves materialized inside trees and rocks," muttered Tuyet. "We'll be just as dead."

"This is no way for a warrior to die," growled Axonn.

"Teridax must be stopped," said Brutaka. "We must do whatever we can, regardless of the danger."

Artakha nodded. But before he could use his great power, a hole appeared in space before him. An armored hand reached out and grabbed his arm, pulling him, and the other along with him, into the portal.

The nine found themselves sprawled on a damp stone floor. Kapura was the first to realize that the stone was moving, not to mention breathing. He cried out and got to his feet, backing against a wall. The bricks in the wall reached out to embrace him, holding him fast.

An armored figure, his face set in a hideous grin, stepped into the light cast by the one window in the room. “Kind of rattles you until you get used to it, doesn’t it?”

Miserix’s eyes narrowed. “I know you. You were among my rescuers from Artidax. You were the one who never shut up. Where have you brought us?”

Helryx stood as best as she could on the moving floor, weapon at the ready. “Vezon,” she said. “Explain yourself.”

“Not even a thank you?” said the mad Skakdi. “See if I save you from the darkness of outer space again, even if I only did it because he told me to.”

“’He’?” said Axonn. “Who?”

“Oh, didn’t I introduce you? How rude of me,” said Vezon. “Over there, in the shadows.”

The occupants of the chamber turned as one to look in the direction Vezon was pointing. They could barely make out a figure seated on the floor, chains affixed to arms and legs. The chains were writhing like serpents.

“Be careful,” Vezon added, in a loud whisper. “He’s quite insane, you know.”

“Matoran,” said a voice from inside the darkness, “amazing … and the rest of you … how proud I am. If I could, I would embrace you all.”

Helryx took two steps forward, saying, “Is this another of your tricks, Vezon? Who is this?”

Vezon put out a hand to stop her. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“You’re not me,” Helryx snapped, pushing him aside.

She had advanced as far as the edge of the shadow when her armor suddenly began to strangle her. The Toa of Water fell back, gasping for air.

“Would have been better if I were you,” said Vezon. “Less painful.”

Axonn slammed Vezon against a wall, pressing his arm against the lunatic’s throat. “Answers, Vezon. Now.”

“If you want answers,” choked Vezon, “you need to ask him. He’s the Great Being, after all, not me.”

A dry chuckle came from the darkness. “A Great Being, yes … that is what they called me … and my brothers and sisters. Angonce once said that name was the worst thing that ever happened to us, because we started to believe it was accurate. Perhaps he was right … perhaps that is why I am imprisoned here. But now you are here to free me.”

Lewa Nuva glanced out the window of the cell. He was stunned to see a forest that stretched as far as the eye could see, far larger than the jungle he had called home on the island of Mata Nui. “Where is here?” he asked.

“That’s right. You wouldn’t know,” said the Great Being. “Welcome, my friends, to Bota Magna.”

Pridak picked himself up off the ground, seething with rage.
His deal with the Shadowed One had been struck. He, Kalmah and Mantax had rebuilt their legions, while Ehlek had returned to the sea to gather his own troops. Of Carapar, there had been no sign for some time. They were poised to strike as soon as the Shadowed One unleashed the viruses on Makuta Teridax. The universe would be theirs to rule once more.

Then … nothing. The appointed time had come and gone, with only a violent earth tremor to mark it. At first, Pridak thought that quake was a sign that the Shadowed One had succeeded. But it rapidly became obvious that nothing had changed. Teridax was still in control.

Now Pridak had a choice. March on Metru Nui, and risk destruction at the hands of the Makuta, or stay put and risk rebellion by his legions. He had been a fool to rely on anyone else, he decided. The Shadowed One was, to use an old saying of his people, “either dead or fled.”

Pridak looked around. His legion was armed and ready. He was a warrior, a conqueror. There was no other choice.

“We march!” he yelled, to the cheers of his troops.

In a chamber on the island of Xia, the stone floor was littered with the shattered remains of precious vials. Of their contents – and of the Shadowed One – there was no trace. No one would look very hard for him. They were too busy trying to determine why every Vortixx in a kio radius had met a horrible death … and just what on their island could possibly have pulverized living beings into fragments, without leaving any sign of its presence.

The Toa Mahri watched in shock as the new lifeform emerged from the tank of energized protodermis. A mixture of a Zyglak, a Vortixx, a Steltian laborer, and the five surviving Piraka, it had been created by the barbaric Skakdi in an elaborate ritual. And now it was free.
It was terrible.

It was beautiful.

Towering 12 feet high, with gleaming golden skin, powerful muscles, and piercing green eyes, it regarded the assembled Skakdi with the benevolent gaze of a creator. Only the vaguely reptilian cast of its face took away from its stunning appearance.

“We live,” it said. “And we hunger.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” said Jaller.

“I haven’t like the sound of anything in at least a year,” replied Kongu.

“Do you think … they’re going to be a meal?” asked Hahli.

“I wish it was that simple,” said Hewkii. “But somehow, I think it’s going to be worse.”

“You will feed me,” said the new creation. “And in return, you will be granted a wondrous gift.”

The Skakdi moved a little closer. They were not a cautious people as a rule, and the concept of someone wanting to give them something – as opposed to them just taking it – was a new and appealing one. As they drew near, their creation closed its eyes, an expression of rapture on its face.

“Is it … feeding?” asked Nuparu. “On what?”

“I don’t know, but let’s make sure we’re not the next course,” said Jaller. “The Skakdi are distracted, and so is that … whatever it is. Get ready.”

“Yes,” said the golden-skinned being. “So much to savor. And so much to give in return.”

“This is it,” said Jaller. “Whatever it’s going to do, it’s going to do now. So let’s … let’s …”

Jaller paused, confused. There was something the Toa Mahri needed to do, urgently. What was it? He knew it was important.

Suddenly, it became crystal clear. Why hadn’t he seen it before? It was so obvious, after all. “The Skakdi are the superior race,” he said to his teammates. “Stronger, smarter …

we shouldn’t be opposing them. We should be following them.”

“Do you … do you think they would allow us to serve them?” asked Hahli.

“Even if they don’t … even if they kill us,” said Hewkii, “what better way to die?”

Throwing down their weapons, the five Toa Mahri rose and walked forward, ready and eager to obey the commands of their new masters.

Next: The Reign Comes to an End

Chapter 12

Teridax studied the three shadow Takanuva who blocked his path. They had been sent by the Makuta Teridax of this universe – the one who controlled the giant robot inside of which millions lived – to kill him and his companion, Mazeka. It was a good plan. After all, one Takanuva would be a challenge – three corrupted ones were deadly.
Teridax had multiple powers of his own to choose from. In his time and in his universe, he had been a great warrior. No doubt Makuta expected him to pit his energies against those of the Takanuva in an apocalyptic final battle and, outnumbered, die horribly after a few minutes. Mazeka would most likely not even last that long, though the Matoran would make sure his killers remembered the fight.

Ah, Makuta, thought Teridax. We are the same being in different universes, but I am not you. You're a plotter … a schemer … not wanting to get your claws dirty, if you can avoid it. You would think of all sorts of ways to fight the Takanuva from a distance … all of which would fail.

Teridax unlimbered his war hammer. You would never think of doing this.

He charged. Before the startled shadow Toa could react, Teridax had swung his hammer, striking one Toa in the face and shattering his mask to pieces. Whirling, he landed another hammer blow to the chest armor of a second Toa, cracking it down the center. Mazeka moved in then, catching the third Takanuva with a scissor kick and sending him to the ground. Teridax made sure he would never be getting up.

The now mask-less Toa staggered forward, firing shadow energy from his hands at random. One blast caught Teridax in the shoulder, badly damaging his armor. The warrior from another dimension did not have the luxury to feel pain just then, or worry about the antidermis escaping through the gap. He landed a side kick in the Toa's middle, while swinging his hammer again to stop the charge of the other Takanuva. The latter, still in the fight despite badly damaged armor, created a swirling fog of darkness to conceal his movements.

"Let me," whispered Mazeka.

The Matoran stood completely still, reaching out with all his senses. He knew that at any moment, the shadow Takanuva could strike and kill them both. But he could not dwell on that fear, not if he hoped to survive this battle.

There! The slightest scrape of boot on rock, about three feet behind him and to the left. Mazeka leapt, whirled in mid-air, and lashed out with a kick. His foot connected with the Toa's mask, knocking it askew but not dislodging it. Even as his momentum carried him forward, Mazeka landed a second blow to the shadow Toa's neck. Enraged, the Toa hurled tendrils of darkness that began to strangle the Matoran.

“Your friend is doomed,” the evil Takanuva said, smiling. “You’ll just beat him by a few --”

There was a sickening crunch. The shadow Toa’s face went blank. He staggered forward one step and then collapsed, revealing in the process just how much damage a war hammer in the hands of an expert could do. The tendrils dispersed and Mazeka scrambled to his feet.

“Where’s the third one?” asked the Matoran, as the darkness dispersed around them.

“There,” said Teridax, pointing to the north. “And there,” he added, gesturing toward the west. “Oh, and there’s some over there,” he finished, casually glancing to the east. “His mask was shattered. I thought he might like to join it.”

Mazeka chuckled. “You know, Toa wouldn’t approve of this … they don’t kill.”

Teridax shrugged. “Very noble … but considering the state of this universe, maybe they should have bent the rules a little more.”

“Try telling them --” Mazeka began.

Teridax held up a hand to stop him. “Wait. Something’s … something’s wrong. Quick, grab my hand!”

Mazeka did as he was told, even as Teridax began to teleport. The world blurred and vanished around them. When it reappeared, they were standing back on the ridge above the abandoned village. A violent tremor was shaking the ground and Mazeka could barely keep his feet.

“As I hoped,” said Teridax, wearily. “We escaped the worst of it.”

“The worst of what?” demanded Mazeka. “What just happened?”

“Your Makuta … has fallen,” said Teridax. “We need to keep moving, but first … first, we had better find some way to patch my wound. I prefer to walk out of this universe, not float.”

Taipu was used to the darkness. He was, after all, an Onu-Matoran, who had spent most of his life in the Metru Nui Archives or deep in mines. Of course, it was one thing to choose to live in the dark, and another to have all light suddenly extinguished around you.
He took stock of the situation. He was lying face down on the floor of an upper level of the Archives. The air was filled with dust. The lightstones were all shattered. Something

extremely heavy was on top of him, making it impossible to get up and quite difficult to breathe. All of this was the result of a massive quake that had just struck Metru Nui, followed shortly after by a not quite as devastating aftershock.

Taipu tried to yell for help, but could only manage a hoarse whisper. This wasn't a very good way to die, he decided. But it seemed to be one he had gotten stuck with.

Then he heard something. Someone was digging nearby. Maybe they would find him? He tried to yell again, but wound up choking on dust.

There were more sounds. He could hear voices now, familiar ones. Someone was yelling for others to keep digging. The terrible weight on his back was suddenly gone. Taipu felt two strong hands grabbing his wrists and pulling him out from under the rubble.

He looked up to see Tamaru and Macku were his rescuers. Not far away, Kopeke was helping other Onu-Matoran who had been caught in the quake. Macku propped Taipu up against a wall and dusted off his armor. "Are you all right?" she asked.

Taipu nodded. "What happened?"

Macku pointed up. Taipu looked and saw a massive hole, and beyond that, blue sky like he remembered from the island of Mata Nui. It had only been recently that Taipu and the other Matoran had learned their "universe" was the inside of a giant robot. Now someone had evidently punched a big hole in the robot's head.

"I think Makuta ran into someone tougher than he was," Macku explained. "Pretty sure the robot's dead, and my guess is so is he. We're going to need to get everyone out of here and hope there's someplace outside we can live. But in the meantime … well, there are a lot more people trapped like you were."

Taipu got to his feet. "Then I'll help."

"You need to rest," said Macku sternly.

"I didn't rest at Kini-Nui when those Rahi attacked," Taipu replied. He looked around at Tamaru and Kopeke hard at work. "I don't know where Hafu and Kapura are … but it looks to me like the Chronicler's Company lives again."

Macku smiled. "All right, then, old friend. Let's get to work."

Kopaka threw his weapon onto the sand slumped down a rock. He was tired, all the way down to the core of his being … tired of fighting and running and fighting some more. It seemed like that was all he had done since he and his teammates had arrived on the island of Mata Nui more than a year before. As he looked over the Bara Magna

battlefield, and the hulking corpse of Makuta's massive robot, he wondered if at last it was over.
He had answered Tahu's call with all of the Toa Nuva, except for Lewa. Side by side with other Toa and the inhabitants of this world, they had battled Rahkshi, Skakdi, and vicious, black-armored warriors as well. Tahu had single-handedly defeated the Rahkshi, and the others had battered the rest of Makuta's army into submission. The Makuta robot had been struck on the back of the head by an astral body and fallen faster than an avalanche on Mount Ihu. Now, one by one, Matoran and other inhabitants of the robot were emerging from the ruined shell into the sunlight of a new world.

Using his powers to create an ice ramp, Kopaka traveled over the treetops of the new jungle. He wanted some time alone.

Finding a likely spot, miles away from where the other Toa and Glatorian were assembled, he sat down to contemplate his future. The destiny of the Toa Nuva had been achieved, so he always had the option of giving up his Toa power and becoming a Turaga. But he had no real wish to wind up running a village or outpost somewhere.

He could always just retire from adventuring, of course. This was a whole new world for him, with plenty of places to explore and maybe even someplace to settle. It might be nice to do something besides battle for his life all the time. Of course, he had no idea what that "something" might be, but one thing he did know – there was no way he could lay down his weapons until Lewa was found.

The Toa of Air had been missing for days. It was possible he was simply in some other part of the robot and would be emerging. But he might also have been wounded or waylaid. As annoying as Lewa could be sometimes, he was a fellow Toa Nuva and … a friend. Kopaka made a silent vow to find him wherever he might be.

The first step would be to talk to the other Nuva and organize a search. Before he could do that, though, something extremely strange caught his eye. A section of the robot's surface was simply disappearing. There had been no explosion, no heat, no sign of the metal being cut. One moment it was there, and the next it was gone.

What was even more bizarre was who emerged from the hole. A small army of Skakdi; a strange, golden-skinned creature; and … the Toa Mahri! The heroes did not seem to be hostages or prisoners. In fact, it looked like they were quite happily acting as beasts of burden for the Skakdi.

Lewa will have to wait, I'm afraid, thought Kopaka. I need to get to the bottom of this, for the Mahri's sake if nothing else.

Fortunately, the new plant life created by Mata Nui provided a lot better cover than a desert ever could have. Kopaka trailed the Skakdi and their mysterious "allies" for miles.

When they came to the shores of the ocean, the troop came to a halt. The Skakdi could be seen talking and gesturing to the golden-skinned creature.

The creature nodded once and turned to look at the cliffs beyond the beach. Before Kopaka's startled eyes, a massive castle took shape atop the highest of the rock formations. The walls were made of stone and the towers bristled with weaponry. All of Metru Nui could probably have fit inside it, with room to spare.

This is extremely not good, thought Kopaka. One Toa Nuva can't do anything here. Let's find out what five can do.

Lewa Nuva was in the middle of his own mystery at the moment. Transported to someplace called Bota Magna along with Toa Helryx, Vezon, Toa Tuyet, Miserix, Brutaka, and others, he had found himself in the presence of someone claiming to be an imprisoned Great Being who sought freedom. The members of his party had immediately fallen into debate on whether it was wise to free someone with so much potential power and evidently a tenuous grasp on sanity. Lewa rapidly grew tired of the argument and found his way out of the fortress.
The area in which he now stood was one of the most beautiful he had ever seen, even more stunning than the jungles of Mata Nui. He used his power to soar above the trees, taking in the majestic forest, beautiful rivers, rolling fields, cybernetically enhanced giant reptiles, and –

Lewa circled back for a second look. Yes, that was a lizard, roughly forty feet high by the Toa's rough estimate. And yes, it did have a laser targeting system in place of one eye, its teeth were polished metal, and its tail was covered in circuitry for its entire length. The Toa of Air watched as the beast pursued a smaller and much faster reptile. The prey looked likely to escape … at least, until something flashed from the giant's mechanical eye and the ground exploded in front of his quarry. The smaller reptile flew backwards, tumbling end over end, and landed hard on the forest floor. The larger reptile swallowed it whole.

And we thought we had Rahi problems on the island, thought Lewa. They grow them big here.

Swooping down for a closer view, Lewa spotted movement on the forest floor. This time, it wasn't reptiles, but villagers not too different in size from Matoran. They were marching at a steady pace, seemingly unaware of the proximity of the massive predator. Lewa decided he had better warn them.

Landing some distance away, so as not to startle the natives, he waited for their approach. As soon as they saw him, they spread out as if to surround him. He kept his arms at his sides, not wanting to appear hostile. Now that they were closer, he could see they were quite different from Matoran in some ways. They carried very crude

weapons, axes and spears and clubs made from wood and rock. While they did wear armor, it was a strange hybrid of metal and plant life.

One of the villagers, obviously the leader of the patrol, stepped forward and addressed the Toa. But Lewa could not understand anything he said. He tried to use gestures to convey the message that a huge reptile was not far away, but the villagers did not seem to get it, or else just didn't care. They seemed much more fascinated about him. A few of the braver ones poked and prodded him, as if they had never seen his like before.

Now the leader was making gestures of his own, evidently asking Lewa's point of origin. The Toa of Air smiled and nodded, trying to show he understood, and pointed in the direction of the fortress. There was an immediate murmuring among the villagers, not at all a happy sound. The next thing Lewa knew, the points of countless spears were at his throat.

Oh, thought the Toa of Air. It's going to be this kind of day.

Angonce studied his ancient equipment. It told him much about the state of the newly restored Spherus Magna. Mata Nui had gone dormant, at least temporarily; the original Mata Nui robot and its prototype had both been destroyed; the nanotech inhabitants of Mata Nui had somehow survived and were emerging onto Spherus Magna and interacting with the local inhabitants.
The Great Being should have been pleased by all this. After all, it was he and his brothers and sisters who had created Mata Nui and sent the robot on its mission, which culminated in the restoration of the planet. But things had changed a great deal in the last 101,000 years. What might once have been cause for celebration now provoked very different emotions.

They will seek the Great Beings now, he thought. They will want to tell us that all is well. Toa and Glatorian, Matoran and Agori, will join together on this 'joyous' mission. But all is not well … and if they go in search of those who brought so much glory and so much misery to this world … I fear they will find nothing but death.

To be continued in the new serial "The Yesterday Quest," starting soon!