



*Screams filled the air as Matoran and Rahi alike ran for cover. Every few seconds, another creature would fall to the ground, covered in strands of green web as the Visorak continued their assault. Norik could only watch in horror as the other five Rahaga, Keetongu, and Turaga Dume were all captured and mutated by the poisonous spiders. After nothing else was left standing, the monstrous insects turned on him...*

Norik awoke with a loud gasp, his heartlight flashing rapidly. Realizing it had only been a dream, he tried to go back to sleep, but it was no use, so he got up and relieved Bomonga of watch duty. Since power was still out in the city, a fire had been lit on the balcony of the Coliseum - the place where Keetongu, Turaga Dume, and the six Rahaga had been living for the past five hundred years while they healed the city's Rahi and sent them back to their homelands as well as the odd effort at repairs. The red, hunched figure sat down by the fire and began to stoke it with his staff and brood over his nightmare.

"Do we know that the hordes are really gone?" he asked himself out loud. "No, Vakama disbanded them and their leaders are dead," he reasoned after a few minutes. "Everyone here is safe now."

*I wouldn't be too sure about that,* thought the dark figure hiding in the shadows behind Norik. As the being activated his powers of concealment and slipped away back to his home in the Archives, he allowed himself a small chuckle. *Not about the Visorak and especially not about you being safe.*

Rain fell from the perpetually dark sky of Metru Nui as a score of Visorak crawled up the coastline. Water ran down their backs in streams and mixed in with the viscous venom dripping from their mouths; the sight of Visorak arriving anywhere was a sight no one ever forgot. Long ago, this particular group had been separated from the rest of the horde, but they had reached their destination at last. The group's self-proclaimed leader, a Keelerak, looked around at the partially broken buildings of the city in confusion: they were clean, not a single strand of green. Out of the corner of its eye, it caught the tiniest hint of motion and instinctively fired a web at it. With a loud howl, a Kavinika fell to the ground, struggling to free itself. The Keelerak scuttled forward, sank its pincers into the canine Rahi, and injected its mutative venom.

*Perhaps,* the green Visorak reasoned as its prey began to writhe as the mutation took hold, *we're just early.* With that, it ordered its band to fan out through the city and mutate everything in sight.

Keetongu bolted upright and, growling, ran to the edge of the Coliseum's balcony outer

balcony. Norik got up from the fire to ask what the problem was, but before he had even gone two steps, the giant, yellow Rahi gave a loud roar, jumped onto the nearest building, and bounded away through the city. Frozen only momentarily with shock, Norik quickly roused the other Rahaga and Dume and told them about Keetongu's disappearance.

"So he just left?" asked Bomonga incredulously.

"No... he did say one word before he leapt from the balcony..." Norik replied tentatively.

"And that word was...?" said Iruini expectantly.

"Visorak," said Norik darkly.

"Well then, we had better make sure that there is still a city left for Vakama and the others to come back to," said Turaga Dume, picking up a disk launcher with burning determination in his eyes.

The Dark Hunter named Dweller slunk into the shadows of the Coliseum and watched seven small figures leave it. Shielding his eyes from the rain which had just started up, he noted their direction and followed them.

If they are as wise as the Shadowed One says they are, then they will know exactly where to go to find their precious *Keetongu*, he thought. *And when they do, I will have the perfect report to give my master. Dweller quickened his pace. I need to make sure that I'm present for the entire battle - wouldn't want to deprive the Shadowed One of knowing what it looks like when a Rahaga dies, now would I?*

After only a few minutes of walking, Keetongu could be seen up ahead trying to fend off twenty Visorak simultaneously, but it was clear that he was tiring. A Keelerak saw the Turaga and six Rahaga and ran up to them, but instantly stopped when Dume fired a Kanoka of poison removal at the ground in front of the creature, and, although it did not unleash its power, it did knock out a large piece of pavement.

"Take one more step, monster, and I will show you what it feels like to be mutated yourself," he warned, loading a disk of random reconstitution into his launcher. The Keelerak made as if to consider his proposal, but instead it fired a projectile of its own that barely missed the red Turaga.

With a huge crash, Keetongu fell to the ground, unable to fight any more. The fifteen Visorak that had been crawling on his body scuttled off and faced their new opponents.

"Stop!" cried Gaaki. "The horde is no more! You are free now!" The Keelerak ignored her and began hissing what were obviously attack commands. As Rhotuka began to fly through the air from both sides, Dweller crept into a dark alley to watch the fight from a safe place.

The Keelerak then blasted a Rhotuka at Pouks's feet, but he was able to jump out of the

way in time. When he landed, he locked eyes with Dume and they both nodded. The brown Rahaga fired a lasso Rhotuka and dragged the green spider into the small crater that Dume had made. Just as the Rhotuka's energies dissipated, though, Dume activated his Noble Kiril and closed the hole in the pavement around one of the Visorak's feet. Then, true to his word, Dume blasted it with a random reconstitution disk causing the Keelerak to transform into a spiky blob with neither legs nor mouth.

Deprived of their leader, it was not long until the other Visorak were defeated. Using his staff, Kualus summoned the island's last flock of ice bats to distract the spiders while the other Rahaga and Dume helped Keetongu to his feet. Fully recovered and fueled with vengeance, Keetongu opened the recently repaired hatch in his chest that held his Rhotuka launcher and fired a wheel of energy that had the equivalent power of fifteen Visorak attacks back at the group that sent ten of them skidding across the pavement. The rest, he swung at with his shield while the Rahaga captured them with their Rhotuka.

When the final Visorak fell to the ground under the effects of one of Norik's snare Rhotuka, Dweller could scarcely believe the scene that had just unfolded before his eyes. Somehow the Rahaga, Turaga, and Keetongu had won, and easily at that. As the elusive Dark Hunter returned to his home in the Archives, he was torn between how he felt about the outcome.

*On one hand, this meant that the island city was still inhabited, but on the other, it meant that the Brotherhood of Makuta had failed once again to take over Metru Nui so it would be easier for the Dark Hunters to do so later. In the end, he decided that the latter was more appealing for the residents of Metru Nui would be conquered sooner or later and he was willing to wait.*

*Once again, screams filled the air, but not due to Visorak this time. The Matoran, Toa, and Turaga all ran for cover as buildings exploded and powerful beings ran through the city attacking everything in sight. In the heart of all the chaos and destruction was an evil face laughing manically - it was the Shadowed One.*

Like the previous night, Norik awoke breathing heavily and with his heartlight flashing frantically. Iruini, who was tending to the fire, looked at him quizzically.

"Is everything all right, brother?"

"Yes," said Norik in a relieved tone, "It was only a dream."

*For now, perhaps,* thought Dweller as he deactivated his power to induce nightmares and stealthily returned to the shadows.