



The Powers That Be is an ongoing story serial that debuted on BIONICLEstory.com in 2010, following the inhabitants of the Matoran Universe trying to adapt to Spherus Magna.

Chapter 1

Toa Gaaki sat on a rock, exhausted. Along with a handful of other Toa of Water, she had been working for days to help sea creatures and other ocean dwellers to migrate from the ruined Makuta robot to the safety of Aqua Magna. It was grueling work, particularly after the most powerful of their number – Gali Nuva – was called away by Tahu for a special mission.

She created a gentle rain to cool herself down. The drops were colder than she expected and Gaaki actually shivered. She turned and saw the reason for the temperature change. Kopaka, Toa Nuva of Ice, was approaching.

"Have you seen Tahu?" he asked urgently.

"Gone north, with Gali, to search for a site for New Atero," Gaaki answered. "What's the matter?"

"The Toa Mahri are in danger," said Kopaka. "Most likely, we all are. As much as I hate to admit it, I think it is more than I can handle on my own."

Gaaki didn't know Kopaka well, but she had heard enough stories to realize that an admission like that meant serious trouble. Not for the first time, she regretted the fact that she had no real control of her Mask of Clairvoyance. It would give her a flash of the near future when it chose to, not at her bidding. She didn't need a mask power, though, to see how drained Kopaka looked.

"You're tired," she said. "I don't know when Tahu will be back, and it sounds like whatever you found can't wait. Give me the story and my team will check it out."

Kopaka related how he had seen a band of barbaric Skakdi, trailed by an apparently subservient team of Toa Mahri, on a journey across Bara Magna. Both groups were following a strange, gold-skinned being, the like of which Kopaka had never seen before. As he watched, the being created a massive castle with just a wave of his hand. He had raced back to camp to warn the other Toa and find help.

It was against Kopaka's nature to let someone else do his job for him. But he had to admit that Gaaki was right: he was exhausted. Going into battle this way would put both himself and any allies in jeopardy. She promised him the Toa Hagah would only scout out the situation and would check with him before taking any action.

Kopaka spent much of the day observing the efforts of the salvage teams, assisting where he could. Toward evening, he crossed paths with Pohatu Nuva and the two worked together to create a cooling shelter for those laboring in what was left of the Bara Magna desert. That was what they were doing when a strange Toa of Air came stalking across the sand toward them.

"How could you let them do it?" the green-armored Toa demanded. "How could any of you let them do it?"

Pohatu triggered his Mask of Speed and flashed forward to intercept the newcomer. "Slow down," said the Toa Nuva of Stone. "Do what? What are you talking about?"

"Karzahni," the Toa spat. "The most twisted, evil, sadistic excuse for a living being I have ever met – and someone set him free. He's on this planet somewhere, and I'm going to find him."

"That's fine," said Pohatu, trying to keep his gruff voice soothing. "Maybe my friend and I can help. But it would help if we knew who you were first."

"My name is Lesovikk," said the Toa of Air. "And I don't need your help. Just tell me where to find Karzahni and I'll take care of the rest."

Pohatu shrugged. "No idea. Never met him."

"The Toa Mahri have dealt with this Karzahni," said Kopaka. "But they are... occupied at the moment. Still, we know him to be extremely dangerous. If he is on the loose here, we will organize a search come dawn."

Lesovikk shook his head. "Dawn will be too late. We have to find him now. If you want to help, you can pick up my trail at first light."

With that, Lesovikk disappeared into the growing darkness. Pohatu watched him go. "Intense," he said.

"Indeed," said Kopaka.

"Kind of reminds me of someone I know," said the Toa of Stone.

Kopaka glared at him. "I can't imagine who."

The next morning, Kopaka and Pohatu set out to follow Lesovikk's path. Kopaka had made arrangements that if Gaaki and the Toa Hagah returned with any news, he was to be notified immediately. The Toa of Air's trail went east, toward the village of Vulcanus. As they neared that site, shifting sands obscured any signs of Lesovikk's passing.

"Maybe he veered off this trail," Pohatu said. "We might have missed it."

"Perhaps," said Kopaka. "Or perhaps he decided it was wise to cover his tracks."

"I'm going to scout ahead," said Pohatu.

"Be careful."

"Don't need to be," the Toa of Stone replied, grinning. "I'm fast."

Pohatu disappeared. An instant later, he was back. His smile had not returned with him.

"You had better come see this," he said. Grasping Kopaka, he used his mask power again, racing the two of them across the sand. They came to a stop at the edge of Iron Canyon.

"Look," said Pohatu.

Kopaka peered over the rim of the canyon. At the bottom, he could see the shattered remains of a figure.

"Dead?" asked Kopaka.

"Extremely," said Pohatu. "Wait. It gets better."

Pohatu whisked Kopaka down the steep slope to the bottom of the canyon. Even the Toa of Ice, who had seen his share of gruesome sights, was struck by the horror of the scene. It only took a moment's glance to confirm that the corpse matched the description Toa Jaller once gave of Karzahni.

"So he was fleeing the camp, made it this far, stumbled and fell into the canyon," said Kopaka. "Bad way to die, but it happens."

"If he died from the fall," Pohatu replied. "Look at his back."

Kopaka knelt down. There was a gash in Karzahni's armor. It could have been made by a weapon, or just by one of the jagged rocks as he fell.

"And now look at this," said the Toa of Stone. He held out his hand. In it, he grasped a sword with a curved blade. Kopaka had seen its like before. Lesovikk had been carrying it.

"You think ...?"

"Could be," nodded Pohatu. "He finds Karzahni, stabs him, and his enemy goes over the cliff into the canyon."

"If that's true, he has violated the code of the Toa," said Kopaka. "We have to bring him down."

Pohatu started to reply, then turned at the howl of the wind. A cyclone was hurtling through the canyon, directly at the two Toa.

"If we can, brother," said Pohatu. "If we can."

Chapter 2

Pohatu reached out to grab Kopaka. A burst of super-speed and they could both outrace the oncoming cyclone. Kopaka shook him off.

"Some things, brother, I can do for myself," said the Toa Nuva of Ice.

With that, Kopaka unleashed a blast of ice from his blizzard blade. It formed a wall three feet thick across the canyon. The cyclone hit it head-on. The ice wall began to fragment. Kopaka applied more power to shore it up.

"Why don't we just --?" said Pohatu.

"Quiet," Kopaka answered. "I have to concentrate."

Pohatu shrugged. Sometimes, Kopaka chose to do things the most difficult way, just to be stubborn. In fact, most of the time he did that, and it never bothered Pohatu all that much. But doing it now, when they were standing over a dead body with a potential murderer on the loose, seemed like bad timing.

Triggering his mask power, Pohatu shot off toward the cyclone, vibrating through Kopaka's ice wall as he went. Racing around and around it counter to the direction of its spin, he cancelled out the whirlwind's power. It dissipated rapidly and Pohatu skidded to a stop on the rocky ground. He looked back toward Kopaka, but all he could see was the white wall. Annoyed, Pohatu kicked a boulder at it, punching a hole right in the center. Through the hole, he could see a startled Kopaka.

"The best defense is a good offense, right?" said Pohatu.

"Not when you're trying to prove a point," snapped Kopaka.

Pohatu sped back to the side of the Toa of Ice. "Which was?"

"Think about it. If Lewa sent a cyclone at someone, would a wall – any wall – stop it? Or would he just make his creation go up and over the barrier? But this whirlwind just kept battering the wall."

"So Lesovikk wasn't here to direct it, or ..." began Pohatu.

"Or he didn't create it in the first place," finished Kopaka. "Sometimes a cyclone is just a cyclone ... not an attempt to destroy evidence."

Pohatu looked around the canyon floor. It was dotted with caves, rocky outcroppings, and a thousand other places someone could hide. "Can we get out of here? This place has 'ambush' written all over it."

Kopaka gestured to the corpse of Karzahni. "I think he'd agree."

The two Toa gathered up the body and brought it back to the Agori/Matoran camp. Tahu and Gali had returned from their scouting mission to the north. The Toa of Fire listened to the news with a grim expression. When Kopaka had finished telling the story, Tahu knelt to examine the body. After a moment, he rose and walked away, beckoning Kopaka to follow him.

"This is bad," Tahu said quietly. "We have to earn the trust of these Agori and Glatorian if we want to carry out Mata Nui's wishes and build a peaceful society here. We're a long way from finding a site for New Atero. All we need right now is some rogue Toa running around pursuing his private wars."

"Lesovikk is still our best suspect," Kopaka agreed. "But we have no idea where he's gone."

"I do," said Tahu.

"We saw him heading north," Gali said to Pohatu. "And, come to think of it ... I don't think he had his sword with him."

Pohatu frowned. "Well, that's not good. But why leave it behind?"

"I don't know," said Gali. "Maybe someone should go ask him?"

"Maybe so," Pohatu replied. "So how did your trip go?"

Gali shrugged. "Not so good. We searched all over, but nothing looked right to Tahu. We're a long way from finding a site for New Atero. But we'll get there. We owe it to our people and the people of Spherus Magna."

Pohatu nodded. A cluster of Agori nearby caught his attention. They were whispering among themselves and pointing toward the Toa. Rumors were already spreading about a murder in the desert. Pohatu wondered if the Agori were thinking that he and Kopaka had not just found the body, but had done the killing.

Looks like we have one more reason to find Lesovikk, he thought. And it had better be soon.

The next morning, with mounts and provisions, the two Toa headed north. Tahu had offered to come along, but Kopaka said no. "If the Agori are getting suspicious of us, we need our leader here to keep a lid on things," the Toa of Ice had reasoned. "You and Gali talk with Ackar, let him know what's going on. Pohatu and I will handle the rest."

Now, a few hours' ride from the camp, Pohatu thought it was time to pose the question. "So how are we going to handle him?"

"What do you mean?" asked Kopaka.

"Look, we fought Tahu back on the island when he had that Rahkshi poison in him," said Pohatu. "And other Toa have gone bad in the past and had to be stopped. But ... he's still one of us, and there aren't too many of 'us' left these days. Besides, from what I hear ... if he did kill Karzahni ... he had good reason."

"Maybe that's the problem," said Kopaka. "He felt he was justified. Karzahni was an abomination, after all. But fighting monsters is what we do. If we start thinking we have good reason to kill them, and we do it, then we become no better than they are. We're meant to be defenders, not executioners."

"I'm just saying ..."

"I know what you're saying ... believe me, I do," said Kopaka. "But there's a fine line between being a hero and being a monster. If Lesovikk crossed it, we stop him. Cold."

The two Toa rode north for three days. The land turned from brown to green, lush forest replacing sand dunes. They saw no sign of Lesovikk or anyone else. More than once, Pohatu wondered aloud what had happened to Lewa, the Toa Nuva of Air. Perhaps one air-wielder would be able to find another more easily, he suggested. But Lewa had vanished before the defeat of Makuta and not been seen since.

For his part, Kopaka was focusing on the murder. All the evidence pointed in one direction, but what if it wasn't the right direction? Sure, Lesovikk had means, motive and opportunity to kill Karzahni, but so did a lot of others. For that matter, what if this wasn't about Karzahni, not personally?

Pohatu didn't get where his friend was going. "Someone stabbed him with a sword and pushed him over a cliff. How is that not personal?"

Kopaka shrugged. "I don't know. It's simply ... what if it wasn't about something Karzahni had done, so much as what he represented?"

"Crazy people with patchwork masks and really bad attitudes? Yeah, I can see Karzahni representing that."

Before the debate could go any further, Kopaka held up a hand to signal for silence. Something was moving in the forest up ahead. Lesovikk? Someone else? Kopaka summoned his elemental energies, prepared for an attack.

Nothing could prepare either Toa for what happened next. A scream ripped through their minds, one made up of pure agony and something more ... complete shock. The mental cry was so powerful both Toa fell from their mounts, hands covering their audio receptors. That did no good. The scream wasn't a physical one, but a telepathic one, and it brought with it flashes of imagery neither Toa would ever forget.

When it finally subsided, Kopaka was the first to his feet. Before Pohatu could stop him, he ran for the woods. When the Toa of Stone caught up to him, he found Kopaka standing over what looked like a piece of scarlet gelatin. Pohatu glanced around and saw that similar objects covered the ground for hundreds of yards.

"Is that --?"

Kopaka nodded. "Even if I hadn't heard a description of sorts, that mental flash told the story. That's Tren Krom, all over."

Pohatu's eyes widened. "The *Tren Krom*? 'Look at him and you go insane, used to rule the universe' Tren Krom? What could do ... that ... to him?"

Kopaka didn't answer. Tren Krom was supposed to be at a power level that dwarfed Karzahni. But someone or something had reduced him to pieces in an instant and left no obvious clues behind. It was certainly a crime a Toa of Air had the power to carry out, except for one thing. There had been one image telepathically sent into Kopaka's mind that didn't point to Lesovikk. It was a simple, clear image of a single object.

A red star.

Chapter 3

Kopaka and Pohatu stood in the forest, staring at the remains of Tren Krom. Once one of the most powerful entities in the Matoran Universe, now Tren Krom was just pieces scattered among the foliage, a truly disturbing sight for more reasons than one.

"I wonder who's next," said Pohatu.

"What are you talking about?" asked Kopaka.

"You don't see it? First Karzahni, now Tren Krom ... there's a pattern here. Beings with great power dying, one after another."

"Two deaths is hardly a pattern," replied the Toa Nuva of Ice. "Two widely different locations, two different methods of murder ... I'll admit I wondered if Lesovikk might have killed Tren Krom, but I can't see what motive he would have."

Pohatu shook his head. "Lesovikk didn't kill him. At least, I don't think so. Lesovikk was angry at Karzahni, out for revenge, but he wasn't insane. Whoever did this ... well, let's just say there were cleaner ways to get rid of Tren Krom."

Kopaka crouched down to examine the remains. “That’s true. Plus we have to ask, who could have gotten close enough to Tren Krom to do this? His mind was strong enough to sense another intellect even at long range, as I understand it.”

“Maybe someone he trusted?” asked Pohatu.

Kopaka stood and looked around the forest. It felt oppressively still. “I doubt he trusted many, if anyone at all. But consider this: he was supposed to be physically bound to his island in our old universe, unable to move. But when the Order of Mata Nui agents went to retrieve him, he was gone. Next thing we know, he’s here, and dead.”

“The Order ... do you think they --?”

Pohatu’s question was cut off by a sound from up above. Someone or something was in the trees. Pohatu couldn’t see it clearly, but could tell that whatever it was, it had huge wings.

“Shall I?” he asked Kopaka.

“Please,” said the Toa of Ice. “Some things I can do for myself.”

Kopaka summoned his elemental energies and hurled a blast of frost at the watcher in the trees. The effect was to ice up its wings and send the stranger tumbling from its perch and onto the ground.

Pohatu watched as the new arrival, dazed, tried to rise. It did indeed have scalloped wings, along with quite long arms and legs. It wore a Kanohi mask and a sword of fire had slipped from its hands when it fell. Not a native of Spherus Magna, then, Pohatu thought. It’s one of ours.

“Who are you?” demanded Kopaka. “Why were you spying on us?”

“Not spying,” gasped the winged stranger. “Hunting.”

“Like you hunted Tren Krom here?” said Pohatu.

The thing shook its head. “I didn’t hunt him ... someone else did. But then he left without feasting, so the food became mine.”

“Who left? Who killed him?” asked Kopaka.

“I tried to see,” said the creature. “But he knew I was there. A howling wind knocked me from my watching spot and broke many limbs off the trees. By the time I touched the sky again, he was gone.”

“I scouted around,” said Pohatu. “I saw no tracks coming in or out of this area.”

“If I were one of your kind, you would believe,” said the creature, bitterly. “But I suppose you think truth is as alien to me as my appearance is to you.”

Pohatu glanced at Kopaka, then back at the winged being. “What’s your name?”

“When there was anyone to call me by name, it was Gaardus. But that was long ago, when I lived in a koro. Now I am just what you see.”

“You ... were a Matoran?” asked Kopaka, trying and failing to keep the disbelief out of his voice.

Gaardus shook the remaining fragments of ice off his wings and rose to his feet. “You say the name as if there was some honor attached to it. Yes, I was a Matoran. I had a home, a job, a life. Then I was taken by a band of my brothers who had been exiled for crimes too horrible to relate. They were Nynrah Ghosts, hated and feared by even their own.”

“I’ve heard of the Nynrah,” said Kopaka. “Weaponsmiths.”

“So you say,” Gaardus replied. It shuddered as if the memories themselves were bringing pain. “They decided to make a living weapon ... I was the result. But I was too smart for them. I escaped ... and I hunted ... until none of them were left.”

Pohatu was stunned. What kind of Matoran could so mutate another of their own species? How had the other Nynrah allowed this to happen? Were they so obsessed with the secrecy of their culture that they never thought to summon a Toa to stop their exiles from doing something so horrible?

“You got out of the robot, somehow,” said Pohatu. “Maybe with the Rahi, so you wouldn’t be noticed. My guess is you’re good at hiding by now. Then you headed north, as far away from your ... the Matoran as possible.”

“I wanted to get away from the rage,” answered Gaardus. “But it followed me even to this peaceful place.”

Kopaka couldn’t help but feel pity for the tragic creature before him. But there were two deaths that had to be explained, and no time to redress old wrongs. Perhaps when this was all over...

“What did you see? Tell us everything,” he said.

“The one you call Tren Krom appeared in the forest, from nowhere,” Gaardus began, speaking slowly and carefully. “He was... confused. He could move, but not very far or very fast. I was going to hunt, but his mind touched mine, and it hurt. Then ... there was someone else, and the winds came, and I saw the star, and...”

“Wait!” said Kopaka. “You saw a star? What star?”

“The red star,” Gaardus said, as if the answer was obvious. “I saw it in my mind.”

Kopaka was intrigued. He, too, had seen an image of the red star, projected telepathically by Tren Krom in his dying moments. The red star had hovered above the island of Mata Nui in the days when Kopaka and his allies first arrived. Much later, he and the others learned that the star was in fact some kind of booster rocket system used by the Mata Nui robot to break free of a planet’s gravitational pull. It was not a true star, but an engine. None of which explained why Tren Krom would be thinking of it so urgently at such a dire moment.

“I had not thought of the star in so long,” Gaardus continued. “Not since the death of the Nynrah. The star was why I stayed in the Nynrah’s village for so long after my escape. Now I wonder if what I was waiting for was up there, not down among the land and water.”

Kopaka looked up. The star was in the sky now above Spherus Magna, and had been since the arrival of the Mata Nui robot on the planet. With the robot destroyed, the red star would not be summoned into use again. Yet still it hung among the true stars, waiting, waiting for a call that would never come.

“If only we could get up there ...” Kopaka said, more to himself than anyone else.

“The hunting would be poor,” said Gaardus.

“Not for what we’re seeking,” Pohatu said. “Doesn’t matter, though, neither one of us is equipped for space flight.”

Gaardus looked down at the ground for a long time. Then he said, very quietly, “I could bring you. But I do not want to return there. No one ever does.”

“Get us there how?” asked Kopaka.

“I was built to be a hunter,” said Gaardus. “And a hunter returns to the grounds that are rich in prey. Anywhere I have ever been, I can return to... even such a place as that.”

“Then take us there,” Kopaka said.

“Um, Kopaka?” said Pohatu. “Can I have a word?”

The Toa of Ice and Stone walked a few feet away from Gaardus and spoke in low tones. “Do we really want to leave the driving to the winged wonder over there? What if he doesn’t like Toa any better than Matoran?”

“Do you have a better suggestion? Tren Krom used his last seconds of life to tell us about the star... or warn us. There’s something up there connected to his death. We have to find out what it is.”

“Okay,” said Pohatu. “But this isn’t the first time I’ve wondered if you don’t have your Kanohi on too tight.”

The two Toa turned back to Gaardus. “If you can get us there, we need to go,” said Kopaka.

“And quickly, before one of us changes his mind, namely me,” added Pohatu.

If Gaardus thought they had both gone mad, he obviously saw no point in saying. He merely stepped up to them, unwrapped his wings, and then folded them around the two heroes. And in that instant, all three were gone.

Pohatu wasn’t sure what to expect – he had never been inside a “star” before. When Gaardus opened his wings and stepped away, the Toa of Stone looked around. He was inside a curved hallway. The walls seemed to be a combination of metal bands and organic tissue, much the way he imagined the inside of a Toa would look. Steeling himself, he reached out and touched one of the surfaces. Both metal and tissue were still and cold as ice.

At least I’m not inside something that’s alive, he thought. Kind of had enough of that.

“Company,” said Kopaka, under his breath.

Pohatu looked down the hallway. Three small beings clad in purple and black armor were moving toward them. Something about them seemed vaguely familiar, like Pohatu had heard them described before, but he couldn’t remember when. As soon as they saw the two Toa and their winged companion, they seemed to grow very alarmed.

“What are you doing here?” one of the beings asked. “You need to go back. You should be gone by now.”

“No,” said another. “Don’t you remember what happened the last time? They wouldn’t go back and we had to --”

The third interrupted, pointing at Gaardus. “That one has been here before. He was the last. He must know why no one can go now.”

“But look at them!” said the first to speak. “It must be working again, or how could they be here like that?”

The others paused, as if acknowledging their friend had a point. The one who had remembered Gaardus nodded, saying, “Very well. But if it doesn’t work, do we need to end them like the other ones?”

All three little beings produced wicked looking hand weapons. “Naturally,” said the first. “How else are we to make things right?”

Chapter 4

Baleful eyes started up at an imposing edifice of rock and mortar. Here, in the wooded region of Spherus Magna, the Great Beings had plied their trade many years ago. Now one remained inside that fortress, quite mad, but still brilliant and dangerous nonetheless.

For the watcher's purposes, he hardly mattered. No, what was important about that building was who else was inside it now. Axonn, Brutaka and Toa Helryx, veteran warriors; Makuta Miserix, with all the power that title implied; Artakha, wearer of the Mask of Creation; Toa Tuyet, who was mightier than any of the others knew; and Vezon, gifted with the ability to move through dimensions the way others move through air. So many beings of power, all in one spot... it was quite delicious.

So far, he had killed Tren Krom and Karzahni... one a madman, the other a gelatinous mass of hot air. Neither proved to be much of a challenge. The Toa were keeping the whole thing quiet, as they often did. Although the two heroes investigating the murders, Kopaka and Pohatu, had recently vanished, he was not overly concerned. They would turn up eventually. The plan required it.

In the same way, the sight of Toa Lewa being dragged off by nature-loving Agori was at best a minor obstacle. If need be, he would effect a rescue in some indirect way before the Toa of Air could get into any real jeopardy. The Toa Mata were too important to have their lives sacrificed needlessly. Oh, they would die, eventually, but it would be at a time of his choosing.

No one would ever suspect him, of course. No one ever had. As time passed and things had become clear to him, he had known this time would come. The most powerful would need to be eliminated individually – no point in risking the grand plan because he had missed one, after all – and the rest could be dealt with at leisure. He had expected it to be a time-consuming, if amusing, exercise, a sort of living strategy game in which only he knew the rules.

Now, though, fate seemed to have altered the circumstances. So many of his targets, all in the same place, offered the opportunity to accelerate his timetable – much too good of an opportunity to miss. A little of this, a little of that, and the fortress would be so much rubble... and the universe far better off.

With a smile, the bio-mechanical murderer set to work. It was going to be a good day, if a noisy one.

Kopaka, Pohatu and Gaardus found themselves facing what seemed like energy weapons in the hands of the three small armored beings. The two Toa still had no idea if they were truly inside the red star, or just who their bizarre foes were. But they had begun to suspect Gaardus knew a great deal more than he was telling.

"Shorty over there said you had been here before," Pohatu said to their winged companion. "What's the story?"

"You knew that," Gaardus replied. "I told you."

"You did not say anything about these... whatever they are," said Kopaka. "What else did you leave out?"

"I told you I did not want to come back here," Gaardus said simply. "Now you know why."

"We are the Kestora," said one of the purple and black beings. "We are the ones who keep this place operating. But it has not been operating, not for a very long time. And it is his fault," he added, pointing at Gaardus.

"I did nothing!" Gaardus hissed, unfurling his great wings. "I did not choose to come here. I did not choose to leave."

"No one ever does," replied the Kestora.

"Can you put the weapons down, so we can talk like civilized beings?" asked Pohatu.

The three Kestora raised their weapons higher in answer and began to squeeze the triggers. In an instant, Pohatu had seemingly vanished. When he reappeared, the Kestora had been disarmed and he held all their weapons.

"I said – oh, never mind, you know what I said," Pohatu chuckled. "Now what's all this about coming and going? What is this, some kind of a transport hub?"

"In a sense," said one of the Kestora.

"Yes, you might say that," said the second.

"Or you might not," the third interjected. "Anyway, the three of you need to be going. You got what you came here for, time to leave."

"Got what we ---?" Kopaka repeated. "By Mata Nui, someday I will meet a foe who gives a straight answer to a straight question, and I will be so shocked I will --"

"Crack a smile?" finished Pohatu. He turned to the three small beings. "Now, listen. Where is it we are supposed to be going?"

"Back to Mata Nui, of course," said one of the Kestora, as if he were speaking to a child. "Back where you belong."

"Mata Nui is so much junk in the Bara Magna desert by now," said Pohatu. "You guys must not get out much."

"If that's true, then we can't send them back," said the first Kestora. "There is nowhere to send them back to."

"Well, they can't stay here," said the second firmly. "We have too many as it is."

"We could keep them," suggested the third. "Maybe a dissection would tell us why they can't go back. Of course, we tried that before, and all we wound up with was a mess... a lot of messes, actually... but maybe this time --"

Kopaka grimaced, raised his Toa weapon, and unleashed a blast of ice. It froze all three Kestora solid.

"What did you do that for?" asked Pohatu. "We might have learned something, and you killed them!"

"Not dead," said Kopaka, already turning and walking away. "Just frozen. They'll thaw out... eventually. I'm tired of villains spouting gibberish. Let's look around."

Pohatu turned to Gaardus to ask if he had ever seen anything like that, but the winged being had disappeared. The Toa of Stone headed off to tell Kopaka the news. They needed Gaardus if they were ever going to make it back to Spherus Magna.

The frozen eyes of the Kestora watched him as he went.

Back on Spherus Magna, a complicated and delicate job was done. At the proper signal, the Great Beings' fortress and its occupants would be so much ash.

Their would-be murdered looked at his work and pronounced it good. He sat down on the ground and picked up a stone. Humming to himself, he began to carve it into a memorial marker for those about to die.

Kopaka was not happy to hear about Gaardus' disappearance, but he wasn't surprised either. The odds were the teleporter was gone for good, at least if he had any sense.

"We better hope the Kestora were wrong and there is way off of here," said the Toa of Ice. "Otherwise..."

"Otherwise, we are going to get very tired of each other's company," agreed Pohatu. "Want me to scout ahead?"

"No, I --" Kopaka began, even as Pohatu winked out of existence and then back again.

"Too late," said Pohatu. "Already did it. Not much to see. Lots of labs. Some old machinery, looks like it's been jury-rigged a few hundred times. And I thought I saw someone moving, but I can't be sure."

"More Kestora?"

"Maybe. About the same height."

"Let's find them."

The two Toa had gone about a hundred yards when the lights suddenly went out. Now they could hear movement from all around them. There were whispers, too, but they couldn't make out the words. Kopaka triggered his Akaku Nuva, piercing the walls around him with x-ray vision. In one direction, there was nothing to see but outer space. In the other, he saw things – a lot of things – he could have lived without seeing. When he spoke, his voice was raw.

"We need to move," said Kopaka. "Now."

"What's the matter?"

"You don't want to know. Grab my hand. We're finding a way out of this."

The sounds were coming closer now. Some sounded like rodents skittering, others like bodies being dragged across a metal floor. At one point, they saw a lighted corridor up ahead, but as they approached, the lights went off there too. Worse, the noises were starting to come from up ahead as well as behind.

"I think we are surrounded," said Kopaka.

"We're never surrounded," Pohatu answered. "We just prefer to be right in the center of the action."

A sliver of light opened up off to the right. It revealed a small figure, beckoning to the two Toa. "Here, this way."

Kopaka used the Akaku and saw that there were no other figures in the room beyond. If it was a trap, it probably wasn't a very good one. The two Toa headed for the door and slipped inside. The figure closed it behind them.

"It's not safe out there," their rescuer said. "But then you probably figured that out. A lot of very unhappy people up here, you know."

The Toa saw to their surprise that their "host" was not a Kestora, but a Matoran. An Onu-Matoran, to be exact, but not one that either recognized.

"Who are you?" asked Pohatu. "What are you doing here?"

"As far as the second question goes, I presume the same thing you are," said the Matoran. "As for who I am – my name is Mavrah."