



Dark Mirror

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Chapter 1

Plunging through the void between dimensions, Takanuva, Toa of Light, could hardly believe what had happened to him in the last day. While patrolling the shores of Metru Nui, he had been attacked by a creature he later learned was a Shadow Leech, and barely survived. When he awoke, he discovered that his light had been partially drained, leaving him with the ability to fire light from his left hand, and Shadow from his right.

His rescuers turned out to be members of the secret organization called the Order of Mata Nui, who tasked him with a vital mission. He was to bring important information to the Toa Nuva in Karda Nui, and, if he failed, the six Toa were surely doomed. The fastest way to get him there was using the power of a Mask of Dimensional Gates worn by reformed member Brutaka. But the mask was ever so slightly damaged, and the ride had already been a rough one.

A circle of light opened ahead of him. He plunged through it, hoping he'd reach Karda Nui in time. Instead, he went flat on his mask in the familiar surroundings of the city of Metru Nui. Or was it familiar? The city was intact and beautiful, as it had been when he left, but something was odd. There were statues of Toa everywhere: Tahu, Gali and the others, but not in their Nuva forms; as they had been before they transformed. There were other statues, too, of Toa Takanuva did not recognize. And looming over them all was a massive sculpture of a Kanohi mask: the Mask of Intangibility.

How long have I been gone, wondered Takanuva, And who decided to re-decorate?

He spotted a Matoran he knew well, Kapura, scurrying quickly through the street. Takanuva stepped in front of him and said, "Wait, friend. I don't think I've ever seen you run before. What's the hurry?"

Kapura looked up at him. There was shock and fear in the Matoran's eyes, but no recognition. "Forgive me, great Toa," he said, so fast the words tumbled over themselves. "Was I not running fast enough? I promise I will try to do better."

"Kapura, it's me, it's Takanuva. What's come over you?"

"Nothing, nothing!" insisted Kapura. "All is well, great Toa, for how could it be anything else with such wise and benevolent leaders?"

"Alright, I've had about enough of this," said Takanuva.
"Where's Turaga Vakama? Where are the Toa Mahri?"

"I don't know who you're talking about," insisted Kapura.
"Let me pass, please, before..."

The temperature suddenly dropped all around. The next moment, Kapura was locked in a foot-thick shell of ice from his neck down. The Matoran cried out from the intense cold. Takanuva looked up, only to see Tahu and Kopaka standing nearby, frost still drifting from the sword of the Toa of Ice. "Tahu, Kopaka, thank the Great Beings you're here," said Takanuva. "Something's wrong with Kapura... maybe with the entire city."

"The only thing wrong here, stranger, is you," said Tahu.
"Who are you? Why are you here? Where is your identity tablet?"

"I-I'm Takanuva! I live here! You know me, and I don't know what an identity tablet is!"

Kopaka raised his sword and unleashed a hail of ice that shocked Takanuva, knocking the Toa of Light to the ground. Standing over him, Kopaka held the point of his sword to Takanuva's neck. "Well, 'Takanuva', if that is your name, you are now a prisoner of the Toa Empire, against which you've committed an act of war."

Chapter 2

Tahu and Kopaka dragged a protesting Takanuva to the Coliseum. Vahki guardians saluted and stepped aside to let the Toa enter. Wordlessly, they hauled Takanuva through winding corridors, finally tossing him into a cold, dark cell.

"Make yourself comfortable," said Tahu. "Someone will be back for you when Toa Tuyet is ready to question you in a day, or a week."

"If this is some kind of a joke, it isn't funny anymore," said Takanuva. "What is going on around here?"

But Tahu and Kopaka had already walked away.

"What's going on, stranger, is that you came to the wrong place at the wrong time," said a weak voice behind Takanuva.

The Toa turned, surprised to find he was not alone. Hanging on the wall from chains around his wrists and ankles was a Matoran. Using the merest fraction of his Light power, Takanuva illuminated the cell. He stumbled back against the cell door in shock. The imprisoned Matoran was none other than Takua - a fact that seemed impossible, since Takanuva had been Takua before becoming a Toa.

"This is insane!" said Takanuva. "You're me - I mean, I'm you, how..."

"I see," said Takua. "You're not one of the smarter ones. You wouldn't happen to know how to pick a lock would you?"

Takanuva shook his head. If this was a dream or an illusion, it was a whopper. But just in case it wasn't, he fired a thin beam of laser-light from his left hand and sliced through Takua's chains. A quick move let him catch the Matoran before he fell to the stone floor.

"That's a neat trick," said Takua. "So what are you in for?"

"I-I don't know," said Takanuva. "I'm not even sure where I am."

"Metru Nui, City of Legends," said Takua. "Of course, these days, all the legends end with, 'And the Toa crushed anyone who got in their way.' Or, in my case, spent more time wandering than working. When the Vahki treatment didn't take, they put me here."

"I can't believe this," said Takanuva. "Tahu and Kopaka insane, or worse, Matoran jailed, and me sitting here talking to myself. Listen, where's Gali?"

"In Ga-Metru, of course," the Matoran replied. "She and Karzahni run the re-education center."

"Listen, umm..." Takanuva paused, unable to bring himself to say the name 'Takua'. "What happened here? How did things get so crazy?"

"It was about 3,500 years ago now," said Takua, "Toa Tuyet tapped into the power of something called the Nui Stone, which gave her the power of maybe a hundred Toa. When Toa Lhikan tried to stop her, he got killed by her and his traitorous friend, Toa Nidhiki. And that's it. Tuyet took over Metru Nui and convinced the other Toa it was their destiny to smash anyone who posed a threat to the Great Spirit. That meant anyone from the Makuta, to the Dark Hunters, to Toa who didn't seem enthusiastic enough, and Matoran who didn't work quite hard enough."

Takanuva suddenly reached up and took off his mask of power. Before Takua could protest, he had placed it on top of the Matoran's mask. Nothing happened. Takua tore the Mask of Light off, saying, "What are you trying to do, smother me?"

"Just testing a theory," said Takanuva, rising and putting his mask back on. "Come on, we're getting out of here."

"And go where?" asked Takua.

"We have a date in the Archives," the Toa of Light answered, "or, rather, below them. And here's hoping Vakama's stories about what's down there, who's down there, were all true."

Chapter 3

"Where are we going?" asked Takua. "How did you take out those Vahki guards so fast? What's down here? Have you been down here before?"

"Would you be quiet?" Takanuva snapped. He had never realized before just how annoying he was as a Matoran. "There's no telling who, or what, is down here, and I'd rather not have unexpected company."

In truth, it was more than Takua's chattering that was bothering Takanuva. In his universe, the Metru Nui Archives were filled with exhibits of Rahi beasts, carvings, tools and other things that Onu-Matoran and Ko-Matoran scholars might study. But in this strange world that he had stumbled upon, the Archives were more like a museum of conquest. A long-dead and mounted Visorak stared from the shadows with glassy eyes. A collection of weaponry was nearby, each item identified with a small inscribed tablet. The staff of The Shadowed One, the Spear of Fusion, Zamor Sphere Launchers, Rhotuka launchers, and more. Next to that was the most amazing sight of all: the Kanohi Mask of Shadows, the property of the leader of the Brotherhood of Makuta, now nailed to the wall like just another trophy.

Moving further into the depths of the Archives, the Toa and Matoran came upon a group of stasis tubes. These were used to keep Rahi in suspended animation so they could be

studied. At least, that's what they had been used for in Takanuva's universe. In this dimension, he saw with shock that they served a quite different purpose. One tube stood apart from the others, the glow of a Lightstone playing on its face. Takanuva wiped the dust from the crystal and gasped: inside, trapped in stasis, was Turaga Dume, ruler of Metru Nui.

"I can't believe this," Takanuva said. "Even Toa as mad as they are here would never do this."

"Dume talked too much," said Takua sadly, "and, coming from me, that's saying something. When Toa Tuyet took over, he stood up and said that true Toa value justice and mercy, and she had neither in her heart. You had to admire him for it, all the way up to the moment when they hauled him off and stuck him in there."

Takanuva fired a beam of laser-light from his left hand, slicing open the crystal case. Takua grabbed his arm, trying to pull away. "Are you crazy?! What if there are alarms? You can't do that!"

"I just did," said Takanuva, catching the falling Dume. Consciousness slowly returned to the Turaga, and when he saw Takanuva, he said, "Who are you?"

"I'm a... friend," Takanuva replied.

"You? A Toa? No Toa is my friend." said Dume.

"I don't have time to argue with you," said Takanuva.

"Somewhere down here there is an intelligent Rahi called a Krahka; at least, I hope she's here. We need to find her.

Something is very, very wrong in this world, and I'm going to need help if I'm going to make things right."

"Help is exactly what you need, Toa," said a voice behind Takanuva.

He whirled to see the one figure he never expected. Takua and Dume both backed away in fear. Standing before them was the leader of the Toa Empire, the wielder of the Nui Stone, and the unquestioned ruler of the known universe: Toa Tuyet.

Chapter 4

Takanuva, Takua, and Turaga Dume walked in single file to the depths of the Archives, followed by the silent Toa Tuyet. The ruler of the Toa Empire had not spoken a word since capturing the three of them, simply gestured with her Barbed Broadsword for them to get moving. They marched for what seemed like hours, through twists and turns, past long-forgotten exhibits, and into regions that probably even the Archive carekeepers didn't know existed.

Takanuva was puzzled. Tuyet could have just brought them back to a cell on the surface, or, for that matter, killed them. Why go on a tour of the Archives?

Things got even more disturbing and bizarre as they rounded a corner and entered a large chamber. In the back were a half dozen badly damaged Rahkshi and an Exo-Toa armor suit missing its right arm. Even more surprising was the sight of two figures clad in black armor, who sprang to their feet at the sight of the newcomers, shadow energy crackling in their hands.

Takanuva turned around, but Tuyet was no longer there. Standing in her place was another Makuta, this one wearing a scarred and pitted Kanohi Hau. When he spoke, it was in the familiar, grating voice of the Makuta of Metru Nui.

"A simple strategy," he said. "Tuyet has left us little choice but to use our shapeshifting powers when we venture out. Even then, we were captured, just as we have captured you."

"I don't understand," said Takanuva. "Why aren't you wearing the Mask of Shadows? I saw it hanging in the Archives."

Makuta gave Takanuva a look that would have chilled the snow atop Mount Ihu. "The mask is warded. If it is so much as touched, Tuyet and her minions will know at once. She keeps it there, on unguarded, as a taunt to me, knowing how I long for it and cannot touch it."

The two other Makuta and those Rahkshi that could still move closed in.

"But you are not so protected, Toa. Give me one good reason why we should not kill you now, as your kind has killed ours for so many centuries."

"I'm not..." Takanuva began, then stopped as he debated how much to tell his captors. These were, after all, Makuta, the most evil beings in the universe from which he came. Here, though, they were hunted fugitives in a world gone mad. "I'm not one of Tuyet's Toa. My name is Takanuva. I am a Toa of Light."

The three Makuta recoiled. Takanuva could understand why; a Toa of Light was the ultimate weapon against beings of shadow.

"Listen to me," he continued. "I come from someplace else, where there is no Tuyet, no Toa Empire. I can't claim I understand what happened here, but I do know this: I don't belong here, and I need to get back to my own universe."

The three Makuta were silent for a moment. Then they began to laugh, a horrible sound that echoed throughout the chamber for long minutes.

"And just how," said the Makuta of Metru Nui, "do you propose to get back to this universe of yours, my poor, mad Toa?"

"By finding the one who sent me on my journey," Takanuva replied. "A being named Brutaka."

One of the Makuta nodded. He was tall, with armor lined with short, curved, and very sharp blades. "I have heard of legends of a Brutaka. It's said he is a great hero who guards a valuable treasure. But in Matoran legend, every pile of rocks is a treasure, every Rahi larger than a Stone Rat is a monster, and anyone who doesn't scream and run when the thunder cracks is a hero of great courage."

"Very true, Krika, very true indeed," said the Makuta of Metru Nui. "Very well then, you, Toa, are either a liar, a

fool, or a madman, I know not which, but if you need our help, you have to pay a price."

"And what is that price?" asked Takanuva.

"A Matoran expedition, escorted by a pair of Toa, left Metru Nui weeks ago, bound for the island of Artakha," said Makuta. "They were to retrieve an object of power: the legendary Mask of Time, one of the few weapons that might be effective against Tuyet. By now, they have it, and are on their way back. I want you to attack their force and steal the Mask for us. In return, we will smuggle you out of the city so you can find your Brutaka. But be warned: the Matoran leader is a fanatic, who would rather die than surrender his prize. You will have to grant him his wish."

"And just who is this leader?" asked Takanuva.

"No one you would know," said Makuta Krika. "A Ta-Matoran, someone named Jaller."

Chapter 5

Toa Takanuva had experienced many strange things since arriving in what he now knew had to be some kind of alternate universe. But nothing quite equaled what he was experiencing right at the moment: the sensation of flying under his own power over a vast stretch of ocean. Even stranger was the fact that he had Makuta to thank for this ability. After telling him roughly where to look for the caravan that would be carrying the Mask of Time, Makuta Krika had commented that he would never be able to intercept them in time by sea, even if he managed to steal a boat and slip away from Metru Nui. Flight was the best choice. Before Takanuva could argue that he didn't have the ability to fly, Krika had blown a fine powder into his face. The Toa of Light couldn't help but breathe it in. With a laugh, Krika explained that he had just been exposed to a Makuta Virus, which would, at least temporarily, give him the power of flight. If it had any other side effects, Krika chose not to say. Takanuva didn't know whether to thank him or hit him.

Still, his directions had been good. Up ahead on the land, Takanuva spotted an Ussal crab-drawn cart driven by a Matoran, flanked by a Toa of Ice and a Toa of Earth, mounted on Muaka tigers. Takanuva could only guess that both cart and Rahi had been loaded and unloaded from a ship, since part of the journey to Artakha had to be made by sea. Despite the Makuta's warning that he would have to

kill the Toa and the Matoran with them, Jaller, Takanuva had another idea. He was a Toa, after all, in a world dominated by them. It was worth trying, anyway. He landed right in front of the cart, prompting Jaller to reign it to an abrupt halt. The two Toa raised their spears and shields and took a step forward.

"Who are you?" said the black-armored warrior. "Speak or face the power of my Seismic Spear."

"What my grim friend is trying to say," said the Toa of Ice, "is that we were not expecting visitors, not even multi-toned ones such as yourself. Surprises make us nervous, and when we are nervous, other beings sometimes get hurt."

"Lower your weapons," said the Toa of Light. "My name is Takanuva, I am here on business of the Empire."

"I am Toa Kualus," said the white-armored Toa. "My surly friend is Toa Bomonga; and what might your business be, Takanuva?"

"I don't trust him," said Jaller. Takanuva barely recognized him in his red Kanohi Komau. "Kodan keeps a record of every Toa in the universe, and I've never seen his name before."

Takanuva fired a thin beam of light at Jaller, shooting the reins out of his hands. Pewku, the Ussal crab, reared up, startled.

"When I want your opinion, Matoran, I'll ask for it," Takanuva said, trying to sound like a Toa from this universe.

Kualus' response was a blast of ice from his Sub-Zero Spear, but Takanuva easily shattered it with another light beam. Bomonga made a move to attack, but the Toa of Light temporarily blinded him with a flare.

"If you're done," said Takanuva, "Tuyet has received word of a plan to steal the Mask of Time. She has decided that two Toa are not enough to guard it. Particularly you two, so she has sent me to join you."

"And just what makes you the right choice?" growled Bomonga.

The Toa of Light thought fast. "Have you ever heard of... Takutanuva?"

Both Toa shook their heads.

"How about Graalok, the mighty Ash Bear?"

Again they shook their heads.

"And I suppose you haven't heard of the beasts of Mount Ihu, or the flame serpents of the Tren Krom Break, or even," he dropped his voice for effect, "even the Kolhii creature of Ga-Wahi."

"We haven't heard of any of those things," said Kualus.

Takanuva smiled, raised his lance high, and then plunged it into the sand in front of the two Toa. "There is a reason you haven't heard of them, brothers... and if I could defeat them, I could surely handle a threat to the Vahi."

Bomonga and Kualus glanced at each other, then Kualus shrugged. "Very well, brother, you may travel with us to Metru Nui, but since you're so powerful, why don't you walk in front of us? That way, you can meet any challenge head-on. Incidentally, who is this that plans to steal this mask from us?"

"A very powerful and evil being called Brutaka," Takanuva replied.

This time, the two Toa obviously recognized the name. Bomonga even smiled.

"You know of him, then?" asked Takanuva.

"And well I should," said Bomonga. He plunged his spear into the ground next to Takanuva's lance. "After all, I killed him."

Chapter 6

Back when Takanuva was Takua, a Matoran in the village of Ta-Koro, he had once found himself walking through a stretch of jungle, being stalked by a monstrous Nui-Jaga scorpion. Whenever he moved, the scorpion moved; if he stopped, it stopped. If he turned to face it, it would kill him, but if he led it back to the village, it might harm others before it was driven off. He was finally saved by a sudden inspiration: he changed direction and led the Nui-Jaga straight toward a Muaka-cat cave. Angered at the intrusion of its territory by the other Rahi beast, the Muaka attacked the Nui-Jaga, and Takua escaped.

Which just goes to show, thought Takanuva, nowadays there's never a Muaka around when you need one. Here he was, trudging across the barren plains of Karzahni in this weird alternate universe. Behind him were two Toa, Bomonga and Kualus, both of whom served the oppressive dictatorship of the Toa Empire. Between them was Jaller, a Matoran who, in Takanuva's world, was the Toa of Light's best friend. In this universe, he was a servant of the Empire, transporting the Mask of Time back to Metru Nui. That wasn't the worst of it, though: Takanuva needed to find Brutaka and the Mask of Dimensional Gates if he was ever going to make it back to his own universe. And Bomonga had just announced that Brutaka was dead, killed by him, all of which left Takanuva exactly nowhere.

"Ah, Brutaka," said Bomonga. "He fought well, but when he turned to fight Gaaki and Pouks, I hit him from behind and that finished him."

"Not very... fair," muttered Takanuva.

"Fair?" asked Bomonga. "He was an enemy of the Empire; he tried to prevent our lawful exploration of Voya Nui. Who cares how he died, as long as he's dead?"

"Our friend, Takanuva, seems to be carrying a conscience," said Toa Kualus. "That is a heavy burden in a place like this. You would be amazed how many poor, dead beings I see on the side of the path who just couldn't go one more step with that load on their backs."

"Spare me the philosophy," snapped Takanuva. "What about Brutaka's weapons and his mask? What happened to them?"

"You should know," said Bomonga, "if you really served Toa Tuyet, as you claim. any treasure like that gets brought to the Coliseum on Metru Nui for safe-keeping."

"Right, naturally," said Takanuva. This was going to be a problem: how was he going to get into what happened to be the most heavily guarded spot in Metru Nui to get that mask?

"You know, you remind me a little of someone," said Bomonga. "A Toa of Water, one of Lhikan's old team."

What was her name? Toa Naho, that was it. She came along on one of our missions to Odina to clean out that nest of Stone Rats. Offered to go after the Shadowed One herself, take all the risks. Turned out she was helping that creep escape. He got away; she didn't. Tuyet turned her over to her friend Roodaka and, well, she wound up an interesting exhibit in the Archives."

Takanuva knew he should keep quiet, but he couldn't. "Do you think this is what Tuyet really wanted? Toa betraying other Toa, Matoran living in fear of their heroes. Toa were supposed to be respected, and looked up to!"

"But we are," said Kualus. "Everyone respects what they fear, and they can't help but look up to us when we always look down on them."

Takanuva heard a stirring behind him. He could guess what it was: Bomonga and/or Kualus getting ready to blast him from behind. While there was no choice, he would have to try and take them both out and get the mask from Jaller. It would take a lot of luck, probably more than he could hope for, but...

Then he heard other sounds: a rush of wind, startled cries from the two Toa, which receded in the distance, and the sound of a cart crashing. He turned to see a strange Toa standing amidst the wreckage of Jaller's Ussal cart. He was retrieving the Mask of Time, which lay next to the unconscious Jaller. When he noticed Takanuva, he stopped.

"You're not one of them," the Toa of Air said. "That's why you're still alive. Don't make me regret that decision."

"Who are you?" asked Takanuva. "What do you want here?"

"What do I want?" said the Toa. "I want some peace, but I'm never going to get any while that crazy Toa of Water is running things. So I keep an eye out for things she wants, like this Mask here, then I take them from her. That's why when you see her list of enemies of the Empire, you'll find my name at the top: Toa Lesovikk."

Chapter 7

Under the cover of darkness, Toa Lesovikk and Toa Takanuva darted through the Sculpture Fields of Po-Metru. They had slipped back to Metru Nui via an underwater chute a few hours before. Lesovikk knew a few that were closed for repair but were still functioning and, the best of all, unguarded.

"Where are we going?" whispered Takanuva. "The Coliseum is the other way! If Brutaka's mask is in there, that's where I need to go."

"Right," said Lesovikk. "But if you want to get in and out of there alive, we do it my way. And my way starts at the Throne of Stone."

The Toa of Air pointed straight ahead. Not far away was indeed a huge throne made of rock, mounted atop a base of Rahkshi parts. Po-Matoran bearing torches surrounded it, and seated in the great chair was Toa Pohatu himself.

"Umm, excuse me," said Takanuva. "I ran into Tahu and Kopaka not long ago, and...are you sure this is a good idea?"

"Trust me," said Lesovikk, smiling.

After a few hours, the Po-Matoran left to go back to their homes. As Pohatu descended from his throne, Lesovikk scraped three times with his armored boot against a nearby

rock. The Toa of Stone stopped, head turned to listen. Then he said, "Lesovikk, you're out of your mind."

"It helps," said the Toa of Air, leading Takanuva to where Pohatu stood. "This is my new pal, Takanuva. He's waiting for the five widget tour of the Coliseum, particularly the Hall of Masks."

"Wait a minute," said Takanuva. "I don't understand any of this. Tahu, Pohatu and the rest were supposed to stay asleep until they were needed to awaken Mata Nui. But Mata Nui never fell asleep here, so why are they here?"

"He talks a lot, doesn't he?" Pohatu said to Lesovikk. Lesovikk shrugged.

"Okay, glowfish, let me tell you a story," Pohatu said. "Toa Tuyet found out where we were from Artakha. She sent some Toa in to find us, but none of them survived the trip. That was when she found a spot in the Coliseum no one had ever seen before: a place from which she could fake the signal that would launch our canisters. Next thing you know, here we are. She laid it all out for us: how the Makuta and the Dark Hunters were plotting to take over, and how it was our duty as Toa to stop them dead. It was the only way to make the universe really safe. So we all signed on, but, after a while, I started to have doubts. They turned into fears when I found out Tuyet had sent a squad headed by Toa Nidhiki to wipe out the Nynrah Ghosts, just because they might someday make something that could be used

against her. Four dozen Matoran dead. Still makes me sick. That was when I made contact with Lesovikk, and we've been working together ever since. Of course, Tuyet doesn't know that."

"You're a regular stone Wall of History," said Lesovikk. "But it's going to be light soon. We need to get the troops together and get ready for a raid."

Pohatu led the two Toa back to his cavern. Once inside, he used his power to send a mild tremor the length of Metru Nui; not enough to cause damage, just enough to signal those who would understand and then respond. They started filtering in through underground tunnels not long after. Nuju, Ahkmou, three Dark Hunters: Guardian, Darkness and Primal, one Toa: Krakua, and a Po-Matoran that Lesovikk introduced as Kodan.

"It's handy to have the Toa's Chronicler on our side," said Lesovikk. "Helps us stay informed."

"So what's the plan?" asked Takanuva. "We sneak in, steal the mask and get out?"

"He thinks small, too," Pohatu said to Lesovikk. Lesovikk shrugged.

"Listen, junior. I don't know where you came from or why," said Pohatu, "but I'm betting Tuyet doesn't know either, and maybe that gives us an edge. So we're putting everything on one Akilini play. Ahkmou here has alerted the Makuta in

town; Darkness took care of any Dark Hunters nearby who were still on two legs. Everybody's in."

"In what?" asked Takanuva.

"Tuyet's had her own way for too long," Pohatu answered, grabbing a Protosteel axe off the wall. "It's time to take her down."

Chapter 8

Takanuva crouched behind a wall, a wounded Lesovikk beside him. All around, elemental power bursts were flying, warriors were screaming and a disaster beyond his imagination was taking place.

It had all started out so well: Lesovikk's van had made it close to the Coliseum before being spotted. As planned, Takanuva had used his newfound shadow powers to blind the guards. Pohatu followed with a massive fist of stone that cracked the walls of the huge structure. To the east, Makuta Teridax led Krika, Kojol, Turaga Dume and Takua into battle.

At first, they made short work of the Matoran and Toa who guarded Tuyet's fortress. Then, it all went wrong: a Toa of Iron appeared on the walls and a hail of spikes spelt the end of Takua. Takanuva watched in sheer horror as his other self collapsed and died. Kojol fell next, his armor crushed by the Toa's power and his essence incinerated by a Toa of Plasma. Teridax was forced to pull back.

Things were going no better for Lesovikk's squad. Primal had run into Tahu in the eastern entrance, and killed the Toa of Fire. But the sudden appearance of Gali, and a sphere of Water around the Dark Hunter's head, left him to drown on dry land. Toa Krakua hit Gali with a wave of solid sound, blasting apart her mask and armor. Pohatu cried out

too late: Ahkmou had already dashed ahead and slain the fallen Toa of Water. He didn't get to enjoy his triumph long. Kopaka flash-froze Ahkmou, and a swipe from Onua's claws shattered the Matoran into little pieces of crystal and Protodermis.

Now it was no longer one battle, but a dozen separate ones being fought at once, the lines moving back and forth. Pohatu fought his way into the Coliseum, but found himself too evenly matched with Onua to make much progress. Lesovikk fell with an ice dagger in his shoulder, but rallied to blow Kopaka off his post high atop the Coliseum. Takanuva winced as the Toa of Ice hit the ground and lay still.

"Now," said Lesovikk to Takanuva. "Darkness will lead the way. Get in there and do what you have to."

"What about you?" asked Takanuva.

"We'll give them something to remember," said Lesovikk.

Takanuva took one last look around. Nuju was side-by-side with Guardian, keeping a Toa of Magnetism too off-balance to use his powers. Teridax's forces had charged again. Krika used his Vacuum power to absorb Lewa's attacks until Teridax had summoned a bolt of Lightning, powerful enough to turn a Toa into ashes.

Darkness was already on the move, slipping through the cracks in the Coliseum walls. Takanuva used his shadow power to enlarge them and followed.

Inside, the Coliseum was strangely silent. One would never know a battle raged outside its walls. A team of Toa rushed by on their way to join the fight. Steeling himself, Takanuva fired laser blasts at the ceiling, bringing the rubble down on top of them. He still found himself hoping he had only stunned them, not killed them.

Together, Toa and Dark Hunter fought their way to their goal: the Hall of Masks. They had made it to the chamber door when Darkness paused. He heard something. The next instance, the door exploded outward as a wall of water erupted from within, sweeping Darkness away. Takanuva managed to grab hold of the doorway, holding on with all his might and holding his breath.

Outside, Teridax's attack had met with success as Toa fell before him and Krika. Turaga Dume had rallied Lesovikk's group, although not before Nuju had been pulled into the Archives by plantlife gone wild. Guardian, too, fell, but took half a dozen Toa with him.

Back in the Coliseum, the deluge had finally stopped. There, framed in the chamber doors, was Toa Tuyet, Nui Stone in one hand, Mask of Dimensional Gates in the other.

"I know who you are," she said. "Or, rather, I had guessed. You don't belong here."

"Neither do you," said Takanuva. "You don't exist in my world. True Toa must have stood up and stopped you before you went too far."

"In my world, I am much more... competent," she replied.
"How unfortunate for you."

"Alright, then," said Takanuva. "For Takua, for Lesovikk, and for all the Toa and Matoran whose lives you have ruined, I strike."

Chapter 9

Toa Tuyet stood over the battered, semi-conscious body of Takanuva, Toa of Light. He did not stir. Being blown through half a dozen walls by a focused tidal wave would do that to you. Tuyet smiled.

"Pathetic, truly pathetic. If you are an example of what Toa are like in your universe, it's a wonder you haven't all been hunted to extinction by now."

The ruler of the Toa Empire slipped off her Mask of Intangibility and replaced it with a Kanohi Olmak, the mask Takanuva had come seeking. This mask alone had the power to open gateways to inter-dimensional space, and it was Takanuva's only hope of escaping this twisted world.

"Your friends outside are dead, or soon will be. I admit I was surprised to find they still had some fight left in them after 3500 years. But they can't be allowed to rob the Matoran of the peace I have brought them."

Takanuva managed to get to his hands and knees, rubble sliding off his back as he did so. He looked at Tuyet with eyes that held equal parts of contempt and pity.

"Peace?" he said, in disbelief. "Is that what you call perverting the Toa into secret police, terrorizing the villagers, killing anyone who opposes your rule?"

"I did what had to be done. I made the world right. And who are you to judge me? You are nothing but an alien from some other dimension."

Takanuva hurled a blast of shadow at Tuyet, temporarily cloaking her in darkness. By the time she could see again, he was gone. But his voice came from high above her, saying, "That's true; my world is messier than yours, more dangerous in some ways. But it is a world that's better, because you're not in it, Tuyet."

The Toa of Water unleashed her power, bringing the ceiling down, but Takanuva was not there. Instead, he sprang from the opening at the far end of the hall, hurling blinding light at Tuyet as he made a grab for her mask. She spun, caught him by the arm, and threw him hard to the floor.

"I have hundreds of times your power. You are nothing but a Lightstone to be ground to dust beneath my heel."

Takanuva attacked again, hurling bolts of shadow and light. To his amazement, Tuyet parried them with ease. Seeing his surprise, she laughed. "You know, we had no Toa of Light in this universe. We didn't need one. And in a few moments, we will be back to being without one."

Takanuva charged. The next few seconds were a blaze of battle. Lasers turning water to steam, waves crashing against walls, a race to see what would happen first: Takanuva drowning in the tide, or Tuyet drowning in darkness. When the fight was through, Tuyet stood once more triumphant.

"Enough! I have wasted enough time on you. Your rebellion is finished, and now, so are you."

Tuyet was about to strike when a strange sound penetrated the damaged Coliseum. Takanuva raised his head and glanced at a hole in the wall. He saw hundreds - no, thousands - of Matoran marching toward the building, all of them armed. In the distance he could see Airships and sea-going vessels carrying other Matoran, Dark Hunters, Vortixx and others. All of them were descending on the city, their eyes fixed on the Coliseum.

"Still think the rebellion is over?" Takanuva asked. "Or maybe it's just beginning."

"The fools. With my power, I can sweep them all away in a flood like no one has seen before."

Takanuva looked right into Tuyet's eyes. "Then who would there be left to protect? Who would you have made your perfect universe for?"

Tuyet smiled. "Very clever, Toa. True, a universe with only drowned Matoran would not be of much use to anyone. But they must be taught respect."

"Why? If they're so ungrateful, why not use your mask to travel somewhere else? Some place that needs you. Start over again, in another Metru Nui, one where they might welcome a ruler like you."

Tuyet glanced down at the street. The mob was coming closer, and though she could easily kill them all, it would

leave her as the ruler of an empire of corpses. Perhaps Takanuva was right. At the least, she could leave and return with an army of Toa from another dimension, enough to stamp out every last visage of rebellion in her own world.

She turned away and activated her mask. A portal into inter-dimensional space opened before her, and she prepared to step in. That was when Takanuva made his move. He somehow managed to hurl himself at Tuyet, snatching the mask from her face. For the second it lost contact with her, its power shut off and the portal began to close. Takanuva, mask in hand, dove through, but Tuyet was not about to let him escape so easily. Even as he cleared the portal, she grabbed on to his leg, trying to follow him. She blasted him with hard bolts of water, catching his hand and tearing the mask from his grasp. It floated away into the space between dimensions.

Takanuva turned back. What he saw horrified him, but his shout of warning came too late. Tuyet was halfway through the portal, trying to drag Takanuva back in. She was so consumed by rage that she never noticed the portal closing until it was much too late. She screamed as reality slammed shut on her body, leaving her upper half in the void and the lower half in the Coliseum on her world. Mercifully, death came instantly.

Takanuva hovered in space for a long moment. He wondered what would happen in Tuyet's universe with her gone. Would the Toa become protectors again? Would the Matoran take control? Or would some group of the Dark Hunters and Makuta become new dictators? Perhaps

someday, if he was able, he would return to find out the answer.

He turned his head away from the remains of Tuyet, wondering how a Toa could go so wrong, and realizing with a shudder what a fine line it could be between justice and tyranny. Tuyet's life had been wasted, but the lives of no more Toa would be lost if he could prevent it. With grim resolve, he resumed his journey to Karda Nui.

THE END