

BIONICLE™

CHRONICLES #1

Tale of the Toa



The legend begins...

SCHOLASTIC

C.A. Hapka

Tale of the Toa

By C. A. Hapka

The Hungarian release of Tale of the Toa is significantly expanded compared to all other releases. The nature of the added text suggests it is actually from an earlier draft of the book that was pared down before release in English. Back-translation and all further notes by Vrahno.

Notes:

Text exclusive to the Hungarian release, and presumably the original writing: underline

Text not found in the Hungarian release, likely added during the novel's revision: ~~strikethrough~~

The text retains some of the faults and name changes found in the Hungarian translation, but a handful of inconsistencies and errors have been corrected. It is unknown whether all of these mistakes are the faults of the Hungarian translator (his other work, including the dubs of the Bionicle movies, would say they are) or if some can be traced back to Hapka's unfamiliarity with the franchise. Additional observations and comments provided via footnotes.

The Legend of Mata Nui

In the time before time, the Great Spirit descended from the sky, carrying we, the ones called the Matoran, to this island paradise. We were separate and without purpose, so the Great Spirit blessed us with the three virtues: unity, responsibility, and duty. We embraced these gifts and, in gratitude, we named our island home Mata Nui, after the Great Spirit himself.

Our happiness didn't last forever. Mata Nui's brother, Makuta, was jealous of the glory and betrayed him. He cursed Mata Nui, who fell into a deep slumber. Makuta's power dominated the land, as fields withered away, sunlight grew cold, and ancient values were forgotten.

Still, all hope was not lost. Legends told of six mighty heroes, the Toa, who would arrive to save Mata Nui. Time would reveal that these were not simply myths – for the Toa did appear on the shore of the island. They arrived with no memory, no knowledge of one another – but they pledged to defend Mata Nui and its people against the darkness. Tahu, Toa of Fire, Onua, Toa of Earth, Gali, Toa of Water, Lewa, Toa of Air, Pohatu, Toa of Stone and Kopaka, Toa of Ice. Great warriors with great power, drawn from the very elements themselves. Together, they were six heroes with one duty: to defeat Makuta and save Mata Nui.

This is their story.

1. Tahu – Toa of Fire

A beach. He just stood as the sea's waves swept the sand of the gently sloping shore. On the other side of the shoreline, there lay a thick, dark and frightening jungle.

As he turned eastward to glance at the ocean, he saw waves breaking over a coral reef that extended for half a mile. Beyond that, there was nothing but water stretching to an unbroken horizon.

Where am I? he thought, his mind a haze of memories and dreams. *Who am I?*

...Tahu...

This word – a name maybe – floated in his soul. It seemed to fit, to make sense somehow. But little else did. He focused, trying to pressure his memories, maybe he'd recall something.

Blurry images flashed in front of him, but vanished in an instant. A deafening whirlwind, some kind of chaotic battle against an invisible and unknown thing... a swarm of bug-like creatures... a dark, evil presence clouding the Sun, the water and the air...

Tahu shook his head in frustration. Why couldn't he remember more? How had he come to this place – and why?

"I must know" he murmured. "Why don't I know it already?"

Tahu glanced toward the shiny metal box that had brought him here. Near it he saw several red components lying on the sand. Two turned out to be some type of blade – wide, flat pieces of metal that formed a leaping bolt of flame. When he put them together, they formed a sword whose handle sat comfortably in his clawed hand. True, it was heavy and awkward to swing.

He scowled. "Useless hunk of metal," he muttered, jabbing the blade into the sand.

Then he noticed the last object in the sand. It was a mask. It stared up at him with gaping eyeholes, its surface catching the sunlight so that it appeared to come alive in his hands. Tahu gazed at the object for a long minute. Why does it trigger such forceful feelings in him? Suddenly, the image of a shining golden mask appeared, floating in front of him in the darkness, along with a temple and a tunnel. He lifted it up.

Taking a deep breath, he placed the mask on his face.

A sudden power surged through him, filling every inch of his steely, flame-colored body with hot, burning energy. Yes! This was more like it!

Tahu grabbed the flame-shaped sword and lifted it. This time, to his surprise, the blade was glowing with crimson fire, waves of heat gleaming around its surface. When he swung the sword, it sizzled through the air, trailing sparks in its wake.

“Yes!” Tahu said with a satisfied grin.¹ The sight of the flames made him warm, and somehow, he felt he was home. “Now we’re getting somewhere.”

But was he? He let the sword fall to his side, overwhelmed by despair. Why was he here? What was he supposed to do now?

... *The knowing will come...*

Tahu blinked and stared. Did this thought come from him? He wasn’t sure. It felt so firm, as if some force had spoken through him in an infinitely patient voice.

No! he thought, and discarded the thought, no matter where it had come from. *I have to remember more! Right now!*

He ground his teeth. He really wanted to know the answers to his questions. But nothing – just more deadly brief, uncertain flashes. This time, he saw icy, life-freezing, cold fields. A trembling, red blot of light in a deep, stuffy cavern. A pair of eyes swam in the nothingness...

“Why am I unable to remember?!” He howled in anger, swinging his sword over his head.

A bolt of fiery energy shot forth, erupting into the sky like an erupting volcano. A kahu bird flew lazily in the air, let out a caw and then fluttered away. Sparks showered down onto the beach, but Tahu didn’t feel their heat.

¹ Mistranslation. Should say “grim satisfaction”.

Power... I have such power, he thought with wonder. *The power of fire. Of heat and flame. But where does it come from? What is it for?*

The questions multiplied, but they had no answers. Not knowing made him frustrated and angry. It made him want to turn his sword against the earth, the sky, the beach – the very world itself. It was tempting – so tempting. To lose himself in chaos, to strike out with no thought for past, future, or anything else. His arm held his sword high, he was shaking impatiently, the hot energy was already swirling within him.

Tahu took a deep breath. No. He can’t give up so easily. Somehow he knew that, just as he’d known his name.

Okay, okay, he told himself. He loosened his grip on the handle, till the burning fire inside him turned to ashes. *The knowing will come. At least I hope.*

2. Lewa – Toa of Air

“This sturdy clingwiner will do, I expect,” the bright green figure murmured to himself, stretching to grab a vine that was hanging down in front of him. He glanced into the canyon below, then shook his head and grinned. “No secondthink, just go!”

He didn't give himself time to ponder what he would have to do, he leaped off the tree branch overhanging the canyon. He swung himself halfway across, then let go. Momentum carried him in a graceful arc over and past the gorge, to the thick jungle canopy on the other side. His arms outstretched, he soared effortlessly on the air currents, aiming for a sizable madu tree.

He laughed with relief as he landed cleanly on a tweedy branch. Though it bent under his weight, it provided solid footing for his swift feet.

“Now that was fun,” he exclaimed into the open air.

He hadn't been sure that he could make such a leap – he took his chances urged by a sudden thought; rather this than waste his time climbing down into the gorge and climb back up on the other side. And this way, he learned at least one thing: the air was his friend!

He didn't know much else since he had woken up in a frosty area. He knew his name was Lewa. At least he thought so. He liked the name – it sounded strong and mysterious.

Lewa, mysteryking of know-nothingness, he thought with a smile. That's me!

He glanced down at himself, at his strong limbs the color of the jungle leaves. In one hand he carried an axlike blade, perfect for slicing through thick underbrush or twining foliage. On his other hand, there were two strong, dexterous fingers that could grasp the branches and vines firmly. Though he couldn't see it, he knew that his bright green mask swept back in a streamlined shape perfect for cutting through the air.

His smile faded as his mind flashed back to the dreams. Were they perhaps reality? Or really just dreams? He hoped for the latter, for his dreams had been dark and chaotic, full of heavy knowledge which he was however unable to remember. They started spinning in his mind when he had placed the mask onto his face. But now he only recalled fragments: cries in the darkness, a giant, black figure, a suffocating mask...

“Never mind,” he muttered to drive away the fragmented memories. “Time enough for darkthought later. It's time for look for some goodanswer.”

Lewa had immediately found himself drawn to the lush, dripping jungle. Now that he was here, he felt at home. Even the screeches of the unseen creatures had calmed him, and they were strangely familiar, though he was sure he had never set foot here before.

He progressed deeper into the jungle, jumping from one tree to the other, heading south. Even he didn't know why

he chose this direction – he was prompted by an intuition – but he gleefully followed the impulse.

As he reached the edge of a large stand of Volo trees, Lewa jumped onto a slender branch. The motion flung something out of a nest of feathers and twigs farther along the branch.

He cried out in dismay, realizing that he had just ejected a baby Taku out of its nest. Without thought, he flung one arm upward through the air in the direction of the falling chick.

“Up you go!” he cried, the words bursting out of him, though even he was surprised by what he was doing.

For a moment he thought that the baby bird was flying away. Then he gasped when he realized the truth.

No, not flying, the wind had caught it and carried it aloft. Leaping across to a closer branch, Lewa reached up and caught the chick gently in one hand. He placed it carefully back in its nest and sighed with relief.

“Now, what kind of happy luck was that, huh?” he murmured. “Or... or *was* it?”

Suddenly, he flung up his arm as he had done a moment earlier with the little bird. Once again, a quick gust swooped up from below with a swirl of leaves.

“It was me!” Lewa gasped in amazement. “I did it. The wind friend obeys me!”

He stretched out both arms to test this theory. But then, he glimpsed something in the corner of his eye. As he turned towards it, he spotted a small figure staring at him from a lower branch on a nearby tree.

“Hello there, little friend!” Lewa shouted, lowering his arms and looking at him curiously. “Are there others in this jungle too?”

Maybe he could answer his questions... He leaped easily to the lower branch and landed softly beside the other being. The small figure was weakly shaking, regarding Lewa with fear.

“Could this be?!” the person yelled. “We thought this dawn hope would never come. Could it be that the Toa have arrived?”

“Toa?” Lewa tasted the word on his tongue. He found it pleasant and worthy. “What’s a Toa?”

“What? Why, you!” the other one shouted. “The Turaga will explain, better understanding than me. Come with me to the village!”

“Does the Turaga you speak of know the answers to my questions?” Lewa asked eagerly.

When the other one nodded, Lewa began smiling. “Then show me the way, little one! Show me the good way!”

3. Onua – Toa of Earth

Dig, pull, scrape, push. Dig, pull, scrape, push.

Onua fell into comfortable rhythm as he scooped out a new tunnel. When he had noticed the tunnel entrance and swiftly embraced the pleasant darkness, he felt much better. He was happy to be underground.

But he still felt uneasy. Aside from his name, he didn't know anything about who or where he was. And he couldn't shake the feeling that he was somehow missing something – missing a piece of himself.

But he didn't exactly feel home. He knew nothing aside from his name, not where he is, nor who he is. Moreover, he couldn't do away with the thought that something was amiss – something that's part of him.

This is only due to the lack of knowledge, he thought to himself, as he shoveled another clump of dirt from the ever-growing tunnel. It is understandable that I'm feeling strange. I don't even know who or what I am.

He pushed the thought aside, continuing his work. There was no sense in wasting energy fretting over what he couldn't control. All he could do was control what he could, like the digging.

But why is he digging? Onua stopped and frowned. Something had made him start this tunnel. Though why, what is his goal?

... the knowing will come too...

The thought surprised Onua. Was he the one thinking it? It almost felt like it had come from outside, like those dim, distressing dreams he remembered from the time before he awakened...

"No matter," he murmured, reaching out for another clump of earth. "Knowledge won't come when we're waiting for it with out arms crossed."

He forced himself back to work. It was easy to shove aside the questions, and it was easy to submerge in the joy of working with earth. Deep within his consciousness, though, the questions remained, heavy, thick and solid with mysteriousness.

Soon he had already dug at least a hundred lengths through the solid earth. His eyes, which could see weakly and faintly on the surface, could easily adapt down here, allowing him to see well in the dark of the tunnel.

But why is he digging?

Onua powered his huge hand forward through a rocky section of the tunnel wall. It met empty air instead of earth and rock. Interesting.

Pushing through with a shower of stones and clay, he found himself in a large cavern. In the center, a tower of rock ended in a flat stone platform. Atop it, a lightstone glowed.

So there are others underground, Onua thought. Perhaps they will have some answers for me.

He spotted a tunnel in the far wall of the cavern and followed it.

Turning a corner, it was a familiar-looking figure at the center of an especially large mural that startled him. “Is that – me?” he whispered, reaching out to touch the delicately sculpted image. It portrayed a powerful-looking figure with a wedge-shaped mask and large clawed hands. There were five other, similar figures surrounding him. Standing opposite the group was a horde of frightening creatures, enormous lizards, scorpions and a pair of formidable, crablike monsters. What are these? And who are those figures standing around him?

But most importantly, what was a picture of him doing on the wall when he had just arrived here?

As Onua gently followed the lines of the carving with one of his clawed fingers, he felt a strange vibration in the wall. Stepping forward, he put his head to it, listening intently.

... *damdamdammm, damdamdammm, damdamdammm*
...

It was a steady rhythm. He had no idea what it meant, but he planned to find out. With one last glance at the picture of himself, he turned and continued down the tunnel, keeping one hand on the wall to follow the vibrations.

The pulsing grew stronger and stronger – and with the next twist of the tunnel, Onua found what he was looking for. Another enormous cavern lay before him, lit by more lightstone platforms. Dozens of stone columns stretched up to the high ceiling. Between these columns were paths made of cobblestones set into the earthen floor. Stone benches stood beside the paths, and a small, clear stream trickled hurriedly through the cavern, with graceful stone bridges arching above it here and there.

It must be a – a park of some sort, Onua realized. But down here? Why? And how?

Stepping forward, he saw that the little stream emptied out into a still, round pool lined with pebbles. In the center, reddish-brown gemstones spelled out a word:

ONU-KORO

What did that mean? What kind of connection did it have with his name, which sounded similar?

Before he had time to ponder this, Onua saw a small figure hurrying across the park. Onua leaped forward, with both his arms raised above his head. “You there!” he called. “Hey! Hello!”

The figure glanced over his shoulder, then stopped short. “Oh!” he exclaimed. “Oh, oh!” Onua frowned. Perhaps this being didn’t speak the same language as he did. He cleared his throat. “Hel-lo,” he said as slowly and clearly as he could. “I be Onua.” He put a hand to his chest, then pointed toward the other. “You be who? You understand me?”

“Of course!” the small figure cried, and rushed toward him. He slid to a halt, bending into a sort of hurried bow. “Oh, Toa Onua, we have been waiting for you such a long time! And how long! Come, please, Turaga Whenua will want to see you right away.”

Confused, Onua followed him through the archway carved into the cave’s wall. “You know my name, but I don’t know yours.”

“Oh! Forgive my rudeness, Toa. My name is Onepu. I am a member of the Matoran of Onu-Koro.”

Onepu led the way through a series of tunnels and caverns. Soon they reached another large cavern. On each wall, a series of carved-out dwellings climbed nearly to the ceiling.

“I see,” Onua replied, storing this data in his head. He also noted that the Matoran was wearing a mask that almost looked like his own, just a bit smaller. “Well, I have another question, Onepu. Why did you call me a Toa?”

“The Turaga will explain everything,” Onepu said in an excited tone. “This is too big a task for me, and besides, the matter is far too important and urgent. We have no time to lose.”

Onua shrugged. So he is going to meet a Turaga, whatever or whoever that may be.

Onepu lead him across a row of tunnels and caves. Despite the darkness, he was moving really fast. Soon, they arrived at another giant cavern that was nearly as big as where he had discovered the park. Huts carved into stone lined all of the walls, almost reaching up to the ceiling.

Onua blinked, trying to take in all of these staggering sights. So Onepu and others like him really live down here? Suddenly all of this began to make sense. If he feels so much better deep under the earth, why couldn't others feel the same way?”

“Wait here, please, Toa,” Onepu said, gesturing toward a large stone bench near the fountain. “I will fetch the Turaga.”

Onua nodded, and the Matoran rushed off. Onua didn't sit down, he instead took the opportunity to look around. At the center of the cavern was a fountain filled with crystal-clear water. A sculpture arose from the pool, spouting water out of several spots.

Onua blinked. Was he going crazy? Or did that sculpture look an awful lot like him?

As he watched his own statue, he pondered with a heavy heart what other kinds of strange surprises may await him in this new world.

As he took a step forward, his foot touched the small stone wall surrounding the fountain. He felt a strong, solid, familiar rhythm: *damdamdadamm, damdamdadamm, damdamdadamm*. There was no telling what sort of machinery was pumping the water, but it caused the vibrations he had felt on the wall where he saw the relief. Now that he listened closely, he realized that it could even faintly be felt through the cave's floor as well.

He was still staring at the fountain when he heard someone behind him. Turning, he saw a figure much like Onepu, but a bit taller and with a different mask. The eyes behind that mask held patience, caution, and great wisdom.

“I am Whenua, Turaga of this village,” the stranger said, bowing. “Welcome, Toa Onua. We have been waiting for you.”

“Yes, so I’ve heard,” Onua replied. “And I’ve been awaiting some clue about who I am and what I’m doing here.”

“The legends said that would be the case,” Whenua said. “It was said that the members of the Toa, when they arrived, would remember very little beyond scraps of dreams and fragments of their goal.”

Onua took a deep breath. Dreams and fragments? How could the Turaga know about this?

“You said when ‘they’ arrived,” Onua said. “Does that mean there are others like me?”

Whenua nodded. “There are five others,” he said. “Each of you draws his power from a different element. Yours is the earth itself, which is perhaps the strongest of all. This underground world is your home, but even beyond these caves, you have the ability to melt earth with your will. Your purpose is to use that power to face and fight the mighty and evil Makuta.”

Though Onua wasn’t sure why, the name sent a chill through him. An image floated into his mind. Dark, empty eyes in an even darker face shrouded with gray smoke.

“Makuta?” Onua repeated as the image floated away. “Who or what is this Makuta?”

“He is the darkness, the essence of chaos and emptiness and fear, the spirit of destruction,” Whenua replied in a trembling voice. “His strength is unmatched, and it is said that only the Toa have the power to stand against him.”

“It is said?” Onua asked. “You don’t sound too certain about the success of this venture.”

Whenua shook his head sadly. “It serves no purpose to be false, for the earth cannot be deceived,” he said. “Nothing about your quest is certain, except that it is your duty to try. That is all that any of us can do in this life.”

Onua nodded. The Turaga’s words rang true. Now he knew what he felt he had lacked: duty. But he didn’t feel so anymore.

“I will do what I can,” promised Onua solemnly. “But first, you must tell me all you know of these powers you say I have.”

“Of course, Toa,” Whenua said. “That is my responsibility. First, you should know that the power itself comes from within you, but it is focused through your mask. This is the Pakari, the Great Mask of Strength.”

“That’s my mask?” Onua touched his hand to his face, remembering the surge of strength and power when he’d first put it on.

Whenua nodded somberly. “The Pakari gives you power – great power,” he said. “But one mask will not be enough.”

4. Gali – Toa of Water

The waters lifted her, carrying her along in a soft current of warmth. She didn't know who or where she was, but she knew she belonged here in the calm, cool blue of the sea. That was perhaps the only thing she knew for sure.

That and her name: Gali.

But I can't just float here forever, she reminded herself. She opened her eyes and ducked beneath the waves. I have things to do. If only I knew what they were...

She had no certain memories, but many uncertain ones – fragments of thoughts and images. There was urgency in those fragments, though some of them hinted at peace as well. Especially one, an endless sea of calm waters surrounding an island, embracing it and soothing its ills.

Gali kicked swiftly forward with her flipperlike feet. Her hooked arms cut through the water, and the ridged edges on her blue mask sent bubbly ripples out to the sides as she swam. The sea was full of life around her, but Gali felt strangely alone.

As she passed a forest of drifting algae, she felt a shivering tremor radiate through the water. A brightly colored eel raced past her. A couple seconds later, several schools of fish followed, seeking refuge among the jagged crevices of the ocean floor.

Gali paused and stared in the direction the creatures had come. What had frightened them? More fish rushed past

her in a panic, along with several crabs and snails and even a small shark. Gali pushed forward, swimming against the tide of fleeing sea creatures.

A large coral reef blocked her view of whatever lay beyond. As she swam around it, Gali saw a gigantic creature barreling toward her. The water churned around its savage visage as its long, powerful arms pulled it forward toward Gali faster and faster.

Gali gasped. She had no idea what the monster might be, but she could see why the other creatures had fled. The predator wore a dingy-looking, ugly mask over its triangular face, and its gleaming red eyes were ruthless and savage.

There was no time to outswim the huge creature, it was already too close. For a tenth of a second Gali thought of using the coral reef for protection, but she didn't like the thought of what would happen if the monster followed her. She couldn't stand to imagine the beast crashing through the delicate structures, destroying the living coral.

She let her instincts take over. Pushing off of the coral, she bulleted through the water off to one side. Then she shot toward the surface, her strong, flipper-shaped feet propelling her faster and faster. When she broke through the surface, she extended her arms, not sure why she was doing so.

She felt the waters gather and respond to her call. As the giant sea creature burst to the surface a short distance away, an enormous wave formed around Gali. Though her vicious pursuer leaped forward, she forced herself to wait, rely on the water.

A second later the creature's teeth clanged together, but its victim was gone from where it had been a moment before. The tidal wave rocketed Gali away toward the shore, faster than any creature could swim. Gali smiled, she enjoyed the salty sprinkle on her mask and limbs, as the waters carried her to safety. "So this is what I was born for", she thought. "I am here to command the seas. But for what purpose? I must find out more!"

A few minutes later, she shook herself dry as she stepped out of the water. She stood there for a minute, looking around. She felt strangely reluctant to leave the water. Her blue body, which so perfectly blended in with the water, stood out on land. She felt exposed and uncertain.

She glanced straight ahead. A thick, dripping jungle began where the sands left off, and Gali started for it. The humidity of the place reached out, beckoning to her, and she could not resist its call.

The jungle too was full of life, just as the sea. When Gali closed her eyes, she could almost feel the living creatures surrounding her. The trees, the animals, the birds, insects, even the earth itself.

This place is full of life, of the joy to live, Gali thought. *And still...*

She frowned, trying to catch a feeling that always eluded her. The dark, dangerous flow of... something. Like that vibration she felt before the sea predator appeared, yet different. What could it be?

She closed her eyes, took deep breaths, trying to lure the this feeling out of the air. But suddenly a faint wind surrounded her, diverting her attention. Gali's eyes opened wide from the surprise.

"What the heck?" she murmured, and looked confused.

"Hey!" a voice yelled from above her head. "You down there! What are you?"

Gali looked up to see someone sitting on a thin branch right above her head. He almost looked like her but his body was a tad leaner, and his mask green just like the being itself.

"I am Gali," she shouted at the stranger. "That's all I know. Who are you?"

"Lewa," the other answered with a brief, jingling laugh that caused the leaves around him to jitter. "At least that's the name I gave myself, and so far no one had an arguement against it. Where did you come from? How long have you been here? What have you lookseen? How..."

Gali interrupted him, laughing. "Enough with the questions, brother," she yelled, the remark slipping out of her mouth with ease. "I can only answer one at a time. If I can at all."

Lewa smiled. "Sorry, sister," he said "but I had no one to talk to since I left my village."

"Village? What village? Where is it?"

"Overcliff in deepforest, beyond wide, pebbly roadground, after the ancient grove." Lewa gestured slightly to the south.

"It's called Le-Koro. I think it was named after me, or me after it, I forgot to ask."

Gali had a bit of trouble following the odd speech. The description gave her no idea where the village her brother talked about could be. But she was excited to hear about its existence.

"Tell me about your village," she urged. "What did you learn there?"

Lewa shrugged, crouching down on the branch to get closer to her. "Oh, just the dutysense," he said suddenly. "You know, there's this evildoer, his name's Makuta, who evildoos on the island."

"Island," muttered Gali. Another piece of the puzzle solved. "This is an island! Of course! I should have realized!"

"Anyway," Lewa continued, "it seems there's six of us, and this is the Toa. We all get our strengthpowers from the masks we wear."

He got silent for long enough to touch his green mask. "And our dutytask is to find the rest of the masks, to victoryfight against this Makuta."

Gali nodded slowly, she understood all. It fit together with what little she recalled from her disturbing dreams.

"Please, tell me more."

"That's all I know," Lewa shrugged again. "Makuta stolehid the masks all across the island, and guards them with his slavemonsters. It won't be easypie to get them all."

"But we must," Gali said, deep in thought. "I see. Well then, I believe it would be best if we find the others. The other Toa."

Lewa blinked once. "Why would we?"

"What do you mean why?" Gali asked. "Didn't you just say that our duty is to find the masks?"

"Yeah, you're trueright," answered Lewa. "But who said we have to seek them in a tightgroup? If we go alone, the dutyjob will be much quicker goaldone."

Gali frowned, she didn't quite understand. Why isn't Lewa burning to find the others who resemble him? Doesn't he have the same heart as her?

"Perhaps you're right," she said. "But perhaps not. To me, it seems like our task is to find the others. Then, when we have found them, our path will be clearer."

Lewa nodded impatiently. "I thinkguess so," he said. "But it could be a big timewaste that hinders us in seekfinding the masks."

"Who said we can't do it either way?" Gali smiled at her reassuringly. "Right?"

"It's thoughtpossible," Lewa repeated. He sighed. "Okay then, honeytongue. Lets jointtravel for a while, and we'll see how it goes. Deal?"

"Deal," Gali replied. "Which direction were you headed?"

Lewa pointed up and north. "You can't see it from here, only leavetop," he said. "But that way there's a snowbigmountain. My leavebrothers told a myhttale that there's many masks hidden on the slippersylopes."

"Ice?" Gali shivered, she didn't like the sound of that word. But she nodded. "Then lets go."

They cut through the jungle. Lewa was leading the way, jumping from branch to branch. Gali was wading through the wet ground below the trees.

"You can't fast-walk in that splashwater," Lewa remarked after a few minutes. "Come up here toptree."

"You mean I should jump among the trees like an overgrown bird?" Gali asked. "No thanks."

"Why are you spitetalking this planthought?" argued Lewa, grinning. "You think you can legsprint faster than I can vineswing?"

"Only one way to find out," Gali shot back. "The last one to reach that rotten tree trunk over there has to do a handstamp in the swamp."

"Prepare for sorryfailure, sister," Lewa shouted. "I won't be getting hairwet."

Gali stifled a smile as Lewa sprang forward eagerly, swinging from tree to tree with new-found strength. She didn't bother trying to keep up with Lewa, who was somersaulting his way to the tree trunk.

This small, lively, green stranger is unpredictable, Gali thought, though he was to her liking. What could the other Toa be like? she wondered. Will she ever find them?

5. Pohatu – Toa of Stone

Pohatu stopped and glanced over his shoulder. On the high, dusty stone wall that surrounded the village of Po -Koro, dozens of Matoran were gathered, watching him go. Grinning, Pohatu shaded his eyes with one of his hands and gave them a quick wave with the other. The villagers waved back and cheered.

“That was an interesting visit,” Pohatu said aloud to himself as he turned away again. “It’s not every day you find out you’re the Toa of Stone. Whatever that is.”

He almost tripped on a protruding stone in the path. Glancing down, he saw three words spelled out in cobblestones beneath his feet –

UNITY RESPONSIBILITY DUTY

“Hmm, now where have I heard those words before?” Pohatu murmured with a chuckle. ~~The Turaga of Po-Koro~~ He had spent a long time talking with the Turaga and the other villagers after he found the way to Po-Koro. They had told him of many things – the strange, dark history of this island of Mata Nui, the mysterious masks called Kanohi that were hidden throughout the island. Best of all, they said that there were more of those like Pohatu, five other Toa with powers as strong as his own.

As the village elders² spoke, three words had come up again and again – unity, responsibility, duty –, one way or another

2 Translation goof.

they popped up in almost every sentence. At first it was amusing, but Pohatu quickly learned the importance of these three things. These had given the Matoran a purpose, something to strive for always.

Now it was time to see the rest of this island. He spotted a faraway, snow-capped mountain, which rose above the clouds down to the south.

Turaga Onewa said this mask I wear is the Kanohi Kakama, the Great Mask of Speed, Pohatu thought. Maybe it’s time to put it to the test.

He hesitated, wondering if it was wise to experiment with his powers when he still knew so little about how they worked. He was unsure about the Kanohi masks, he didn’t know where they came from and what purpose they served. It seemed foolhardy to use the mask’s power so soon, it might even be dangerous.

But what was the worst that could happen? Gathering his energy, directing his gaze toward the top of the Ihomountain³ – and ran.

The desert landscape passed in a yellowish blur, all details obscured by the Toa’s immense speed. After a moment the yellowish blur shifted into a brown one punctuated by flashes of green and then quickly grew paler again until all Pohatu could see around him was white.

He slowed to a stop. He was standing in a snowdrift overlooking a frozen lake. When he looked up, he saw the

3 For some reason, Mount Ihu was changed to Iho and combined into one word in the Hungarian releases.

steep, icy slopes of the Ihomountain rising above right in front of him.

“Outrageous,” he said breathlessly, a smile spreading behind his mask. “Now that’s what I call speed!”

He walked down to the edge of the lake, and bent forward to observe his reflection in its glassy surface. The eye that looked back from the bronze-colored mask was still sizzling from the excitement of the speedy travel. As his gaze wandered downward, he saw his own lanky form, his long, musclebound arms and legs, the gleaming bronze on his feet and upper body, his strong, two-fingered hands...

His self-exploration was interrupted by the sudden cry of a bird sitting nearby. Pohatu smiled sheepishly. “I’ve admired myself enough,” he told the bird. “I better get moving. I don’t want the other Toa to gather up and start having fun without me.”

He was only half-joking. Ever since the Matoran had told him about the others, he’s been waiting eagerly to find them, to talk to them. Somehow he was sure that if he’s with them, he’ll find the answers to whatever questions he still had. Especially those relating to his cloudy dreams...

Leaving the frozen lake behind, he started up the mountainside. The Turaga had told him the main temple, Kini-Nui, was in the exact center of the island on the far side of the Ihomountain. It seemed as likely a place as any to look for the other Toa. Pohatu felt an urge to use his speed again to get there, but he resisted. He suspected that the top of the Ihomountain would give him a good view of the island, and besides, it could be useful to get to know this

place for when it comes to finding the masks the Matoran have been constantly talking about.

As he turned around to check his progress, he caught a glimpse of movement somewhere farther up the slope. A bird?

“Not unless this island grows its birds awfully big,” he muttered, staring at the silver-and -white figure gliding gracefully down a high mountain slope, powdery snow flying up in an arc behind his feet. No, there was only one thing it could be. Another Toa!

His heart pounding, Pohatu leaped up the slopes, gathering speed – careful not to go too fast. He didn’t want to overshoot his target.

He lost sight of his quarry for a few minutes as he tromped through a narrow valley. Grumbling at the snowdrifts, which came up to his waist in some spots. He glanced upward. At the top of the valley, a rocky bluff hid the higher slopes from his view. He clambered up toward it, finally leaving the deeper snowdrifts behind. Brushing the snow from his body, he gazed at the precipice standing in his way. If he had judged the distance right, the other Toa should be on the snowy slope just on the other side.

“Time for a shortcut,” Pohatu murmured. “I don’t want him to start skiing down that hill and get away from me. Besides, I might as well start getting used to this power of mine.”

Taking a deep breath, he hunched his shoulders and raced straight at the solid stone.

6. Kopaka – Toa of Ice

Krmmm, krmmm,... Craaasash!

Kopaka's ice blade was up and ready as the rocky bluff exploded and the first flying ice chunk was about to reach him. But there was no time to dodge as enormous boulders rained down around him.

"Watch out!" a voice cried from somewhere in the storm of stone.

Kopaka lifted his shield, protecting himself as best he could. When the eruption of stone stopped, he found himself trapped between several huge boulders.

Glancing up, he saw a figure about his own size gazing down at him, resting his weight on one of the large stones, staring down at him. The stranger wore a bronze-colored mask, and the eyes behind it were concerned and a bit sheepish.

"Sorry about that," the stranger said. "I was practicing. Are you all right?"

"I would be," Kopaka returned icily. "If you weren't standing on me."

The stranger jumped back a few steps, then stretched out his arm. "Let me help you out." Kopaka was already pointing his ice blade at the nearest rock. He was annoyed that the stranger's sudden appearance had taken him by surprise, caught him with his defenses down. He would not make that mistake again.

"Thank you. I don't need help," he said.

Focusing his energy, he channeled it through the blade. A thrill ran through him as the rock around him froze solid, becoming brittle and glassy.

The other figure was still watching him anxiously. "Let me do it," he urged as Kopaka lifted his blade again. "It'll be faster."

Kopaka frowned, already tired of the stranger's pushy chatter. "I said, I can do it myself." Bringing the blade down, he smashed the icy boulder into smithereens, freeing himself.

The stranger looked impressed for a moment. Then he shrugged. "Yeah, well, you missed one," he said, kicking at one remaining boulder.

Kopaka blinked as the huge stone went sailing off toward the horizon. Whoever this stranger was, he was strong – incredibly strong. Kopaka supposed that meant he had to be one of the other Toa that Turaga Nuju had mentioned.

But Kopaka had no interest in meeting other Toa. He had a far more important goal floating before his eyes: he wanted to find the Kanohi masks and defeat the darkness threatening this land. Nothing else mattered.

Turning away from the stranger, he continued on his way without a word. The Matoran had told him there was a mask at the top of this mountain – the Place of Far-seeing, they had called it. He meant to find that mask as soon as possible.

He heard the snow crackling behind his back, which told him the other Toa was following.

~~But the stranger didn't get the message.~~ "Hey," the stranger called. "Wait! Are you a Toa? I've been looking for you – I am Pohatu, Toa of Stone."

Kopaka considered not answering – maybe if he ignored this annoying Pohatu, he would go away. But it seemed unlikely.

"Kopaka," he said brusquely. "Ice. And if you don't mind, I'm in the middle of something. See you later." He bent and effortlessly rode a slight dip in the ground, his feet sliding smoothly over the ice. He soon left Pohatu behind.

But it turned out that the newcomer was not to be abandoned so easily. "Wait!" Pohatu called again, scrabbling up the hill. "Listen, I have a feeling we're both here for the same reason. Lets team up. It might make things easier."

"I work alone."

"By choice?" Pohatu caught up⁴ quickly. "Or just because no one can stand you?"

Kopaka almost smiled at that. ~~Almost.~~ This other Toa was irritating and far too chatty, but he also seemed to be quick-witted. And he was certainly strong, or else he wouldn't have been able to kick that solid boulder almost all the way to the sea. Perhaps he could come in handy after all. Especially if they came across another of those huge, vicious creatures that the Matoran called Rahi...

⁴ Translation error. Should say "returned".

"All right," Kopaka said after a long moment. "Come along. After all, I might need a mountain moved – or the island lifted."

Pohatu chuckled. "Okay," he said. "So – where are we going, anyway? Po-Koro's people said that a few masks are hidden on this mountain. Should we start looking for those, or seek the other Toa first? I understand there's six of us in total."

Kopaka pointed toward the peak rising just above them. Then he climbed on, not bothering to check whether Pohatu was following.

A few minutes later the two of them were standing at the peak of the mountain. Kopaka immediately spotted a mask lying in the snow.

Pohatu saw it, too. ~~"Good work, brother," he said. "Go ahead—claim your prize."~~ "I see this was meant for you," he said. "At least, judging by its color."

Kopaka nodded. The new Kanohi ~~looked gray and lifeless lying in the snow~~ was icy white, just like his. ~~Though it was the same size as his own mask,~~ Its shape was different – a helmetlike form with angled eyes and three slashes in each cheek.

The Kanohi Hau, Kopaka thought, remembering what the Turaga had told him. *The Great Mask of Shielding.*

"Wow!" Pohatu said as he looked around. "You can see the whole island from up here!"

Kopaka ignored him, he bent to pick up the mask. He stared at it for a moment, then carefully placed it over his own mask. Immediately, a strange feeling overwhelmed him. As if a cushion of strength had settled in around him, protecting him from all harm.

"I can feel the mask's energy protecting me," he said aloud. He almost forgot Pohatu was there too.

But what of his other powers? Did this new mask affect them? He concentrated hard. He called forth the power of his original mask, which gave him the ability to see through stone and snow to what lay beneath. Glancing down at the ground, he saw the icy snow, and then the raw, cold dirt underneath, and below that, a layer of rock crosscut with veins of minerals.

The powers of the Mask of Vision are still mine to use, he thought. He was pleased.

As he turned his gaze toward the south, he began blinking in surprise because his all-seeing vision cut straight through the craggy bluffs to several bright spots of color far below in the foothills. Then he sighed. For a moment he was tempted to turn away, to ignore what he'd seen. But he realized he might as well face up to the inevitable.

"We have to go," he told Pohatu abruptly, hating the thought of what was to come but knowing there was no avoiding it. "Come on!"

"Why?" Pohatu looked bewildered. He had been gazing over the western shoreline but now turned to Kopaka.

"No questions," Kopaka was tired of all the conversation. "Just follow me."

The two of them headed down the mountain, Pohatu skidding and slipping on the icy slopes. Kopaka would have liked to swiftly ski down the smooth ice to the foot of the mountain. It would have felt nice to be alone for a few minutes and digest what he had just discovered about the power of his mask. But he forced himself to move slowly so the other Toa could keep up.

They were about halfway down when there was an earth-shattering roar from somewhere just ahead of them.

"Uh-oh," Pohatu said. "I don't like the sound of that."

Before Kopaka could respond, a massive creature burst through a snowbank a short distance below where the Toa were standing, sending a shower of snow and ice shards out on all sides. Kopaka shielded his eyes, squinting at the enormous, snorting, puffing beast as it skidded to a stop just a few lengths away.

"Is this what you were leading us toward?" Pohatu shouted, sounding dismayed.

"No," Kopaka said grimly.

The creature was like something out of a nightmare. Its red eyes gleamed with hate, and it pawed at the snowy ground with hooflike feet, puffs of steam blowing from its nostrils. Twin horns twisted out of the sides of its enormous head.

“Hmm,” Pohatu said. “Do you think this big fellow is an ally or enemy?”

Kopaka glanced at him, startled, then realized the other Toa was kidding. He rolled his eyes, not amused. “Come on,” he said. “I think we’d better –”

At that moment the hideous creature let out another thunderous bellow – and then charged straight at them.

“- run!” Pohatu finished for him.

The two Toa turned and sprinted back up the slope. At least Kopaka sprinted. Pohatu tried to run, but lost his footing on the ice and went down, struggling to keep himself from sliding right back under the beast’s charging hooves.

“Pohatu!” Kopaka shouted. “Come on, get up!”

He skidded to a stop, realizing the other Toa was in trouble. Big, charging, snorting trouble. Letting out a sigh, he skied back down the hill.

“No! Kopaka, don’t – it’s too dangerous.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Kopaka waved his arms and shouted, trying to distract the beast. He was sliding straight towards the monster, then turned away and spun back onto the slope, hoping to attract the attacker’s attention.

The creature slowed, glancing from one Toa to the other, confused. Then it snorted and bellowed and returned its full attention to the fallen Pohatu, who was just now climbing unsteadily to his feet.

Time for Plan B, Kopaka thought, looking around for new ideas. They were standing on an open field that offered little in the way of hiding places. To one side, the ground dropped away sharply into a deep, icy ravine. Kopaka paused, his mind clicking into gear. If only he could get the beast to change directions...

There was just one problem – the creature was almost on top of Pohatu. Two more steps⁵, and its horns would be buried in the other Toa’s chest. There would be no time to explain.

He’ll just have to go with it, Kopaka told himself grimly, already pushing off smoothly and gathering speed as he skied downhill toward the fallen Toa. *If he doesn’t, well...*

There was no sense worrying. Now it was time to act.

“This will be nothing⁶,” he muttered.

Snort! The beast made another step forward. It lowered its head, aiming its horns directly at Pohatu. Pohatu took a step backward, almost falling again as his foot hit an icy patch.

Meanwhile, Kopaka skied toward him, gathering speed. This would be close... “Heads up!” he shouted. “And arms out!”

Pohatu looked startled, but flung his arms out to his sides.

Just as the creature lunged forward, snorting eagerly, Kopaka whizzed past and grabbed Pohatu around the chest.

5 Somehow, “leap” was translated as „step”.

6 Supposed to be “Here goes nothing”.

“Oofff!” Pohatu grunted as Kopaka yanked him out of the beast’s path just as it lunged forward and buried its horns in the snow.

Kopaka wobbled, nearly losing his balance. But he quickly regained it, sliding down the hill diagonally, his ski-like feet leaving deep, narrow trails in the snow.

I have to straighten out, he thought. *Otherwise we’ll never make it.* Behind him, he could already hear the beast roaring with anger and charging after them.

“Tell me, please, where are we going?” Pohatu panted. To Kopaka’s relief, the Stone Toa was hanging loosely in his arms, not struggling against his grip or trying to free himself.

Kopaka couldn’t have replied even if he’d wanted to. He was too busy willing his feet to obey him. He placed the center of his weight to the side in a desperate attempt to control the angle of their speedy downhill slide.

It worked. Just three or four lengths from the ravine now, his feet finally settled smoothly into an upright position on the icy snow. He bent as low as he could without dragging Pohatu’s legs in the snow. Now there was no turning back...

“Hey!” Pohatu cried, suddenly looking forward and seeing the chasm directly in front of them. “What are you do-aaaaah..?!”

Kopaka held his breath as he felt his feet leave the cold, solid surface of the ice. He held on tightly to Pohatu as they flew up – up – up and over the canyon. Pohatu was still

screaming, but Kopaka didn’t let out his breath until he felt his feet slam down again on the far side of the gorge. He wasn’t sure if he could still control his slide, but he didn’t care either. He teetered and threw himself to the side, allowing himself and Pohatu to pitch face-first into the snow.

“What the – why did you do that?” Pohatu cried, spitting out a mouthful of snow. “You could have gotten us killed!”

“That’s why.” Kopaka had already turned to stare back at the ravine. He pointed, and Pohatu turned to look just in time to see the snorting, squealing creature skid down the ice and tumble head over hooves into the depths of the fissure. A moment later, a furious bellow filled the air.

“Oh.” Pohatu was silent for a moment. Then he grinned weakly. “Er, thanks. Guess I owe you one – brother.” He extended one hand, clenching it into a fist.

Kopaka nodded, clanging the other Toa’s fist with his own. Then he crawled forward to the edge of the ravine, glancing down. The beast was still bellowing and struggling at the bottom, digging its hooves into the ice as it started to climb.

“Looks like it’s at home in this area,” Kopaka observed, watching as the beast leaped up to an icy ledge. “It will be able to climb out of there soon enough.”

“Not if I have anything to say about it,” Pohatu replied.

Kopaka scowled, he didn’t know what the other Toa had meant by this. But a moment later he found out, for Pohatu climbed to his feet and strode toward the rocky cliff nearby. “You might want to step aside,” he called over his shoulder as he began climbing hand over hand up the sheer rock face.

In contrast to snowy places, he moved about steadily on the windswept cliffs.

Kopaka moved a little farther down the slope, keeping an eye on the edge of the gulch. That beast could come charging out of there at any moment...

“Yeehaaaaw!” Pohatu cried, drawing his foot back and then kicking at a huge chunk of the rock face. The solid stone cracked instantly, and an enormous boulder flew forward, blotted out the Sun for a moment as it flew toward the fissure, disappearing over its edge. Kopaka stared. How did he do it?

Pohatu moved on to another section of the bluff. Once again he aimed a mighty kick, sending a chunk of stone across the snowy ground and straight into the gorge. Kopaka watched with grudging admiration as Pohatu repeated the movement again and again. But he could still hear the monster’s angry cries from deep within the abyss.

“Okay, this is too slow,” Pohatu exclaimed, the thin mountain air carrying his words to Kopaka. “Let’s try something else.”

He stood up to his full height. What was he up to now? Kopaka had no idea. A second later he jumped up in surprise as Pohatu brought both fists down on the rock – and the cliff exploded into a thousand shards of stone.

Remembering his first meeting with Pohatu, Kopaka covered his head with his shield. A few pebbles bounced off of it, but the bulk of the explosion of stone showered down into the ravine with a deafening roar.

“Huh!” Pohatu shouted gleefully after the noise had subsided. “That was so cool! I mean, I was pretty sure it would work, but still...”

While he waited for the other Toa to ~~rejoin him~~ join him in his glee, Kopaka stepped forward and peered again over the edge of the chasm. He heard a weak snort and soon spotted the monster too, at least what little of it was still visible. The creature was buried up to its horns in the rocky mess that now filled nearly half of the deep canyon.

Hearing Pohatu hurrying⁷ beside him, Kopaka turned. “Nice work,” he said. “It will be able to escape – but not for a long while.”

Pohatu grinned. “Alright. I think this is our cue to get out of here!” He glanced once more at the huge beast trapped below them. “That was close, though. What is that thing, anyway?”

“I have already met one of these, though that one belonged to a different kind,” Kopaka told him, already turning to lead the way down the snowy slope. “Rahi. That’s what the Turaga said they’re called. There are many species, all shapes and sizes. They’re not very friendly.”

“No kidding. I think I’ll be having nightmares about those horns.”

Kopaka nodded. Both Toa were silent for a few minutes as they climbed and skidded down the mountain, each buried in his own thoughts. Finally, when the first tiny evergreen plant appeared out of the snow, Pohatu spoke again.

⁷ Translation error. It should say “hurrying up”.

“So what did you see up there, anyway?” he asked. “From the peak, I mean.” This time, Kopaka decided to answer. “Strangers,” he replied. “Beings of great power.”

They came to the top of a steep hill. Standing in an open area below, four bright spots stood out against the drab background of stone and dirt. Four figures – one a bright, burning red, another blue as the sea, a third black as starless midnight, and the final one the same bright green as the leaves on the trees.

Kopaka stared down at them. The other Toa. It had to be them. But why did he have this troubling feeling as he looked at them, that he'd almost be ready to return to the world of his disturbing, dark dreams that he barely remembered?

“But are they allies,” he murmured, “or enemies?”

7. The Meeting

Gali was the first to notice the two newcomers. “Brothers,” she said quietly, but even so, her voice easily put an end to the conversation. “Look.”

All four Toa regarded the new couple. Gali nodded, deep in thought. “So, they are the missing Toa. We’re all here now.”

One of the newcomers wore a bronze mask. He leaped easily down to land among them. “My regards!” he said. “Mind if we join the party?”

Onua laughed. “Welcome, bother,” he grumbled. “We’ve been waiting for you.”

Tahu stepped forward. “I am Tahu, Toa of Fire. Who are you?”

The bronze stranger seemed unintimidated by Tahu’s fiery glare. “I’m Pohatu,” he said with an easy elegance. “Toa of Stone. My talkative friend there is the Ice Toa, Kopaka.” He gestured to the silver-and-white figure standing silently beside him.

Gali stifled a smile as Tahu looked squinteyed at the easygoing newbie. Eventually, he held out his fist. “I welcome you, brothers,” he said as Pohatu’s fist touched his.

The second newcomer stepped forward. Kopaka. Gali looked him up and down, feeling a chill ripple through the air as the Toa of Ice came closer.

This one – this Toa has many layers, she thought uncertainly. He is cold. But I sense his frosty exterior may hide a blazing fire deep within...

At that moment, Kopaka turned his icy gaze blue eyes at her, catching her stare. He said nothing, but Gali quickly turned away.

More introductions were made, and soon they were trading stories of how and where they each had awakened.

As the others chatted, Kopaka said little. He didn't like making friends, he was thinking about the future. He has only gathered one mask so far, but already had to deal with two of the island's many dangerous beasts, the Rahi. What else lay in store for them here? And what of the mysterious Makuta, the ultimate evil his villagers had spoken of?

He glanced at the red Toa, Tahu, who was blustering on about his journey to find his village, Ta-Koro, at the top of a volcano. *This Fire Toa is full of hot air*, Kopaka thought. Already, he looks like he's the team leader, but I distinctly remember that I haven't voted for him yet. *Will he be prepared for the heat of battle, or will he burn out quickly?*

Then there was Onua, the Toa of Earth. He looked like a solid companion, he spoke less than the others, while listening to all that was said. Did that subdued exterior hide a busy mind, or an empty one?

Just then Lewa, the Toa of Air, punctuated a comment he'd made by backflipping up onto a nearby boulder and doing a handstand. *So much energy*, Kopaka thought. *But it blows*

out of him uncontrolled, in all directions, like the wind. Not exactly someone I'd want to trust my life to in a tough spot.

Hearing Pohatu's cheerful laugh, Kopaka turned to gaze at him. He had to admit the Toa of Stone had surprised him in their battle against the horned Rahi. Even though he had been out of his element, when he got into a tough situation on the slopes of the high mountain, he had fought bravely. He had also been willing to entrust his life to Kopaka in that wild ski jump over the ravine.

I don't know if I could have done the same, Kopaka admitted to himself. Then he shook his head. *But why should he trust someone he doesn't know? It turned out well in that case, but he was foolish to be so ready to turn his life over to a stranger. I would not make that same mistake.*

Finally Kopaka turned his gaze toward Gali. She was one he couldn't figure out. The way he had caught her looking at him a few moments ago – it was as if she could see into his mind, his heart, just the way he could see through the earth and stone with his Mask of Vision. But that was impossible. Wasn't it?

Gali spoke, interrupting Kopaka's thoughts. "Well, brothers," she said, turning her gaze to take in all of them. "I suppose that's enough talk of the past. We should start discussing what comes next. Right? For despite all the wondrous powers we may have, I expect that our best weapon is our minds."

Kopaka almost smiled. At last, someone was talking sense!

“You’re right, Gali,” Tahu said. “We need to find these masks we seek – as quickly as possible. The Turaga of my village told me they will give us great powers. For example, amplified speed, I know my own mask gives me and I think one of them has something to do with the powers of protection or shielding...”

“That’s right,” Pohatu interrupted. “Brother Kopaka has found his Mask of Shielding, ~~too~~.”

Tahu frowned. “Yes,” he said shortly, sounding irritated. “Well, there are five more masks out there for each of us.”

Once again, Kopaka held back a smile. Obviously Tahu was annoyed that someone else had beaten him to the first mask.

Onua looked thoughtful. “According to my Turaga, I have also heard from my Turaga that we need to find these Kanohi masks,” he said. This is also part of the task. The duty.”

“Unity, responsibility, duty,” Lewa recalled. “Yes, I’ve been earhearing these words all the time.”

“Again and again,” Pohatu added.

“As you can see, I wear the black Kanohi Pakari, the Great Mask of Strength,” Onua continued. “This means I still have to find five other black masks, which will grant me the five other Toa powers, just as you need to find the masks corresponding to your colors to complete your abilities. There is the Kanohi Hau, the Great Mask of Shielding. This is exactly the shape of the one you already wear, brother Tahu. Pohatu wears the Kanohi Kakama, or the Great Mask

of Speed, Kopaka got the Mask of X-Ray Vision first, which we know as the Kanohi Akaku. The Kanohi Kaukau, the Great Mask of Underwater Breathing, allows Gali to swim under the water. And brother Lewa wears the Great Mask of Levitation, the Kanohi Miru. When we find all the masks, all of us will share in these powers. We will be stronger both as individuals and together. Sadly, Makuta has hidden the masks all over the island and set his Rahi creatures to guard them. So it won’t be easy to find the masks.”

“Fine, fine.” Tahu sounded impatient. “Anyway, the important thing is to find them – fast. The fastest way is to split into smaller groups. Gali and Lewa, you can search the jungle and beaches together. Onua and Kopaka can check the caves of Onu-Wahi. And Pohatu, you can come with –”

“Hold on a quicksecond, brother Tahu,” Lewa interrupted. “If speed is what we’re after, why bother with the pairmaking? Why not each of us journeysearch on our own?”

Onua shrugged. “Our fiery brother has a good plan,” he said calmly. “Working in pairs makes sense. It strikes a balance between speed and caution.”

Gali was shaking her head. “Brothers, brothers!” she said. “We have been brought together for a reason. I think we ought to stick together, at least until we know exactly what we’re up against.”

Pohatu nodded. “She’s right,” he said. “Trust me, these Rahi creatures are nothing to face alone. But if we travel together they should give us little trouble. Right, Kopaka?” he turned to the Toa of Ice, smiling.

Kopaka shrugged, doing his best to chill the impatience he felt in listening to this conversation. Why hadn't he already departed? "I can't agree, Toa of Stone," he said. "We should split up. As I already told you, I prefer to work alone."

Pohatu looked slightly hurt. "You may prefer it," he replied. "But would you also prefer being chased by that sharp-horned beast if I hadn't been there to help you trap it?"

"Enough of this bickering," Tahu broke in impatiently. "We will accomplish nothing by standing here and having a debate. The decision is made – we split into small groups. It's the best of both worlds, can't you see that?"

All I see is one who believes that power belongs to whoever shouts the loudest, Kopaka thought in disgust. Well, I, for one, am not ready to bow to such a 'leader'. Not as long as I have life in my body.

Tahu noticed Kopaka's stare. What thoughts lay behind his mask the cold, blue eyes? The Ice Toa's silence and intense gaze made Tahu uneasy, though he didn't like to admit it even to himself.

It doesn't matter, Tahu told himself, pushing such feelings aside. There are more important things to worry about.

The others were already back to arguing, several of them speaking at once.

MMMMMMRRRRRKKKKHHHH!

Suddenly, with no warning, the very earth yawned open in front of them, splitting the clearing in half. The rocky ground

groaned and split, and a fissure opened up with incredible speed, ten lengths long and twice as deep. All around, the earth shuddered and trembled, smaller cracks opening here and there as the trees shook and birds took off into the air in a panic of cries.

"What is this--?" Lewa yelled.

His words were drowned out by ear-splitting thunder. Jagged streaks of white-hot lightning streaked across the sky, striking down only a few lengths from where the Toa stood.

"Get back!" Onua shouted as the air crackled with electricity and several trees and shrubs burst into flame.

Tahu leaped away with the others, though the fire held no terror for him. What was happening? He glanced up to the sky, just in time to see as a huge bank of dark clouds rolled in above them, releasing a torrent of rain and hail. At the same time, a violent gust of wind howled down from farther up the mountain.

"What kind of crazystorm is this?" Lewa yelled over the noise of the pounding rain and shrieking wind. ~~"An earthquake, thunder and lightning, rain and hail and wind all at once?"~~

Gali shook her head, shielding her face against the driving ~~wind~~. "This can be no regular storm," she cried. "It must be the work of Makuta."

As the word left her mouth, the storm suddenly stopped. The wind disappeared. There was no rain, no hail. The earth lay still. The only hint of the storm's awesome power

was the smoldering remains of the lightning-scorched foliage – and the huge, gaping fissure in the ground.

“Eerie,” Pohatu remarked.

Tahu nodded grimly. “Clearly, Makuta knows we’re here. And now we know he is here too, watching us. There is no time to lose. We need to find those masks – now.”

8. What Lies Beneath

~~Tahu hadn’t had a destination in mind when he had stomped off from the group of Toa. He was too angry to think straight. Tahu couldn’t believe that the group of Toa have trodden him into the ground like that.~~

This is not going to work like this, he thought. Not at all, if nobody listens to me, even though what I say makes sense.

No matter how often he had repeated his plan to split into pairs, the other Toa had refused to agree with it. Kopaka and Lewa had insisted on taking off on their own. After they had left, Onua and Pohatu didn’t bother trying to support the plan to stay together, either. Even Gali had seemed too distracted to argue the point – she was the only one among them who hadn’t visited her village, and she was eager to find it now. And so the Toa had all gone their separate ways.

Tahu’s anger drove him aimlessly over the foothills around the base of the Ithomountain, then onto the fiery slopes of the Mangai volcano. Only there, after bathing in the heat and the gleam of the lava, did he find pleasure again and start to calm down a bit.

Kopaka found one of his masks up there in the snow of his own homeland, Tahu thought as he headed up warmed himself up on the fiery mountain. Why shouldn’t I start my search here in my own home region? So it is possible that mine is here.

Thinking about Kopaka made him clench his fist tighter on the handle of his fire magma sword. It just seemed unfair that Kopaka found one of his Kanohi masks before the others, before he, Tahu did. He didn't know what exactly irritated him about the Toa of Ice, and that made him like Kopaka even less.

It's like he just sits back and listens to us talk, thinking he's better than us, Tahu thought with a snort. Like it's not worth his time to get involved.

"It's not worth *my* time to worry about the likes of him," he said aloud. "Especially now." He swung his sword to punctuate the point, accidentally sending a finger of flame shooting out and melting a nearby pile of stones into lava.

"With all due respect, great Toa, you might want to watch where you point that thing," a voice said from nearby. "Because even though to us, the inhabitants of Ta-Koro, fire is like the breath of life, under bad circumstances it can also be dangerous."

Tahu whirled around. Standing before him was a robust Ta-Matoran with a bold look in his eye.⁸

"I know you," the Toa said. "It's Jala, right?" "Weren't you there in Ta-Koro when I met the Turaga?"

⁸ Translation error. The original says "sturdy-looking figure", referring to the Matoran's physique, but the translator apparently misinterpreted it and thought he "looked sturdily" with his eyes.

The Matoran ~~nodded and bowed~~. "I am Jala," he said, bowing slightly. "I am the Captain of the guard of your village of Ta-Koro."

Tahu nodded. He remembered now, the Turaga had introduced Jala with pride, praising his bravery and his loyalty to his duty.

"Hello again," Tahu said, returning the Matoran's honorable gesture. "And while we're giving out advice, you might not want to sneak up on a Toa. It could be hazardous to your health."

"~~Sorry, I got the hint,~~ Toa," Jala said with a grin. "Sorry for startling you. I didn't mean it."

Tahu smiled back, he liked the Matoran's tough but respectful behavior. "Apology accepted. But what was your intention in tracking me here? I have a feeling it wasn't happenstance."

"It was not." Jala's expression turned serious. "I came to see how your search for the Masks of Power was going. Don't take this the wrong way, but... do you have any kind of plan for finding them?"

Tahu frowned, feeling his fiery temper rising. How dare this lowly Matoran question his tactics? "Of course I have a plan," he snapped. "I'm searching... I'm searching for the masks. Okay. Perhaps I don't have an exact plan as such. But I'm working on it."

Jala respectfully bowed again. "Of course, Toa," he said. "In any case, I thought it might be helpful for you to know that

legend has it that the red Akaku – your Great Mask of X-Ray Vision – lies within the deepest cavern of Onu-Wahi.”

“Onu-Wahi,” Tahu repeated. “Those caves and tunnels that Onua spoke of?”

“Yes,” Jala replied. “The network of underground passageways lies beneath much of Mata Nui. There is an entrance just over that way, beyond that lavastone wall. It leads to –”

“Thanks,” Tahu interrupted, turning away. “Tell the others at the village that I will soon be wearing the Kanohi Akaku, and all the other Great Masks.”

“Toa Tahu!” Jala called after him. “Wait!”

Tahu paused, glancing over his shoulder.

“Yes? What is it?” he demanded impatiently.

Jala touched one fist to his mask in a salute. “I just wanted to wish you luck,” he said. “And to remind you, take care in the dark underground. We just got you – we don’t want to lose you again.”

Tahu smiled. “Worry not, my small but valuable friend” he said. “You’ll not get rid of me so easily.”

With that, he leaped over the wall and hurried toward the cave opening that lay beyond.

It wasn’t long before Tahu realized why the Matoran had been so worried. Everything about the dark, twisting tunnels of Onu-Wahi felt creepy. Even with the glow cast by his fire magma sword, the darkness seemed to huddle around him, suffocating in its closeness. Tahu found himself turning around nervously whenever he heard his own footsteps.

He was struck by a sudden gust of wind, extinguishing the flame of his sword and plunging the entire cave into complete darkness.

It only took a quick surge of energy to light the sword up again, but he still wasn’t fast enough to keep his heart from racing. He looked around, angry at himself, and wondered why he got so spooked by a harmless tunnel.

A drop of water fell on his head, seeping in through the eye hole on his mask. “Yuck!” he said, wiping it off. His voice was weak and blunt in the suffocating darkness. “Why does that stupid mask have to be here of all places?”

The only answer he got was the rhythmic tapping of the water drops. Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to move on. Some dark part of his spirit protested – *No! We don’t belong here, we shouldn’t be here, we’ll be crushed...*

But Tahu shook his head fiercely, willing such thoughts away. If his quest has lead him here, he will not give up.

He continued even deeper, following the tunnel’s darkened curves. Every time he came to a junction, he chose the path that went farther down. He could almost feel the weight of the earth towering over him, as it grew, pushing and

constricting him, almost sucking the air out of the passageways. But he kept a steady pace.

The air grew cold and still. ~~The flame on his~~ His magma sword sputtered and flickered, but the force of Tahu's will kept it burning.

Almost there, he told himself. I can feel it. These tunnels can't possibly go much deeper.

And yet they did. Deeper, and deeper, and still deeper, until Tahu started to wonder if he hadn't just imagined that there was a surface world at all. Deeper – until he started seeing strange shapes moving in the shadows just beyond his glowing red light. And still deeper.

Finally he stepped out of the end of a tunnel into a cavern, an enormous cavern, that was bigger than Ta-Koro's main square. A raw, howling wind whipped through it, almost knocking Tahu back a step. He, however, stepped forward instead, then suddenly stopped, and as he accidentally looked down, he found out he did so just in time. Only steps ahead Right in front of his foot, the floor dropped away into nothingness. He bent forward, thrust out his magma sword, sending more energy flowing through it to make it glow brighter. But even so, he couldn't see the bottom.

He found a pebble nearby, dropped it into the abyss and waited to hear it clang at the bottom. But he heard nothing.

Great. Just great, he thought bitterly. What am I supposed to do now?

He wasn't sure what made him look up then, but as he did, he caught the glint of something red across the chasm. Squinting against the darkness beyond his sword glow, he made out the vague shape of ~~a ledge~~ on the opposite wall of the cavern. On that ledge was a small gray shape – a mask? He wasn't sure.

In any case, the yawning depths of the chasm lay between him and the object. How was he supposed to get over there? Maybe if Lewa were here, although he doubted that even the foolhardy Toa of Air would be willing to perform such an uncertain jump. Although, Lewa could do something about the wind...

Tahu took a few careful steps along the near wall of the cavern. To refresh himself, he held his face into the wind swirling around him. As he neared the edge, he finally spotted the answer to his problem – a bridge. A narrow stone span, less than the width of a foot. It stretched out from the wall and disappearing into the darkness. Does it reach the other side of the chasm? Tahu stared into the darkness and couldn't determine.

The damp wind chilled him as he stood for a moment, uncertain. Then he shook his head. He hadn't come this far to turn back now. Besides, he has to do this, after all, he is a Toa. His first and only duty is to serve Mata Nui. To this end, he has to recover the mask.

"This will be nothing."⁹

He stepped out onto the bridge. The stone under his foot was smooth and slippery, and it was even narrower than it

⁹ Probably another mistranslation of "here goes nothing"?

had looked. It took all of Tahu's concentration to maintain his balance. The winds continued to swirl around him, making it even harder to keep his balance.

After a few minutes he glanced up, but seemed no closer to the far ledge than when he'd started. *This is ridiculous*, he thought impatiently. *It's going to take forever to get across at this rate. I have to go faster!*

He swung his foot out, taking a larger step this time. When it touched the rock, it skidded slightly to one side just as another violent wind gust swept past – and Tahu suddenly felt himself slipping sideways into the chasm!

He grabbed at the bridge, wrapping his left arm around it and holding tight. His legs swung loose over the abyss of unknown depth. He struggled until he threw his right hand up and over the bridge as well, nearly losing his grip on his sword as he did so. With a grunt, he flung his legs up, clinging upside down to the underside of the bridge.

He focused on pulling himself up and to one side, inching his way around to the top of the bridge. His muscles hurt from the strain, and the rough stone scraped his thighs and chest at every move. Finally he heaved a breath of relief as he pulled himself right side up once again. After resting for a minute, he loosened his grip, pushed himself into a crouch, and then back into a standing position.

Okay, slow and steady it is, then, Tahu told himself. *One foot in front of the other.*

He took a step, wavering slightly and resisting the urge to look down. He was gripping his sword firmly, taking another step, then another. He overcame his own nervousness.

One step, two steps – almost there...

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS!

Suddenly the air was filled with a loud, violent hiss that seemed to come from everywhere at once. Startled, Tahu slipped, one foot sliding out over the nothingness. Just in time, he flung himself sideways, arms outstretched, regaining his shaky balance on the narrow beam.

The air was filled with frightening, red lights. These were coming from dozens of bright red creatures that had appeared out of nowhere, swarming across the narrow bridge from both directions. Each was the size of a clenched fist and looked like a cross between a scorpion and a giant ~~wingless~~ firefly. Their deadly-looking pincers clamped open and shut rhythmically as they buzzed toward Tahu, their legs moving too fast to see.

“Hey!” Tahu cried in annoyance, kicking at several of the creatures that were already swarming up over his feet. “Get away!”

The glowing scorpions paid no attention. More and more of them swarmed around him, until they completely covered his feet and lower legs.

“Ow!” he cried as one of them sank its pincers into his ankle. He smacked it, but already two more of the creatures were clamping onto his knee and thigh.

Tahu grumbled, swinging his sword around to get the small pests off himself. But there were too many...

“Enough of you,” he muttered, pointing the sword just above the thickest cluster of the creatures ~~on the bridge~~ nearby. Focusing his energy, he blasted a spurt of flame, ~~hoping to scare them away~~ sweeping them away.

But instead of burning up, the creatures merely glowed brighter, seeming to suck in the heat of the fire.

“What?” Tahu exclaimed. “So you like fire, eh, you stupid little pests? I’ll show you fire!” He pointed his sword again, sending flame roaring out of the end of it. But once again, it only seemed to make the creatures stronger. He ground his teeth, lashing out at them again and again, his flame going from red to searing white as he got more furious. But the bugs still kept swirling around him. The bridge, however, was glowing ominously as the stone started to melt beneath the intense heat.

“Uh-oh,” Tahu said with a gulp as lava dripped off into the abyss.

He forced himself to lower his sword. The creatures were swarming thicker now, dozens of them clamping onto every part of his body.

Must... get... away... Tahu thought desperately as he tried to shake them off. This has to... work, Tahu thought, but his brain was slow and numb. He didn’t know whether his energies had been depleted from spewing all the fire, or if there was some kind of poison in the scorpions’ stingers. At any rate, he found it very difficult to think about what to do.

His knees faltered, and he lowered himself onto the narrow bridge, staggering from the assault of the wind. A few of the creatures had reached his head, some stopping to stare into the holes around his eyes.

Tahu was unable to blink to protect his eyes from the appendages’ touch. What will happen to him? He was so tired...

All of a sudden, he started panting and sank forward, his brain filled with explosions of light and sound. He shut his eyes tight and gripped the stone bridge so forcefully that his hands hurt, but the vision would not pass, it raced across his mind with bewildering speed.

Tahu grunted as he saw a couple of humongous crustacean creatures that rushed toward him in a dark tunnel... Then a swarm of monsters different from the scorpions, they were bigger, deadlier and devoured everything in their path... Then another group of creatures followed in shining metal armor, seeking the source of darkness... Afterward came a trio of giant, long-legged beasts, carrying snakes in place of brains...

He heard the villagers behind all of them begging and crying for their lives, and saw horrific scenes in which the villages and the scenery were torn apart. Almost before they even materialized, these visions were extinguished in a sudden burst of bright, white light that was hot and cold at the same time, and bathed everything in cleanliness and hope...

Although Tahu had no idea what these pictures had meant, his entire being was filled with the certain knowledge that all of this was important, more important than himself or the

lives of the other five Toa. Something that's worth fighting for, even to the end.

As this knowledge settled into him, energy flowed through his brain and body, stronger than the poison of the small Rahi. He shook off the weakness and dizziness, leaned against the bridge, and thrust himself to his feet. He knew he couldn't withstand the swarm for much longer. But he also knew he couldn't let himself be defeated. Too much was at stake.

How could he fight the scorpions? His best weapon – fire – seemed to be completely useless against them. The Great Mask of Shielding that he wore didn't protect him from their underhanded attacks. And he was trapped on this bridge, forced to fight gravity and wind as well as the swarms of creatures. For a moment, he lost hope yet again.

Suddenly Gali's voice floated into his head.

... Our best weapon is our minds...

That was what she had said back in the clearing. At the time, Tahu had paid little attention to her words, he didn't even realize he heard them. Now, though, they shined within his mind. And with them, suddenly, came an idea.

“Okay, pests,” he said aloud. “Last chance to back off before it's too late. No takers? Oh, well, I warned you.”

With that, he dropped his sword onto the bridge, then bent and grasped the stone with both hands. Flinging his feet off the edge, he let himself hang loose once again over the abyss.

He closed his eyes, picturing Lewa. The Toa of Air seemed unable to stand still for more than a few seconds and had spent much of the time back at the clearing doing backflips and handstands. At one point, Tahu remembered, Lewa had even jumped up and grabbed onto an overhanging branch and swung himself around it by both hands, flipping around and around like a monkey.

Keeping that image in mind, Tahu swung his legs as vigorously as he could. It took a few tries, but finally he flung himself over the bridge and back around the other side. Gripping tightly with both hands, he pumped with his body, taking advantage of the momentum. He flipped around the narrow bridge again and again, building up speed.

Gathering all the energy he would normally focus on creating or controlling fire, Tahu spun faster and faster, and before long, the scorpion creatures started losing their grip. One by one at first, then dozen by dozen, they flew away into the darkness. Their faint screeches and buzzes faded into nothing as they fell into the abyss. He felt more creatures scurrying up his arms to get to the bridge, but most fall before they could reach Tahu's wrists.

It's working! he thought gleefully. *It's working! They can't hold on!*

Still he kept spinning, around and around and around, until he felt the last fiery wounds of the creatures' pinches fade away and could no longer hear their buzzing. Only then did he slow down enough to flip himself back upright onto the bridge.

There, he though, breathing hard from the effort. Even Lewa would be impressed by that.

He glanced up and down the bridge. There was no sign of the swarm in either direction. Then he felt a pinch and looked down to see that one scorpion creature had managed to hang on to his wrist.

“I think I can handle one of you,” Tahu said, yanking the creature loose with his free arm. “Time to go join your – wait a second. What’s that?”

He paused in the act of tossing the glowing creature into the chasm. What was on its head? Looking closer, under the light of the small animal’s own glow, he saw that it was wearing a tiny mask over its face. The mask was pitted and pockmarked, its jagged edges made Tahu think it had been created in a hurry from a bigger one. But it was a mask nonetheless.

“Strange,” he muttered, poking curiously at the mask with his finger.

The small creature buzzed angrily, struggling against Tahu’s grip. When his finger came close enough, it flung its pincers out and grabbed it, clamping down viciously.

“Ow!” Tahu yanked his hand away, once again winding up to throw the little beast down and be done with it. But again, something made him hesitate. Why would a creature such as this wear a mask? The local birds, insects and other animals he had seen in the forest and on the beach weren’t wearing any sort of mask.

Getting more curious, he shifted his grip on the scorpion creature until he managed to trap its pincers within his hand. Then he used the other hand to carefully peel the little mask free.

As soon as he did so, the creature went limp in his hand. For a second he thought he’d accidentally killed it. But then its legs waved weakly, and it chittered woozily up at him.

“Interesting,” uttered Tahu. “Has the mask given it power, like mine gives to me? Lets see...”

He set the creature down on the bridge at his feet, being careful not to put his fingers within reach of its pincers. But he needn’t have bothered with such caution. Showing no interest in him whatsoever, the little scorpion scurried quickly away down the bridge, disappearing a moment later into the darkness.

Tahu blinked, wondering what that might mean. Had the creature run away because he’d removed its mask? Or because it had suddenly realized it was now all alone in its attack?

He opened his hand, staring at the tiny mask. A gust of wind swooped past, nearly sending him off balance once again. It also swept the small mask off Tahu’s palm and away into the chasm.

Tahu grabbed for it – but it was too late. The mask was gone. Blowing out a sigh of frustration, he did his best to shrug off the loss. The important thing was that he’d defeated the scorpion creatures. Now he could continue with his quest.

He cautiously bent down and picked up his sword. After all that had happened, the insecure walk across the bridge no longer seemed quite so daunting, and it wasn't long before he was stepping onto the ledge.

The mask was lying there waiting, its empty eyeholes staring up at him blankly. He picked it up and settled it on over his own mask.

Energy exploded within him. He staggered forward, remembering the drop-off just in time to stop himself from stepping right over the edge.

He pressed himself against the cave wall, trying to get accustomed to the new sense that had appeared in him. So much power! He looked around, seeing his surroundings with new eyes aided by the mask's powers of X-ray vision. Even in the near darkness he could see the veins of minerals buried within the stone walls around him, the trickles of water cutting through the solid rock, beneath his feet.

Tahu blinked, trying to get used to his new way of seeing. "Okay," he whispered to himself in awe. "Now we're getting somewhere."

9. Cold as Ice

With every step, he cursed the heat, smoke, and choking ash of Ta-Wahi. He couldn't even imagine how anyone could find Mangai's slopes tolerable, much less why anyone would decide to live there like the people of Tahu's village. Why did a Mask of Strength have to be hidden in such a place? He had no idea, and he hoped that the Matoran who had given him the tip had not led him astray.

No, Kopaka thought, that isn't too likely. It was difficult for him to trust anything but his own mind and senses, but he found little if any untruthfulness in the small people of this island.

"These Matoran are honorable people. I doubt they would do anything to endanger our mission," he scowled. "The Rahi, though..."

He had started his quest for the masks in Po-Wahi, guided by a Po-Matoran's suggestion. As he made his way across the searing, constantly moving sands, heading for a steep cliff, a giant, scorpion-like creature lunged out of a cave, attacking him.

A dire battle ensued. The beast was much larger than Kopaka, with deadly pincers and a nimble stinger tail. Kopaka fought with caution, but it was difficult to overcome the fear inspired by the creature's viciousness. Only the Great Mask of Shielding protected him from a lethal sting.

After he realized the monster couldn't be beaten with force, Kopaka's brain immediately got to work trying to find a

different solution. Instead of aiming his ice sword directly at the animal, he started freezing the sand below the Rahi. He targeted the sand again and again, freezing it into ice crystals under the creature's feet. He had created a real skating rink in no time. This made his adversary angry, but didn't slow it down. Kopaka wasn't done. Though the Rahi had ice under all six of its feet, Kopaka struck out at even more sand, transforming the desert around them completely into an icerink. The Rahi bellowed in anger when it realized it could only slide where it didn't want to, and couldn't chase after Kopaka, who got away. Later, a Matoran told him the Rahi he had fought was a Nui-Jaga, the feared, poisonous scorpion of the desert. Few who have met it lived to tell the tale.

But the adventure was worth it, for by the end of it, Kopaka wriggled out of Po-Wahi with the Great Mask of Underwater Breathing. When he concentrated, he could feel the mask's power fizzle within him.

This will come in handy when I have to find one of my masks in Gali's waters, he thought. And unless I'm mistaken, that will be the case. Seems that's the way things go around here. All five of the missing masks are hidden in a different Wahi.

Kopaka grimaced as the hot winds swept past him. He looked up at the mountain. Thick streams of lava snaked slowly down on its slopes. He knew that on the top of the volcano was the giant Lake of Fire. Ta-Koro's people lived on its outskirts.

Pausing As another wave of heat overwhelmed him, Kopaka raised his ice blade to his neck, letting its welcome coldness

revive him. How could anyone spend any time on this infernal volcano, let alone live there?!

An image of Tahu floated through his mind, and he grimaced again. If the Toa of Fire could see him now, he would probably laugh his mask off.

Of course, I'd like to see Tahu trying to get along in Ko-Wahi, Kopaka thought. He'd probably melt a hole in a glacier and spend so much energy yelling at the ice that he couldn't climb out.

The thought amused him, giving him the strength to get moving again. He looked up again to measure up the distance to the peak. The Matoran had told him the mask he was looking for would be hidden somewhere near the Lava Lagoon, located two thirds of the way to the volcano. Meaning, he was close to his destination.

After a few more minutes of climbing, he crested a peak and found himself overlooking an amazing landscape. He knew it had to be what he was looking for: the Lava Lagoon.

Several of the slopes of the mountain met here, forming a deep, broad basin filled with lava. At least two hundred lengths across, the simmering lagoon glowed yellow and red and orange. A waterfall of lava poured into the far end, sending up constant sprays of steam and smoke.

For a moment he just gazed at the incredible sight of the lava lake. Then he remembered the quest, and looked

around, wondering where in this bubbling wasteland a mask might be hidden.

Then he noticed a small, craggy island jutting out of the center of the lagoon.

“Uh-oh,” he muttered. Was the heat making him see things, or was that the gray shape of a Kanohi mask sitting on the island?

He groaned. Why couldn't the mask have been guarded by another Rahi instead – or two, or twelve? He would rather face all the Rahi on Mata Nui at once than have to deal with this lagoon.

Makuta showed quite a sense of humor when he hid these masks, he thought grimly. But I'll have the last laugh – no matter what it takes.

Pointing his ice blade at the lagoon, Kopaka focused his energy.

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ!

A small patch of lava froze – for about half a second. Then the ice cracked, steam escaped, and a moment later the frozen section had melted back into its original fiery form.

Kopaka frowned but tried again, staining himself to his breaking point. But his efforts had little effect over the boiling lava.

Time for a new plan, he thought. If I can't go straight across, maybe I can go over.

Changing his focus, he concentrated on the steam in the air over the lagoon. He aimed his ice blade toward it.

ZZZZZZ!

The particles of moisture in the air froze solid, forming together into an icy bridge reaching over the first section of the lagoon.

ZZZZZZZZZZ!

ZZZZZZZZZZ!

Kopaka felt his energy draining away as he pointed his blade again and again. But when he was finished, he smiled with triumph. His ice bridge stretched all the way across the lagoon to the island!

Now all I have to do is go get that mask, he thought, stepping onto the near end of the bridge. He hurried forward a few steps, then paused. What was that sound?

Drip... SZZZZZ!... drip... szzzzz!... drip... SZZZZZ!

Glancing down, he saw with alarm that the bridge was already melting away.

“No!” he cried, pointing his blade toward it to refreeze it.

But it was no use. As fast as he could refreeze one section, another melted. Within seconds the middle part of the bridge collapsed into the lagoon, splashing the burning hot lava high into the air.

Kopaka barely had time to leap back to shore as his section of the bridge collapsed, too. He came down with a thud, his ice blade sparkling across the ground and almost going over the edge of the cliff.

He could barely breathe. He stared at the lava lake as he grabbed his sword. Diverting all his anger into icy, determined calmness, he thought the situation through again. There had to be an answer. Turning the challenge over in his mind, he searched through his options.

Finally he had to admit the only likely solution: the other Toa. *If Tahu were here, he would have no trouble retrieving that mask*, Kopaka thought reluctantly. Or Onua. He could probably dig a tunnel under the lagoon.

He shook his head, annoyed with himself. Why waste thought on a solution that wouldn't work? He had found two masks already without help from the other Toa. He could find a way to get this one without them as well.

His brain began ticking again, looking for a prospect he might have missed. As he was thinking, he slowly glazed across the lake's narrow shoreline. It curved in a light arc, following the shape of the broad valley.

As he wandered toward the end of the little beach, Kopaka noticed a plume of steam coming from a crack in the rocky wall behind him. Unlike the sooty, smoky steam hovering over the lagoon itself, this steam looked pale and clean.

Curious, Kopaka climbed up the rocky wall for a look. He soon discovered a hot-water spring bubbling up from the depths of the mountain.

"Interesting..." he muttered, already processing the new information in his mind.

He glanced out toward the island where the mask lay, measuring the distance with his eyes. Then he stared again into the steaming spring. An idea was forming in his head. Would it work? ... Well, he wasn't sure about it.

He analyzed the available information again and again. The depth and size of the spring. The distance to the island. The probable heat of the lava.

Still, he couldn't quite convince himself that it would work. The probability was fairly high, maybe sixty-five or even seventy percent, but nothing was certain that usually wasn't enough for him...

Kopaka clenched his fists as he imagined Tahu's mocking laughter, Lewa's perplexed glance. Neither of them would have the patience to waste so much time worrying over probabilities. Perhaps just this once he should live by their example?

Besides, it's this or nothing, Kopaka reminded himself. Of that, he was one hundred percent certain. If this plan doesn't work, nothing will, he would have to resort to asking the other Toa for help, and he will not be forced to do that.

Not giving himself time to doubt his decision, he took a deep breath. He looked down at the spring and pointed his blade.

ZZZZZZZZZZ!

The spring froze solid.

Kopaka smiled. As he had suspected, the water in the spring had been much cooler than the lava. It gleamed in its stone cup like a solid icicle.

Now came the hard part – getting the miniature iceberg out of its hollow and down the slope to the lagoon. Little by little, Kopaka froze and then chipped away the outer wall of the hollow, until all he had to do was push the large chunk of ice straight out and over the edge.

If I already had the Mask of Strength that's lying on that island, I could easily have lifted this out of here, he thought briefly as the ice floe slid down the mountainside, falling into the lava below with a splash. Of course, if Onua or Pohatu were here, they'd already have...

He didn't bother finishing that thought. There was no time to waste – the lava was already eating away at the edges of the ice floe. Without hesitating, Kopaka leaped down onto the ice.

Lets hope my sword can take the heat! he thought, and plunged the blade into the lava. When he pulled it out, it was in one piece, still as cold as before. He breathed a sigh of relief, and using his blade as a paddle, he rowed toward the island with all his might. The ice continued to melt, but Kopaka kept his gaze focused on his goal.

By the time he reached the rocky little ledge, his ice “boat” had melted away to about half its original size.

More than half, Kopaka told himself as he leaped onto the island and scooped up the mask. *It's still more than half there. That will be enough – especially with the added strength of my new Kanohi mask to help me row.* He jammed the Mask of Strength over his face, feeling its power seep through him.

Still, he hesitated as he stepped back onto the floe. Even with the help of the new Kanohi, It would take him almost as long to row back to shore as it had taken to get here. Would the ice last that long? His ice boat meanwhile shrank even further as he contemplated, stuck in indecisiveness.

Just go! he chided himself. *There's no other choice.*

Jabbing his blade into the lava, Kopaka put all the strength of his new mask into his effort as he pushed away from the island. But as he rowed, he couldn't keep his thoughts in check. He watched the speed of the ice raft, the rate of the melt, the distance to the shore, and he came to the alarming conclusion that he would not make it.

I'll make it, he told himself firmly, squashing the frightening thought. *Whatever it takes, I'll do it. If the floe melts away too soon, maybe I can freeze enough of the lava, to hop across the rest of the way a step at a time. Or –*

~~As he jabbed his blade into the lava again, he misjudged and hit the edge of the floe instead. The force of the blow sent several large chunks of ice flying—one straight toward him! The Ice Toa didn't have time to dodge it. The ice chunk connected solidly with the side of his head, knocking him to his knees.~~

His thoughts were interrupted, a strange, feverish feeling clutching him, freezing him in place. He was unable to row, to move, worse, unable to even think as a He clung woozily to the ice, fighting to retain consciousness. But darkness seeped out from the corners of his mind... and then, suddenly, an intense vision overwhelmed him, sweeping away the floe, the lagoon, the heat, and everything else.

First he found himself looking with a bird's-eye view over all of Mata Nui. The image suddenly rushed closer, almost as if he were falling straight toward the slopes of the Ithomountain in the center of the island. The image shifted slightly to one side, swooping down one of the mountain's slopes until it reached a large clearing. There, Kopaka saw a great temple built out of stone, lined with beautiful, blooming plants that covered the marvelous pillars and the stone carvings.

Then a strange, echoing voice spoke out of the darkness.

... Welcome, Toa of Ice...

It boomed, fading in and out as Kopaka struggled to free himself from the vision.

... do not be... your mind can journey to... behold the future of... you and the others shall... all the Great Masks of Power... together and defeat... three shall become... path of wisdom... myself, Akamai... of the warrior... only by uniting... farewell...

With that, Kopaka's mind snapped back to reality. He found himself on his hands and knees on the floe, still clutching at

the rapidly shrinking chunk of ice. His expression turned grim as he rushed back to rowing with maddening speed.

~~*That little accident was bad luck on top of bad judgment*~~
~~*Whoever sent that vision had awful timing,*~~ he thought bleakly as he finally faced the truth – the ice floe wasn't going to make it back to shore. That meant he had two choices: Try the frozen-footstep method, or wait as long as he could and then attempt an enormous leap to solid ground.

He decided that the second plan had a more likely chance of success. But the distance to shore seemed impossibly far.

Kopaka reminded himself that he now wore the Great Mask of Strength. Perhaps it would give his legs the extra power they would need to propel him such a tremendous distance. Perhaps...

Gathering his strength, Kopaka got into position and then waited. One long moment, then another, then another. He cooled his impatience as he gauged the footing beneath him. All he needed was enough to push off from –

“Now!” he shouted, leaping forward with all his might. The energy of the Pakari flowed through him, giving him extra strength.

But he immediately realized it wouldn't be enough.

That Great Mask of Levitation would come in awfully handy right now,” he thought bleakly as he felt himself start to fall toward the bubbling lava.

“Kopaka!” a voice shouted from the direction of the shore.

Kopaka glanced forward, but saw only a flash of green as he suddenly felt himself caught up in a blast of wind. Flipping over his head in the air, he could only clutch his ice blade. The breeze grabbed him and took him with it.

“Aaaaaaaaah!” he cried as he flew helplessly through the air.

CRASH!

He smashed into the ground face first.

“Sorryoops, brother,” Lewa’s voice said from somewhere nearby. “I didn’t have thought-time to plan a softer landing.”

“Ugh,” Kopaka groaned. Every limb in his body ached. But he was still in one piece – and unmelted! When he looked over his shoulder, he saw the surface of the bubbling lava, only a few lengths behind him. “It’s all right, brother Lewa,” he added, realizing that it was Lewa’s wind gust that had saved him. “I owe you one. I shall not forget this.”

He extended his fist, and Lewa bumped his own against it.

“Anytime, brother,” Lewa said. “And at least I see you got a mask out of it.”

Kopaka nodded, touching the new Kanohi on his face. He wondered if he should tell the other Toa about his vision. What had it meant? Who had sent it? Was it a foreshadowing of something important – or merely a trick sent by Makuta?

Whatever it was, it nearly got me boiled, he reminded himself. Isn’t that the best evidence of all that it must have come from Makuta?

Disturbed by the thought, he remained silent about his vision as Lewa chattered on about finding his own Great Mask of Strength in Onu-Wahi.

“Had to fight a nastyugly Rahi to get it, too,” he said cheerfully. “But I suppose it was worth it – gave that quickbreeze I sent you some extra oomph.”

Kopaka nodded. “These Rahi. I have met a couple myself. They seem to stop at nothing to guard these masks.”

“Oh, this fellow quickstopped as soon as I knocked off its own mask,” Lewa said. “It panicked into the depths of the tunnels everquick.”

“Really? Hmm.” Kopaka filed that away in his mind. It could be useful to him later. That reminded him – he still had masks to find. “My thanks to you again, brother Lewa,” he said with a formal little bow. “Now I must take my leave and continue with my search.”

“Oh! I almost mindlost why I came looking for you in the first place,” Lewa cried. “I just luckymet Onua and Pohatu downmountain. Onua has called a meeting.”

Kopaka grumbled. “But I haven’t found all my masks yet.”

“None of us has.” Lewa shrugged. “We’re all learnfinding that this searchquest is trickier than we thought. That’s why Onua wants to get together. I’m not one for groupworking, but I think he may be right. We need to compare notes, do

some teamplanning to help each other against the Rahitrouble.”

Kopaka opened his mouth to protest again, but shut it before speaking a word. How much time might he have saved just now if he'd had Lewa along in the first place – or Tahu, or Onua? How much easier would it have been to fight the Nui-Jaga if Pohatu was there to help pummel it with stones, or Gali to drown it under a sudden shower?

He sighed. As much as he hated the idea of joining in on some big, happy, crowded Toa-fest, the facts were staring him in the face. The mission would be more successful if the Toa attacked it as a team provided someone could actually figure out how to work together.

“All right,” Kopaka said at last. “Let's go.”

10. The Temple

Gali was very glad that Onua's meeting had gone more smoothly than the last. Despite the frustrating appearance of some of Makuta's forces, It had ended in one unanimous decision: The Toa would work as a team.

She was relieved. Each of the Toa had encountered at least one Rahi during their lonesome travels, and Gali was no exception. After encountering another of the monstrous swimming Rahi she'd seen just after her awakening, she respected the creatures' power more than ever. She now knew that such beasts were known as Tarakava. At the same time she began feeling sympathetic to them. The ~~Turaga~~ Matoran had told them that all the Rahi were native beasts of the island – controlled by Makuta to do his dark bidding.

Perhaps when we've found all the masks, we'll also find a way to set the Rahi free, Gali thought.

She only wished that the mission were going more smoothly. So far they have found a handful of masks working as a team. However, had wasted too much time on petty disagreements. Lewa kept getting distracted and wandering away from the group. Tahu seemed determined to completely disable or destroy every Rahi they encountered, even if it was wholly unnecessary for recovering any of the masks. Kopaka periodically got fed up with the bickering and threatened to go off again on his own.

Through it all, Gali did her best to maintain the peace. She could tell that Onua was working toward the same goal in a quieter way. She found her respect for the strong, reserved Toa of Earth growing more and more. Now, as they approached the shoreline just south of Po-Koro, she glanced toward him.

“Onua,” she said. “If what ~~the Ta-Matoran~~ that Matoran told us is accurate, we will need to go beneath the waters to retrieve Tahu’s levitation mask.”

Lewa overheard her and groaned. “Not again!” he cried. “I already took one wetdive to get my Mask of Speed. I still haven’t got all the wateryuck out of my ears!”

Pohatu laughed. “I’m with you, brother,” he said. “I learned that water is no friend of mine, especially without the Great Mask of Water Breathing. I fear I would be more of a hindrance than help.

“Don’t be foolish,” Kopaka spoke up. “Obviously, only those among us who already hold the Kanohi Kaukau should go on from here. Pohatu, Lewa, Tahu – you can wait on the beach.” He turned his icy gaze toward the Toa of Fire. “Tahu, you haven’t found the Great Mask of Underwater Breathing either, have you? Which means you have to stay behind too.”

Tahu glared at him peeringly. “Thanks for pointing out the obvious, brother Kopaka,” he retorted. “But it’s my mask we’re after here — ~~my villager was the one who revealed its location~~. And I think I should be the one to decide whether or not I go want to take part in its recovery.”

Gali rolled her eyes. She didn’t need the Great Mask of X-Ray Vision to see Tahu and Kopaka were unable to make peace with each other. “It would be helpful to have several of us standing guard on the beach, brother Tahu,” she pointed out. “Just in case those Nui-Rama that have been chasing us should find us. If they ambushed us while we in the water, they could strike at us and grab us out of the water before we even realized what was happening.”

“That’s true,” Tahu admitted, though he still shot Kopaka an irritated glance. “Go with good fortune, Gali. We’ll keep a careful watch for the Nui-Rama and every other danger while we wait for your return.”

“Alright,” Gali smiled back. Tahu may be rash and impulsive, but he was always ready to assist wherever he could to help the mission succeed.

Onua was already leading the way into the surf, with Kopaka a step behind. Gali followed, feeling some of her anxiety wash away at the touch of the warm, familiar water. “Follow me,” she said, rushing forward. “The Matoran told us where to go. This way.” She dove into the waves, swimming quickly out into deeper water. She had to warn herself to slow down, so that the other two Toa could keep pace.

Soon they reached the broad, open sweep of the sea valley. Immense amounts of water lay ahead, its peace only disturbed by the occasional school of fish or a couple random smaller sea animals.

Kopaka pointed to a large, shadowy shape visible in the water about a hundred lengths ahead. Gali faintly shuddered

as she recognized the familiar shape of the Tarakava. She should have known the it won't be so easy to get that mask...

"I escaped from one Tarakava by blinding it with waving seaweed, and from another by luring it into a cave where it got stuck," Gali told the others. "These Rahi are strong, but not very clever, I think. All we need is a plan."

Soon the three of them were swimming slowly toward the Tarakava. A moment later the creature spotted them and let out a roar so loud, it drove away all the fish in the area.

"Okay, it knows we're here," Gali whispered, swimming and floating in place. "Kopaka, get ready."

The Ice Toa nodded. Gali looked and waited excitedly as the Tarakava barreled toward them. Soon it was only a short distance away, then closer thirty lengths away, then twelve... Still Kopaka didn't move.

Gali held her breath. The beast would be upon them within seconds. And it would be impossible to get away from it by swimming, especially in an open space. What is Kopaka still waiting for?

As Gali was about to cry out, the Ice Toa finally made his move. With a twitch of his ice blade, he sent a blast of intense cold out ahead of him, instantly freezing the water – and the Tarakava – into a solid block of ice.

"Nice work!" Onua cried, his deep voice rumbling through the water like an earthquake. "Now it's my turn..."

With that, he struck the sandy ocean floor with his fists. The ground swelled up, arcing over the giant Tarakava ice cube until it completely surrounded the frozen area.

"That should hold it for a while," Gali said, relieved that the plan had worked. "Now all we have to do is –"

"Wait," Onua interrupted, staring at the Tarakava, whose head protruded out of the dirt-and-ice mound that trapped it. It writhed and flailed in frustration, trying to free itself. "I just want to see something."

He swam toward the creature, carefully staying out of its jaws. Patting the dirt mound before him, he caused it to burst upward in a small explosion, knocking the Tarakava's mask from its face.

The change was instantaneous. The creature's violent spasms stopped immediately. After a moment it let out a wail of dismay and started to wriggle again, but this time it completely ignored Onua, who was sill swimming nearby.

When Onua returned to the other two, he had a troubled look in his eyes.

"I thought that might happen," he said to them. "When Pohatu and I encountered a pair of Nui-Rama, he knocked off the masks of one of them. The creature suddenly changed – swam¹⁰ away instead of continuing the fight, but until then it really put our energies to the test."

¹⁰ Translation error, probably. It should say "flew". Or maybe the error stems from the original text before the revisions?

Kopaka nodded thoughtfully. “Something similar happened when I met a Kuma-Nui on my way to Po-Wahi.”

“I wish I’d mentioned it earlier,” Onua said. “I didn’t realize it might be important – until just now.”

Gali noticed that Kopaka didn’t make the same apology. “We have learned something important here, I think,” she said. “It is through these masks that Makuta controls the Rahi.” Noticing ~~the gray shape of a red mask against the white~~ in the sand nearby, she darted forward to scoop it up.

“Mission accomplished,” Onua said. “Come on, let’s get back.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Kopaka snapped. “You’ll only end up killing yourself – and making a mess for the rest of us to clean up.”

Pohatu sighed, wondering if it had been a mistake to split into two groups. If Onua or Gali were here, maybe one of them could settle this argument between Kopaka and Lewa. But they, along with Tahu, had gone to Le-Wahi in search of Pohatu’s Onua’s second-to-last mask.

Now Pohatu stood atop the highest bluff in his own home region, staring at the mask that hung tantalizingly halfway down the sheer rock face. At the bottom of the cliff was an enormous Nui-Jaga. The Rahi knew the Toa were there, and every few seconds, it turned its masked face toward them and rattled its tail stinger.

“Perhaps our icy brother is right, Lewa,” Pohatu suggested, as gently as possible. “If you miss your mark and fall... well, anyway, I’m sure we can find another way if we put our minds together.”

Lewa shrugged, his smile never faltering. “Why worrybother?” he said. “The factmatter is, this way is so much more fun...”

The last sounds were lost in a rush of movement as Lewa launched himself off of the cliff with both arms outstretched.

“That fool!” Kopaka muttered savagely.

Pohatu couldn’t speak. He could only hold his breath, hardly daring to watch. It was his own bronze Kanohi Kaukau that Lewa was trying to grab as he swept past – how could Pohatu live with himself if Lewa’s bold attempt ended in catastrophe?

“Yeeeeeee!” Lewa cried, snatching the mask in one hand as he swooped past, then sweeping one arm through the air to call the wind to his aid. The sudden gust that resulted gave him a quick lift. But he soon left the wind behind, floating upward on his own power.

“He uses the Mask of Levitation well,” Kopaka admitted grudgingly as he watched the grinning Lewa ascend toward them.

Pohatu shot a glance at the Ice Toa. Beneath all his coldness, Kopaka had an honest heart.

A second later Lewa landed beside them. “One Kanohi Kaukau, as ordered,” he said breathlessly, tossing the mask

to Pohatu. “Hope it fits, because I’d sorryhate to have to return it.”

Onua squinted uncertainly toward the treetops. The sun was bright here in the rain forest of Le-Wahi. His eyes ached with the effort of trying to see through its brightness.

“Is that it?” he asked Gali and Tahu, who stood beside him.

Gali nodded. “It is your Kanohi Kakama,” she confirmed. “It seems to be stuck in the knot of this tree, up near the top. Too bad brother Lewa isn’t here to play monkey for us.”

“Indeed. Sister, you hold the Mask of Levitation – do you think you can get mine?”

“I can try.” Gali stared upward. “I haven’t yet had much time to practice, much less in a deep forest like this. But if I move slowly...”

Tahu let out a noisy, impatient sigh. “Look, we don’t have all day for this,” he said abruptly. “Why not try an easier way?”

With that, he pointed his sword at the tree.

“Tahu, no!” Gali cried.

But even as the words left her mouth, flames shot out of Tahu’s sword and enveloped the tree’s trunk. Within seconds the fire had consumed the entire tree, burning it into a black skeleton sprouting from a pile of cinders. Only the mask remained untouched by the flame, falling intact to the ground with a puff of embers.

Onua frowned as he picked up the mask. *He’s insane*, he thought, as runaway flames licked at several neighboring trees. *He could have set the whole forest ablaze!*

Behind him, he saw Gali gesturing with her arms. A moment later, a drenching rain shower poured down over them, dousing all the fires.

“Um, thanks,” Tahu said somewhat sheepishly, wiping rainwater from his mask. “I didn’t think the fire would spread.”

“Right.” Gali’s voice sounded almost cold enough to have come from Kopaka. “I suppose you also didn’t think about the birds who called that tree home, or the plants and animals that relied on it for shade. In other words, you didn’t think.”

With that, she turned and assertively stalked off into the jungle.

“There!” Tahu crowed triumphantly as the de-masked Rahi scurried away down the drifts of the lower Ihomountain. “The Great Mask of Water Breathing is mine. And that means –”

“- all the masks have been found,” Kopaka finished for him.

“Good,” Gali said shortly, hardly smiling at Tahu’s obvious glee as he placed the Kanohi Kaukau over his face ~~and the dull gray surface of the mask suddenly gleamed bright red.~~

Kopaka was strangely pleased to notice that Gali and Tahu didn't seem to be getting along. He wondered what had happened between them, though he wasn't about to ask.

"Now we come to the next question," Onua said. "What are we supposed to do now?"

Tahu shrugged. "We have all our powers now," he pointed out. "So let's go and take out the rest of the Rahi. Now that we know how to disable them —"

"Seems like timefoolery to me," Lewa interrupted. "The Matoran know the secret now, too. With that knowledge, they should be able to safekeep themselves against the Rahi for the nowtime. And I have a hunchthought that other tasks lay in store for us."

Kopaka winced at the Air Toa's comment. Didn't anyone else recognize how absurd it was to rely on hunches and premonitions? At the same time, though, he couldn't help flashing back to the vision he'd had on the Lava Lagoon.

He frowned. Why did he have to remember that right now? He has barely thought of it since then. Did it have some kind of meaning, or was he turning into a foolish dream-follower like Lewa?

"Perhaps our next duty has to do with the golden-colored Kanohi my Turaga mentioned," Gali said. "Does anyone know anything more about them? Do you remember the dreams we all dreamed before we awakened?" Gali asked, interrupting Kopaka's thoughts. "Did any of you see anything about the golden Kanohi? Not bronze, like brother Pohatu's masks, but shining gold like the Sun?"

"Not I," Onua said as the others shook their heads. "What exactly ~~were you told?~~ have you seen, sister Gali?"

"Not much. I don't know." Gali frowned, looking puzzled and frustrated. "I—I suppose we will have to go back and ask. All I really know is that somehow, we are supposed to find such a golden mask. I... I'm constantly thinking that's the goal. That we have to find the golden masks."

Finally Kopaka spoke up. "I think I know where we might find it," he said quietly.

The others glanced at him in surprise. "Huh?" Tahu said. "What are you talking about?"

"I had a vision," Kopaka said. "Right before you found me on the Lava Lagoon, brother Lewa." He glanced at the Air Toa, who had stopped leaping around for once. "In it, I saw a temple, a huge temple at the center of the island. I think we're meant to go there."

Tahu snorted. "And when exactly were you going to let us in on this secret?"

"He just did, ~~Tahu,~~" Gali pointed out quietly. "And that's fine. There was no need to knowing it until now."

Kopaka gazed at her, touched that she'd come to his defense. *It's just because she's annoyed with Tahu over something or other,* he told himself.

Still, he couldn't help giving Gali a brief, grateful smile.

“It looks just as it did in my vision,” Kopaka murmured, sounding surprised.

Onua glanced at the Toa of Ice. More than likely, he was the only one close enough to hear his words, though he suspected Kopaka didn’t want anyone to hear them. The others were already exclaiming over the grand temple, talking over each other about the beautiful stone pillars and the artistic carvings. But Onua’s mind turned immediately to more practical matters.

“Look,” he said, pointing to the life-size carvings of the six Toa cut out of the temple walls, complete except that the carvings wore no masks at all. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“I am, if you’re thinking our masks would fit perfectly over these carved faces,” Tahu said, ripping off his Kanohi Kaukau and holding it over the carved Tahu figure.

“Wait!” Kopaka said. “Let’s not throw away our powers foolishly.”

Tahu frowned at him. “Who says we’re throwing them away?” he challenged him. “It was your vision that led us here. Now you say we’re being foolish?”

“That’s not what I meant,” Kopaka said.

Gali placed a hand on Kopaka’s arm. “It’s okay, brother,” she said. “I think Tahu is on the right track – this time.”

“Thank you, sister Gali.” Tahu smiled at her. “I appreciate the support.”

Gali smiled back, and Kopaka scowled in irritation. Whatever had been bothering those two earlier seemed to be over. But more importantly, Gali’s words encouraged Tahu to continue what he was doing. Kopaka opened his mouth to argue further, but something stopped him.

Maybe this isn’t the wrong thing to do just because it seems impulsive, he thought. Then he frowned. *What am I doing? Am I turning into Lewa or Gali, trusting whims and feelings?*

Tahu pushed the mask onto the stone Tahu’s face. As the mask melted into the stone he pulled off his Kanohi Miru, and then his other masks, placing each one onto the carving’s face.

Lewa and Pohatu followed Tahu’s lead. Even Gali stepped forward toward her sculpture, her Kanohi ~~Kaukau~~ Akaku in hand.

Onua glanced over at Kopaka. “Normally I, like you, would be against this rush to move,” he commented. “But I’m getting the strangest feeling that this is what we are meant to do.”

Kopaka nodded. “I – I, too, am beginning to get that feeling.”

That was enough for Onua. He had already observed enough to know that the Ice Toa wasn’t one to make rash decisions – not without good reason, anyway.

The two of them walked over to their own likenesses. Onua pulled off his Kanohi Kakama. Taking a deep breath, he set into place on the stone Toa’s face. The stone seemed to suck it in, swallowing it into itself. Onua fed it another

mask, and another. Soon he was placing his last mask, the Kanohi Pakari onto the carving. It melted into the carving like the others but remained visible, tinting the stone black. Without any mask at all, Onua's face felt strange and vulnerable.

For a moment nothing happened. Onua felt his heart sink. Had they just given away their Masks of Power for no good reason? Had this all been a trick of Makuta?

"Okay, now what?" Lewa asked finally, a bit agitated.
"Surely, we didn't go through all the dangertask just to make some nice decoration for a wall?"

Then there was a peak of sound, like great bells blended with laughter. Onua gasped in amazement as a new mask suddenly appeared on the face of each stone carving – the golden Kanohi, glowing with light and power.

Onua carefully lifted the golden Kanohi from the carving's face and placed it on his own. He staggered back a step as waves of power blasted through him. Then he smiled. This new mask united all the powers of the other six – only it was even stronger!

"So this was what we were really seeking," Gali said, sounding awed. "The mask that replaces all six. Now we truly have the power to take on the Makuta."

Her last few words were nearly drowned out by a mighty rumble from somewhere deep within the earth. The Toa jumped back as a group, even as the ground began to shake and groan beneath their feet.

"And what now?" Pohatu shouted. The walls and pillars shook, sending dust and debris raining on top of them.

Before anyone could answer, a chasm yawned open in front of them, right in the middle of the main temple area. It turned into a tunnel about two lengths wide.

Then everything stopped. The earth lay still again, as if nothing had happened.

The Toa stared at the hole in the ground. Then they stared at one another. There was a moment of silence.

Finally Onua spelled out what they have all felt. "Come on," he said, stepping toward the tunnel. "I guess we'd better see where this goes."

11. Into the Darkness

Lewa's heart pounded with anticipation as the Toa made their way down the tunnel. The power of the golden Kanohi flowed through them and made them braver than ever before. With so much power at their disposal, how could even Makuta hope to stand against them?

Ahead, Tahu quickened his pace as the tunnel got wider and smoother.

"It's going straight down," he said, excitement sparkling in his voice. "It must lead to Makuta's lair. I can feel it in every part of my being."

"Wait," cautioned Pohatu, almost at the very end of the line. "Do you really want to challenge him to a fight deep underground, in his home lair, without having any idea who we're up against?"

"He's right," Onua said carefully. "We'd better talk this through."

Tahu snorted impatiently without slowing down. "Enough talk," he shot back. "It is time to act. Who's with me?"

"Me!" Lewa shouted, happy that Tahu was saying what he had also been thinking. What's the use of standing around and talking? They all knew what was coming up. They have faced the Rahi and the other monsters of the island. Now it was time to face the greatest challenge. "Let Makuta tremble!" he yelled. "Nothing can stop us!"

Tahu also yelled in response: "No more wasting our time, lets get to work!" he added.

"Fools!" Kopaka's frosty voice pierced through the damp, dim air of the tunnel. "Have you still learned nothing? This island is full of surprises, and at this moment we are the least prepared to face any of them."

Lewa was shocked. He was thinking this could be the longest speech he's ever heard the Toa of Ice make. But he didn't change his mind. "I still say we should keep going" he shot back. "Maybe this way, we will be the ones surprising whatever's waiting for us at the tunnel's end."

"That's a nice thought, brother Lewa," Gali said, but her voice was laden with worry and uncertainty. "However..."

Tahu was already rushing ahead toward the tunnel's next corner. "Come on!" he shouted. "This way, everyone!"

Lewa caught Pohatu rolling his eyes. "Sure," the Toa of Stone muttered. "That's how you surprise an enemy. By shouting at the top of your lungs!"

By that point, Tahu was too far ahead to hear the remark. Lewa shrugged and followed him, gripping his green katana blade tightly. But After so much confusion and uncertainty, it felt good to have a plan at last.

We explore tunnel, he thought. Then we find and kill/destroy Makuta. Sounds simple enough...

The tunnel twisted and turned through the earth, traveling deeper and deeper. Tahu's magma sword cast enough of a

glow to light their way, though deep, ominous shadows still lurked ahead and behind them.

Finally Tahu let out a shout as he turned a corner. "Hurray!¹¹" he cried. "I think I've found it."

"What?" Lewa skidded around the corner and stopped.

They were in a cavern, broad and long. Thick slashes of lightstone in the walls cast an eerie pale glow over the place. At the far end, an immense iron door filled most of the wall. Several other passageways snaked off in various directions along the sides of the cave, but Lewa didn't spare them a glance. His eyes were trained on that giant door.

"That's it," he whispered in awe. "That's where we'll find Makuta."

Nobody answered, but he could feel that they were all in agreement. Tahu gripped his sword tightly. "All right, then," he said. "If he's in there, let's go in and finish him."

"Tahu, wait a minute," Pohatu protested. "We can't just rush in there without a plan, or..."

SSSKKKKKKREEEEEEEEE!

A piercing shriek filled the room, echoing wildly from a thousand directions. Whirling around, Lewa saw a pair of monstrous Rahi skittering out of two side passage-ways. They were immense, broad and squat but surprisingly fast. Their powerful arms ended in dangerous-looking pincers.

¹¹ Another mistranslation of "hurry".

"What are those?" Pohatu cried.

Lewa gasped, recognizing the creatures from a ~~Turaga's description~~ one of his dreams, although he had almost forgotten about them. "Manas," he said, without knowing where the word came from. "I remember think they're namecalled Manas."

"They're just more Rahi," Tahu shouted, already swinging his ~~fire~~ magma sword. "Nothing we can't handle. Come on!"

Lewa hesitated — ~~the Turaga had warned then that no single Toa could hope to take on the Manas. But perhaps together...~~ then followed him. He somersaulted through the air toward one of the creatures, landing on its back. He grabbed it and tried to flip it over, but it was larger than he'd expected and tossed him off easily.

"Oof!" he grunted, landing hard on the stone floor.

The Manas turned against Onua, still letting out an ear-splitting screech. The noise made it hard to think.

"No reason use in thinking." Lewa thought grimly. "Only winfighting."

He leaped back into the fray, joining Tahu and Onua as they battled furiously against one of the Manas. Pohatu raced past, pausing long enough to whisper in Lewa's ear.

"Gali has set a trap," he said. "Help me lead the Manas toward that small tunnel back there."

Lewa nodded and immediately understood everything. Makuta's beasts were strong, but not too bright. The Toa have already trapped many Rahi using ice or water to incapacitate them for long enough to remove their masks.

Pohatu let out a whoop and raced to the back of the cave. Lewa jumped forward and smacked the nearby Mana¹² on its shell-like back before somersaulting away. "Catch me if you can, uglyvile!" he taunted.

The Mana paused, turning toward him. But then it returned its attention to Onua, snapping at him with its deadly claws.

"This way, brother!" Lewa shouted, waving his arms at Onua. "Run this way!"

Onua managed to dodge the creature's blows and raced toward Lewa. "What is it, brother?" he asked breathlessly.

"A planidea," Lewa told him. "Come on, we need to lurelead them this way."

Nearby, he saw that Kopaka was doing his best to lure the second Mana in the same direction. He wielded his ice blade coolly, backing up a few steps each time the Mana lunged at him. Behind him, Gali served as a distraction whenever the creature seemed to be getting the better of the Ice Toa.

Step by step, the six Toa led the two Manas toward the tunnel where Gali had set her trap. Lewa glanced behind him, noting the water lapping at the mouth of the tunnel that wasn't much wider than the flat, powerful body of a

¹² The translator thought "Manas" was plural, so single ones are called "Mana".

Mana. He didn't know the details of the plan, but he could guess them.

If we can get this monsterpair trapped in that tunnel, sister Gali can ask the waters to awaycarry them, he thought. Then we can stoneblock the tunnel, and get back to finding Makuta.

Soon they were right at the tunnel. The Toa looked at each other. Lewa felt his body quivering with eagerness to move, but he forced himself to wait. They had to act together, or the plan would fail.

When Gali spoke, it was a single word. "Now!"

The Toa all acted at once. Lewa, Tahu, Pohatu and Onua rushed forward and leaped past or over the two Manas, putting the creatures between themselves and the tunnel. Meanwhile, Gali rushed closer to the tunnel's entrance, and the waters within started to churn.

But what is our icebrother doing? Lewa wondered even as he began to swing his ~~blade~~ sword at the Manas, driving them back.

He soon understood. As the water in the tunnel entrance splashed out onto the cavern floor, Kopaka pointed his ice blade at it, freezing it solid. Soon a slick coating of ice covered much of the floor between the Manas and the tunnel. Once the creatures reached the ice, it would be easier to push them into the watery trap.

"Almost there!" Tahu shouted. "Come on, brothers! Let's finish this!"

Lewa leaped forward again, swinging at the closer of the two Manas. The creature hissed furiously, striking back with deadly accuracy. Its claw struck the Air Toa on the shoulder, sending him rocketing backward.

“Brother!” Pohatu yelled. “Are you alright?”

“Don’t let them distract you!” Lewa cried back. “Go after them!”

Ignoring the pain in his shoulder, he leaped back into action. The Manas took another step backward, then another, and it they finally hit the ice.

“Push!” Tahu howled, hurling himself at the creatures. By this time Kopaka had joined the fighters, and the five of them leaped at the two Manas, shoving them toward Gali’s tunnel. Lewa could see the creatures’ claws striking his comrades again and again – he felt powerful blows land on his own body. But he ignored the pain. All that mattered was the plan... To work...

The Manas skittered across the ice, their enormous bodies increasing their momentum. Lewa saw that they were heading straight toward the tunnel. Gali stood nearby, ready to finish the plan.

“Come on!” Tahu shouted, pointing his fire magma sword at the ground to melt the ice that now lay between the Toa and their quarry. “Don’t give them a chance to escape.”

But before the Toa could reach the Manas to give them a last push into the cave, the two crablike creatures spun toward each other. Hissing loudly, each of them reached

out its claws, locking them together until they seemed to merge into one even more enormous creature.

“Oh no!” Onua cried. “Look at them – they’re too big for the tunnel now!”

“They’re working together,” Kopaka said grimly. “I didn’t think the Rahi were capable of such intelligence.”

Pohatu shook his head. “These Manas creatures are not ordinary Rahi.”

Lewa was already leaping into action. “We are not planlost yet,” he cried. “I’ll separate them if I can...”

Without waiting for a reply, Lewa somersaulted forward, calling on every air current to propel him to his goal. He crashed headlong into a tangle of claws that held the two Manas together.

The creatures let out a furious hiss. Acting together, they swung their joined claws outward, sending Lewa flying across the cave. He smashed against the wall and landed in a heap, dazed.

As he climbed to his feet, he saw the paired Manas bounce off of the too-small tunnel entrance. Soon they had rocketed back across the remains of the ice onto dry ground. There, they separated and returned their attention to the surprised Toa.

These are no ordinary Rahi, Lewa thought as he saw the Manas’ pincer land a powerful blow on Tahu, knocking him into the wall. *No ordinary Rahi at all.*

12. The Power of the Toa

Kopaka saw Tahu fly by and crash into the wall too. As the Fire Toa slid to the floor, stunned, Kopaka aimed his ice blade in front of the Mana that was moving in on the fallen Toa. The floor in front of the creature instantly froze once again, slowing it down long enough for Lewa to somersault in and drag Tahu out of range.

“This is ridiculous,” Gali cried as she defended herself against the second Mana. “They’re just too strong! We’d better retreat.”

“Never!” Tahu croaked, his voice hoarse but determined. He got up. “We must stay united. We must defeat them!”

Kopaka blinked, wondering why Tahu’s words had struck such a chord in his mind. *Where have I heard something like that before?*

He glanced toward Gali and found her watching him. “What is it, brother?” she asked, and pulled him aside. “Do you know something? I – I think I do. I had a vision. It told me that something would happen after we found all the Masks of Power. That we would need to – unite.”

Kopaka hesitated. Could it be?

The words from his vision returned: *... behold the future... you and the others shall... all the Great Masks of Power... together and defeat... three shall become... path of wisdom... myself, Akamai... of the warrior... only by uniting...*

“I think I had the same vision,” he admitted at last. “I didn’t understand it at the time. I – I still don’t understand it.”

“Don’t you see?” Gali stared into his eyes, almost seeming to forget about the Manas, who were attacking the other Toa nearby. “I was told that three shall become Wairuha and walk the path of wisdom. Three shall become Akamai and walk the path of the warrior. Only by uniting will the Toa find the strength to triumph.”

Kopaka shook his head. “No,” he said. “It doesn’t make sense. How could such a thing happen?”

“I sense that it will happen if we want it to,” Gali replied quietly. “But only if we really want it.” She glanced briefly toward the battle behind them. “I’m thinking that I want whatever will help us all. Do you?”

Kopaka stared at her for a moment, his thoughts were unusually muddled. How could he want such a thing? Three become one – it would mean giving up his own individuality. No! It was impossible... Or was it?

Haven’t I found that sometimes my own powers fell short? he thought reluctantly. Haven’t I found myself wishing at times that the others were with me? Haven’t we all experienced too late that if one of us knows something, it would have helped to tell it to the others in time?

Gali was still watching him. “Unity, responsibility, duty,” she said urgently. “Think about those words, brother. Do you believe in them?”

“Yes,” Kopaka said at last, though it was painful to admit it. “Yes. I don’t like them much right now, but I believe in them.” He took a deep breath. “Let’s do it.”

“Great!” Gali smiled at him. “Lets talk with the others.”

They rushed over to the combatants just in time to help Onua parry a double-strike from the two Manas.

“Brothers!” Gali shouted. “We need to retreat – just for a moment.”

Pohatu and Onua glanced at each other. Then they used their powers simultaneously to tumble down part of the ceiling and create a wall of rubble right in front of the advancing Manas.

“That won’t hold them for long,” Pohatu said breathlessly. “Now, what is it?”

Gali quickly described the vision she’d had. “We need to unite,” she finished. “Combine our powers. Otherwise, there is no hope of victory.”

“I’m not sure why, but I’ve been expecting this idea.” Onua commented. “I think I’ve seen something similar in my dreams.”

The others nodded.

“At this point, Well then, lets do it,” Tahu said, “~~Hi try anything.~~ It is time.”

As if part of one of his own dreams, Kopaka moved toward Gali and Lewa. Beside them, Tahu turned to face Pohatu

and Onua. In each group, there were three Toa, they closed their eyes¹³... and became one.

Akamai, the Toa Kaita blinked and stood up.

“Yes!” he bellowed, and felt the powers meld together in his immeasurable body. Immense strength from the part that used to be Onua. Swiftness and skill from what had been Pohatu. Fiery energy from the area that had come from Tahu. “Now the battle can begin.”

Beside him, Wairuha, the other Toa Kaita bent his arms in amazement. The energies of Gali, Lewa and Kopaka swirled in and around them, blowing a moist, chilly wind when he spoke.

“Brother!” rumbled Wairuha. “This is how it has to be. Let us do what he have to.”

The two Toa Kaita turned around and with huge steps started for the sheer stone wall. A moment later, the Manas burst through it, jumping straight at them.

¹³ Probably yet another mistake. It should say “they locked eyes”, but it seems the translator didn’t know what that meant.

13. United Toa

The two Toa Kaita were a worthy match for the powerful Manas, and this time, the battle raged more furiously than ever.

Akamai fended off one of the crablike creatures with a series of powerful blows. “What, you scurry away like a tiny Hoto bug?” he cried with a roar of laughter. “Are you a Rahi, or perhaps just a worm?”

“Do not taunt them, Akamai,” Wairuha said. “Remember that they are unwilling servants of Makuta, like the other Rahi we have met. Let us finish this quickly.”

The words hardly left his mouth when one of the Manas leaped at him. Despite his immense strength, the strike sent Wairuha staggering backward a few steps as the enemy clamped its pincers onto him. Using all of his strength, Wairuha managed to rip the Mana free and fling him against the wall.

The Mana hit the stone with a solid crunch. But the hard shell protected it from injury, it recovered quickly and skittered back toward the battle.

Wairuha knew it was time to finish the battle. “Use your power, borthor!” he shouted to Akamai. “That is why we are here!”

Turning toward the Mana that was scurrying toward him, he sucked in a deep breath, feeling his powers – of ice, water,

and wind – expand and merge within him. A moment later, a raging blizzard erupted in the cavern.

All the while, he saw that Akamai, too, was using his combined powers. A giant crater exploded in the cavern floor, spraying stone, earth and lava in every direction. The Manas staggered back from the hole, looking frightened. Another crater appeared, and another, until the Manas were trapped on an island of solid floor surrounded by a moat of boiling lava.

Wairuha, meanwhile, focused his energy through the blizzard, controlling it. He concentrated with everything he had – logic, instinct, and impulse guiding him all at once. Soon he had compressed the might of the storm into a single, focused beam of pure cold energy.

He turned it toward the trapped Manas. As the beam passed over them, the creatures froze solid.

“Nice work, brother,” Akamai said. “But I fear it will take more than that to kill them.”

Wairuha was already moving toward the lava moat. “There is no need to kill them, brother,” he said. With one acrobatic leap, he crossed the moat and stood beside the frozen Manas. “I’ll need your assistance to remove these masks.”

Akamai nodded and leaped over as well. Touching one finger to the mask of one of the Manas, he soon melted the ice surrounding it. Wairuha reached out and pulled it free, dropping it into the lava, where it sank out of sight.

The Toa Kaita turned to the other Mana, repeating the process. Soon both Manas were free of their controlling masks.

“There,” Wairuha said, leaping back across the moat. “That takes care of that.”

“Not quite.” Akamai bent and touched the ground at the edge of the lava moat. There was a rumble, as the edges moved toward each other, closing off the moat as if it had never existed.

Wairuha looked around. Except for the frozen forms of the Manas, the cave looked as empty and peaceful as when the Toa had arrived.

“Our work is done,” he said. “And now...”

He felt ~~his mind slipping away~~ as if he were sinking, as if in the moment just before sleep. He closed his eyes...

Tahu opened his eyes. *Is it really me?* he wondered and looked at himself. His red and golden form was sanding there, gleaming in the dim shine of the lightstone, like in the first rays of the sun whe he had first awakened.

He smiled. Yes. He was himself again and happy again. Becoming part of Toa Kaita Akamai had been electrifying, but it was nice to have his own mind and will to himself again.

Glancing around, he saw the other Toa standing nearby, all of them looking as dazed as he himself felt.

Lewa was the first to speak. “Well,” he said, stretching and bending, “that was a powerfeeling you don’t get everyday.

Surprisingly, Kopaka spoke next. “I really hope so,” he said coldly.

Laughter bubbled from Gali like a spring. “Brothers,” she cried, stretching her arms wide, “We did it! We became a part of something larger – and did what we never could have done otherwise.”

Pohatu grinned as he extended his fist to Tahu. “It was good exchanging minds with you, brother,” he joked.

“Same.” Tahu bumped his fist together with Pohatu’s and returned his smile.

14. Out of the Shadows

“Quicklook!” Toa Lewa cried, pointing across the huge underground cavern. “The Manas are thawing. Once Makuta sees his hardluck creatures running for their lives, he’ll be out of our way everquick.”

Pohatu, the Toa of Stone, glanced where the Air Toa was pointing. He and the other five Toa watched as the ~~mask-free~~ enormous, crablike Manas thawed from the deep freeze that ~~Toa Kaita Wairuha’s~~ Kopaka’s icy power had put them in and scuttled away, disappearing into the darkness of a nearby tunnel. The masks which Makuta had used to rule over the fearful animals have been destroyed, molten in Toa Tahu’s fiery lava, thus the Manas have been freed of their dark duty.

It had been a hard-fought victory for the members of the Toa. They deserved their moment of celebration. Somehow though, Pohatu found it impossible to relax and enjoy it. He looked around. Tahu’s magma sword illuminated the others, along with a number of empty passageways leading out of the chamber. But there was something – a shudder of stone against stone, the faintest tremor in the rocky ground – that told him there might be more to come. The Toa of Earth was thinking along much the same lines.

“Don’t be so certain that we have truly defeated the Great Evil One,” Onua warned Lewa solemnly. “While these Manas were powerful, they were but guardians. Makuta himself...”

“What’s that?” Gali interrupted. The Water Toa was staring intently toward the back of the cavern.

“Something moved back there. Onua, can you see anything?”

Kopaka peered into the darkness along with the others, gripping his ice blade ~~uneasily~~ firmly. Although the Toa of Ice had an uncanny ability to stay calm and collected in almost every situation, below the surface, things was completely different. Kopaka never felt right in Onu-Wahi’s underground tunnels, mines and caves. He had felt the walls were always too close to him. The air was still and the heat unbearable.

Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.

Water trickled onto stone somewhere far off – or was it nearby? Down here it was hard to tell.

“Does anyone see anything?” Lewa’s whisper broke the near silence.

“Shh!” Gali chided him. “Did you hear-?”

KRRREEEEAAAAAAAAA!

The sudden sound exploded through the cave.

“What was that?” Pohatu asked, raising his Climbing Claws that functioned just as well as weapons. “It sounded like something not good.”

The others murmured uneasily. In the reddish gleam of Tahu’s sword all faces looked worried and tense.

“Toa...”

Pohatu spun around. Had he really just heard that whisper? He listened tensely. And then he heard it again, there was no doubt about it.

“Toa...”

“Who is it?” Tahu called boldly. “Who’s there? Step forward and reveal yourself at once, or suffer the wrath of Toa Tahu!”

Mocking laughter echoed through the underground chamber, echoing back from the flinty walls. “But of course,” a low, reverberating voice hissed with delight. It seemed to be coming from nowhere and everywhere at once. “Toa Tahu, with a heart of fire and a temper to match. Just how hot can you burn?”

Makuta! Without knowing how he knew, Tahu’s mind formed the name.

This, then, was the Dark One they had sought for so long, whom the six Toa have been hearing about ever since they had woken up on the island Mata Nui with no past and no memories, without knowing anything of themselves other than that sole duty was to protect the island’s people. Then they had found each other, discovered that each of them could control one of nature’s elements, fire, water, air, earth, stone or ice. They had used this power against the Rahi, beasts forced under Makuta’s control. And they had used this power to seek out the golden Kanohi masks they now wore, which gave unique abilities to each of them. Their search has eventually brought them here, to this underground lair, where they faced off against the Manas while transformed into Toa Kaita, two beings of great

power that combined the Toa’s spirit, body and elemental power.

Now, at last, the time of the final battle had arrived. Tahu gripped his magma sword, burning with anticipation.

There was a glimmer of movement in one of the tunnels leading off from the larger central chamber. Tahu leaped forward instantly and struck with all his strength. But his ~~fire~~ magma sword sliced through empty air and stuck solid rock with a furious CLAAAAANNNNNNG! Sparks flew wildly, illuminating the Fire Toa’s fierce expression.

“Wait!” Pohatu cried, even though it was too late. “Tahu, wait a moment. We don’t even know what it is we face yet.”

Once again, laughter filled the chamber. “Ah, and this must be the famous Toa Pohatu, with a spirit like a stone,” the mysterious voice cooed. “Always ready to wait and watch and ponder – even as Mata Nui crumbles around him.”

“It is easy enough to mock us from the shadows,” Onua said evenly, stepping into the center of the chamber. “But your words will never defeat us.”

“No doubt,” the voice responded silkily. “But it matters not, as I have only to sit back and comfortably watch as you defeat yourselves.”

Confused, Gali waited to hear more. But the voice had faded away, as if it had never been. For a moment, there was silence, only broken up by the constant dripping:

Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.

“What was that supposed to mean?” Lewa asked, ~~breaking the silence~~ wondered aloud.

Before Gali could answer, she caught a flash of movement out of the corner of her eye. Spinning to face it, she saw a dark figure racing toward Tahu, skillfully wielding a deadly-looking sword.

15. Toa vs Toa

“Tahu! Look out!”

The Fire Toa turned just in time to raise his sword against the onslaught. Sparks flew in every direction, nearly blinding him. The face of his attacker was hidden behind a blackened, pitted mask, and black, suffocating smoke billowed from its ~~sword~~ twin blades. He fought with the same passion and swiftness as Tahu.

Tahu held the stranger off as best he could. He channeled the power of his flame through his fire magma sword, pointing it toward the sandy ground beneath his attacker. It instantly crystallized into glass and broke under the stranger’s weight. The attacker plummeted out of sight into a burnt pit.

But Tahu barely had time enough to smile before the stranger leaped out of the pit. “Hate to shatter your illusions,” it said in a sizzling, crackling voice, “but it will take more than that to get rid of me.”

The words only drove Tahu to greater fury. He shot white-hot flames out of the swords, but his movements were too fast, careless, striking the walls and boulders of the cavern until sparks flew in all directions, showering over the other Toa.

“Take care, Tahu,” the attacker spoke again, “lest the fire of your anger blaze out of control.”

Tahu gritted his teeth. "We'll see how you like my fire now," he said.

He pointed his magma sword at the stony cavern floor. Fire poured from the end, melting the rock into steaming, glowing lava. The puddle grew fast, spread out across the cavern and bathed it in flickering, orange light.

"Brother Tahu!" Onua's voice sounded distant, almost lost in the bubbling sound of the boiling lava. "Watch what you're doing – you'll endanger us all!"

But Tahu could only focus on his adversary, who elegantly sprung to the top of a giant slab of rock at the edge of the lava.

"Coward!" Tahu roared. "Can't take the heat, huh? Leaving already?"

"Leave?" Laughter bubbled out of the stranger, as if more lava had burst up through the ground. "Why would I leave, Toa of Fire?"

Tahu's With that, the mysterious opponent leaped off its rock and surfed across the bubbling lava unscathed. Its smile broadened. "Come, give in to the flame," it whispered. "Let it consume you and all you hold dear – I know you can feel it burning deep inside."

Tahu gasped, startled out of his own anger, at least momentarily. What sort of enemy was this? He looked around for help and saw that five more attackers had suddenly appeared, as if out of the shadows themselves, each moving in on a different Toa...

Nearby, Gali struggled against another her own mysterious attacker. The stranger's form mirrored her own almost perfectly, but rather than the clean blue of the open sea, its body was the muted, sickly brownish-black of an oil slick.

"Who are you?" Gali gasped as she released a raging flood of water toward her attacker evaded an axe blow.

A chuckle poured out of the attacker, who seemed unaffected by the flood like water from a spring. "Who am I?" it said. "Is wise, all-seeing Gali really so blind? I am you!"

Gali gasped, her Aqua Axes dropping down by her sides as her foe's words swept away her power. "What? What do you mean?"

But she already knew the answer. So this is Makuta's new method of attack, making them fight themselves! What better way to size up their strength, observe their weaknesses?

"You are not me," Gali responded in anger. "At best you could only be my mere shadow."

"Exactly." When the stranger lunged at her, Gali jumped to the side, spun around and landed fifteen meters away. She took a deep breath, coughing. What could have made the air so thick, warm and unpleasant?

She looked around and realized the spot she had landed on was surrounded by lava. Flames flickered on its surface, shining light on a nearby pair of combatants. Tahu! He's still

fighting against himself, both of them sliding across lava as easily as Gali had waded through the shallow waters of Naho Bay. Before she could take a better look at them, she heard a blunt thud to her side. She whirled around, just in time to evade the enormous double slash of her opponent's axes.

"You didn't believe you could get away that easily, Toa of Water?" the stranger taunted her, somersaulting backwards with ease. "In your great wisdom, you'll obviously realize what a meaningless effort this is. Like a fish squirming around trying to escape, when the fisherman has already caught it on a hook."

"We'll see." Gali forced herself to focus, taking deep breaths to draw every available bit of moisture toward herself. The water of the streams flowing inside the rocks surrounding the cavern, the tiny droplets flying in the air, even the steam rising out of Tahu's lava. They united and rushed toward Gali as a roaring, furious flood that swept away everything in its path.

Gali jumped into the first wave to reach her, her Aqua Axes driving her like flippers through the powerful stream. She swam to the surface far away, smiling.

But her smile faded when her opponent popped up from the water next to her.

"I'm sorry, Gali," it said with a grin. "Looks like the water has swept over your head."

Pohatu jumped atop an enormous boulder just in time to avoid being swept away by Gali's flood. "Hey!" he cried, his usual good nature overwhelmed by near panic. "Gali, take care not to fight your friends as well as your enemy!"

His opponent smirked, clinging on to a nearby wall. "So much for the teamwork," it said in a haunting¹⁴ voice. As the water receded below, it easily jumped down to the cavern floor. "This is how your friends repay your loyalty. Makes one wonder why one should bother with friends at all, doesn't it?"

"Not at all." Pohatu leaped to the ground and immediately swung his weapon at the boulder sank his Climbing Claws into the rock he'd just been standing on. It shattered into hundreds of flying shards, ricocheting off the walls toward the mysterious attacker.

The stranger effortlessly dodged them, its movements as fast and smooth as Pohatu's. The Toa of Stone frowned – he was impressed. "So," he said, "it looks like we have to fight. Well then, let the dance begin."

With that, he grabbed a hold of another immense boulder, tearing it free from the ground with a grunt. He lifted it above his head and hurled it at his foe.

The stranger laughed as he dodged the rocks jumped aside. "Too bad, Pohatu," it taunted. "Good thing you expect nothing to return for your loyalty to your friends. Because now that the chips are down, it seems they've left you to fight me all alone."

¹⁴ Another strange translation mess-up. The writer misinterpreted "gravelly" as "from the grave".

It was getting hard for Lewa to concentrate on his own battle. First he'd nearly backflipped into the pool of lava that had suddenly appeared to cover half the cave. Then a flood of water had washed through, forcing him to float near the ceiling to avoid drowning. Now a gigantic boulder was heading for him as his opponent pushed him against the cave wall.

"Now we're royally in deepforest," he grumbled under his nose. But that didn't mean he was ready to give up.

"Al-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai!" he yodeled, flipping himself up and over his attacker's weapons and out of the boulder's path.

CCRRRAAAAACCCCHHHH!

The cavern shuddered as the boulder struck the wall. Lewa glanced hopefully back toward it, wondering if his opponent might be trapped behind it.

"Looking for me, Toa of Air?" The words were like a cold draft to his ears.

He turned around, barely able to avoid another attack. He wasn't used to fighting with an enemy as fast, agile and acrobatic as himself. The foe's skill with the katana blade was like his own in every respect. He also used the tool as a weapon, looking for an opportunity to stab the sharp blades, originally meant for cutting through the thick jungle shrubbery, into Lewa.

What is this creature, this quickdodging dark-stranger? Lewa wondered as he leaped into the air to escape another blow. It looks like me – but he does not like me.¹⁵

He took in the stranger's pitted mask, blackened as if by a creeping forest moss. Its skin beneath was green – not the healthy green of Lewa's skin, but the washed out green of a rotting leaf.

"What do you want from us?" asked Lewa, while commanding a passing gust of wind, trying to knock his enemy off balance. "Why did you attack us here in the everdarkness?"

The stranger ducked out of the wind's path, laughing. "You're more chattertalky than every, huh, Lewa?" it sang. "It's a wonder you're not windblowing your fellows away with all your twittering."

"We'll see who's going to be windblown away," Lewa murmured, annoyed at the stranger's insult.

Tumbling out of range and lifting his arms, Lewa focused his energies on the air all around him. Soon, jets of air began whirling toward him, guided by his arms

The whirlwind roared through the cavern, getting stronger by the moment. Pebbles, rocks, even bigger boulders were caught in its tremendous force. It swept up Lewa's enemy, and the Toa of Air laughed with delight.

¹⁵ Yet another goof in the translation. Should be "but not like me".

But his opponent merely laughed in return as it glided easily through the currents and soon landed back behind the startled Toa.

Kopaka was getting confused as he battled his own mysterious opponent. It hadn't taken him long to realize what was happening – Makuta had created these shadowy versions of the Toa to challenge them where the Manas and all the other creatures had failed.

And so far, the plan seemed to be working.

Kopaka fought on grimly. Neither he nor his enemy was wasting any energy on words. Instead, they fought silently, but exerting all of their strength. Kopaka found his frustration rising as each of his carefully executed moves was met and returned with equal precision. It seemed he couldn't gain an inch of advantage over his opponent, worse, he had to struggle hard just to keep his position.

This isn't working, he thought. There has to be a better way.

Then he saw Lewa somersaulting above his head. This momentary inattention was all his foe had needed. It thrust forward, the dirty white gleam of its sword heading straight for Kopaka's midsection.

The Toa of Ice managed to swing his shield on front of him just in time. The sword slid across it with devastating force, throwing Kopaka off balance.

Okay, he thought coldly. Time to try something else.

"This should cool you off," he muttered to his opponent.

Suddenly, he touched his ice sword to the ground and focused his energy. Instantaneously, the cavern floor froze into a solid sheet of ice.

Even as he did it, Kopaka realized he'd miscalculated. His enemy smiled snidely as it glided across the ice toward Kopaka, its moves more graceful and controlled than ever.

"I see you've just recognized the cold, hard truth," it whispered in a voice as sharp as an icicle.

Onua barely had time to think as he fought his unwearied opponent. This stranger, Onua's shadow version, was just as strong as him. It was a creature of Makuta's, but unlike any other.

As he ducked to avoid his foe's blow, Onua briefly looked around the cave. Not far away, Kopaka was skating on an icy area, entwined in a perilous dance with his pale and lanky lookalike. A bit farther, Gali and Pohatu were deep in battle with their enemies. Lewa's voice could be heard from somewhere above, and the flames of Tahu's sword illuminated the walls.

Onua shook his head, willing himself to focus, to think through this problem. He had already tried overpowering his enemy with raw strength, but its might matched his own. He had attempted to trap it by tunneling through the cavern wall and then collapsing the tunnel atop it, but the creature had burrowed out easily.

We can't go on this way, he thought desperately. This enemy is too strong. It's as if he could foresee all my moves. My best tricks aren't enough to slow him down, much less defeat him.

The Shadow-Onua sent another blow his way, and Onua could barely dodge in time. He can't keep this pace up for long. Right now the Toa were at an impasse, evenly matched with their enemy. And somehow Onua knew if even one of them went down, it could mean the end of all of them. And its seemed like just a matter of time. This enemy was tireless, and eventually even a Toa tires...

When his opponent started running toward him again, Onua shook off the momentary rush of desperation. Feeling uncharacteristically desperate, the Earth Toa struck the ground before him with all his might. The earth rumbled at the blow, it rose and the dust, sand and smaller rocks exploded. The quake extended, shaking the entire cavern and sending a hailstorm of rocks and earth raining down on all the fighters.

Onua felt despair grip him as he saw that while the other Toa had been knocked off their feet, his own opponent merely leaped over the torn earth and moved in to press the attack.

16. Unity, Responsibility, Duty

Kopaka hit the ground hard as the quake rumbled beneath him, cracking the ice he had been standing on. Before he could get up, he was certain his enemy was on him in a flash.

He managed to block the blow with his shield and then swing his ice blade upward. If he could just aim...

SKREEEEK!

He shook his head to clear his sight, and smiled as he saw that his enemy was frozen in place. But the icy shell that encased the stranger was already developing hairline cracks, as if covered in spiderwebs.

He didn't grant his quarry the second he would have needed to escape, instead, he swung his shield around and sent the frozen enemy skittering across the ice until it smashed into the cavern wall.

CRACCCH!

The creature shattered into hundreds of icy shards. But before a victorious smile could appear on Kopaka's face, he realized what a fatal mistake he had made.

And Each of the ice shards formed into a new enemy!

"Retreat!" he yelled instantly, as the first group of shards attained their full size, extending their dirty blades. "Quickly!"

Nearby, Onua glanced over and gasped when he saw Kopaka's predicament. This truly wasn't an enemy like any other! They needed time to reorganize and figure out some kind of strategy.

"We heard it!" Onua bellowed, "Everyone, back into the tunnel! We have to devise a plan!"

"Easier said than done," shouted Gali, exhausted.

Onua looked around and saw that the Water Toa's enemy had forced Gali to the edge of Tahu's lava pool, which Onua's earthquake had transformed into a dozen separate puddles.

This is bad, Onua thought helplessly, dodging another blow from his own enemy. How can I fight one so much like myself? How can any of us?

He blinked as the answer dawned on him at last. Of course!

"Listen up!" he shouted. "We're going about this all wrong. We can't hope to defeat our own shadow doubles – but that's why we're a team!" He wanted to say more, but he didn't have the chance – he had to dive aside to avoid another blow from his opponent's weapon.

~~Pohatu~~ Kopaka heard Onua's words, but he couldn't respond for a moment. He was too busy fending off his own attacker the attack of the shadow shards marching toward him. But in the back of his mind, he turned over the Earth Toa's plan and found it made sense.

Pohatu was relieved to hear Onua's plan. Of course! After all, they have defeated the Rahi and the Manas by fighting in unison! Why would this situation be any different?

"Who are you kidding?" his opponent chortled mirthlessly, as if reading his thoughts. "They're not going to fight for you, Toa of Stone, or even with you. They'll use your strength to save themselves, then leave you behind."

"No," Pohatu said firmly, putting all his strength into one leg as he shattered another boulder with a mighty kick. His enemy fell back to avoid the shrapnel of stone, but instead of pressing the advantage, Pohatu spun away and glanced quickly around the cavern.

A couple meters away, he saw the Fire Toa desperately trying to fend off a volley of blows with his fire magma sword. "Tahu!" Pohatu shouted. "Stand back!"

He wasn't sure that the other Toa had heard and understood him, but he had no time to waste. Gathering his energy, he leaped upward and struck the ceiling of the cave with a mighty blow of his fist. Cracks snaked all over the rock. As the pieces broke off and fell, Pohatu directed them straight onto the Fire Toa's opponent.

"Aaaaaah!" the black stranger cried, raising its arms to protect itself. Flames shot out of its sword, but it was no use. It couldn't melt the falling stones fast enough. Within seconds it was buried beneath a mound of rocky debris and swooshed into a nearby tunnel, with only a weak stream of gray smoke rising from under it, signaling that it had been there at all.

Tahu stared at Pohatu in surprise. “Hey!” he said. “What did you do that for? I was just about to-”

“Never mind,” Pohatu yelled, turning to defend himself against his opponent. “Help Gali!”

Tahu glanced over his shoulder and saw that the Water Toa was on the ground at the edge of a lava pool, her enemy advancing upon her.

“Gali!” Tahu cried. “Hold on, I’m coming!”

He ran closer, carrying tremendous heat energy within himself.

“Tahu!” Gali gasped. “don’t – this thing is too strong!”

But Tahu didn’t hesitate. As the Shadow Gali whirled to face him, he pointed his ~~fire~~ magma sword. Heat and flame danced out from the end of the blades, wrapping around the enemy as it howled in surprise.

Steam hissed out in all direction, obscuring his view. When it faded, nothing remained of the Shadow Gali but a puddle on the cavern floor, which quickly turned to droplets and disappeared from sight.

The others knew what had happened. The defeat of two of the shadow enemies gave the other Toa new strength of purpose. Gali turned all her power toward Onua’s enemy, re-formed her flood and sent it gurgling towards Shadow Onua. It cried out in dismay as water pounded against it, eroding it away into nothing but a bit of sand that got swept into the darkened end of the cave.

The distraction gave Onua the chance to help Lewa. Seeing that the Air Toa’s ~~enemy~~¹⁶ was somersaulting high in the air out of reach, Onua quickly summoned the earth beneath his feet to rise upon, trapping the high-flying enemy in a floor-to-ceiling column of dirt and stone. A moment later, he felt a cold breeze rush past him, heading for one of the tunnels.

Freed from his enemy, Lewa saw that Kopaka and Pohatu remained under attack. His first thought was to rush to Pohatu’s aid, he wouldn’t have much use for Kopaka, and the Toa of Ice didn’t appreciate others’ help anyway.

But he saw that while Pohatu was holding his own, the ice-shard enemies had Kopaka surrounded. Kopaka was using his sword and shield skillfully and calmly, apparently unfazed. But Lewa knew that no one could resist such numbers for long.

“I’m coming!” Lewa shouted, tumbling through the air around the icy battle. As he flew around Kopaka and his attackers, he gathered the surrounding air currents, forming them into a whirlwind. “Kopaka!” he cried. “Duck!”

The Ice Toa looked startled, but threw himself to the floor. A split second later, the whirlwind roared down around him, grabbing the shard soldiers into its grasp and spinning them around and around at dizzying speed.

The Shadow-Kopakas yelled in anger, but they couldn’t withstand the awesome power of the cyclone. Lewa felt the air getting cooler around him, his adversaries did everything they could to freeze the storm into obedience. But the cold

¹⁶ I don’t know why this was deleted, probably just an oversight, unless the translator wanted to kill off Lewa.

air just made the windstorm swirl even wilder, spinning faster than before.

The icy shard-soldiers crashed against one another again and again. Before long they had disintegrated into tiny sparkles of Ice, covering the ground below the whirlwind.

“Bad move, my improvising brother,” Kopaka said bleakly. “What if they all form into enemies again?”

“Not a problem if I can help it,” Tahu said, ~~blasting the ice crystals with his fire sword~~ stepping closer and aiming the magma sword at the ice crystals. Within seconds, they had melted and evaporated into steam, and the resulting steam rose and disappeared into the darkness.

“Guys!?” Pohatu called breathlessly. “Um, hey – anyone want to give me a hand here?” The others turned and saw that the Toa of Stone was still trading blows with his shadow self.

“Oops!” Lewa said.

“I’ll take care of this,” Kopaka said. “Stand back.”

Taking a deep breath, the Ice Toa blew out a frosty blast, freezing the area around Pohatu into a sheet of ice. The shadow Pohatu skidded across, winding up in Tahu’s pool of lava, where it sank with a gurgle. The remaining bubbles hurriedly flowed into a nearby passageway.

Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.

Once again, the cave was nearly silent. The Toa stood there for a long moment staring at one another. Then, as a group, they collapsed wearily to the ground.

After ~~catching his breath a few minutes,~~ Tahu sat up and glanced at Onua who was watching the others thoughtfully.

“What do you think, brother?” he asked the Earth Toa.

Onua smiled, though there was a hint of weariness in his eyes. “I think,” he said, “that we have won an important battle, and of that we can be proud. But this is far from the end.”

Tahu nodded, his grin fading as he gripped his ~~fire~~ magma sword more tightly. Yes, Onua was right. He could feel it, burning in his mind like a half-remembered dream.

This was far from the end.