

The Kingdom

By Greg Farshtey

Takanuva, Toa of Light, fell through inter-dimensional space, trying hard not to scream. A moment before, he had stepped through a dimensional portal created by Brutaka. His mission: travel to Karda Nui and warn the six Toa Nuva there of a disaster about to occur.

Somehow, though, this trip was not going as planned. Takanuva was being buffeted about, catching glimpses now and then of weird other worlds filled with beings both familiar and unfamiliar. He could guess that if he somehow wound up in one of those places, he might never find his way back to his own universe.

Suddenly, there was a jolt worse than any before. He was spinning wildly, out of control. There was an instant of complete darkness, followed by a very bright light, and then Takanuva slammed onto a rocky shore. He lay there, stunned, for a long time. When he finally lifted his head, it was to view a sight he could never have imagined.

The city before him was vast. It made Metru Nui look like a collection of stone-cutter shacks. Multiple design styles had combined to create a megalopolis that stretched for as far as the eye could see. Some of the buildings looked like ones in Metru Nui – he recognized the Coliseum, for example – others were totally strange and some almost primitive.

Takanuva glanced up at the sky. No, it didn't look like the one over Metru Nui. It looked – *oh, no, that couldn't be*, he thought. It was the same shade of blue as the one over the island of Mata Nui.

That's impossible, he said to himself. *Everyone left Mata Nui to move back to Metru Nui months ago. And Mata Nui was never this size, or filled with so many beings and buildings!*

He stood up and looked around. Everywhere, he could see Matoran of all kinds hard at work. That certainly wasn't unusual. Of course, the fact that they were working side by side with Bohrok, Skakdi, and Visorak was downright shocking.

"Hey," said a voice from behind him. "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

Takanuva turned. A Ga-Matoran, Macku, was there. She gave no sign of recognizing him.

"I'm Toa Takanuva," he answered. "Can you tell me where I am?"

"You're not Takanuva," said Macku, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "Try again ... or would you rather we call the Hunters?"

“But I am Takanuva. I know I look different, but -- ”

“That’s for sure,” laughed Macku. “You’re a lot taller. Or have you never seen Turaga Takanuva, stranger?”

“Turaga --?” sputtered Takanuva. He recovered quickly. “Um, maybe I was a little confused. Tell me, do you know where I could find Jaller?”

“At the Great Furnace, naturally,” said Macku, suspicion in her voice. “What do you want him for?”

“I have, um, a message for him from an old friend,” Takanuva replied.

It took some doing, but he finally convinced Macku to escort him into the city, which she called “the kingdom of the Great Spirit.” The first person she brought him to was a tall, strong warrior carrying a massive axe. He looked Takanuva over for a minute, then nodded. “He’s not a shapeshifter. And he really does think he’s Takanuva.”

“Thanks, Axonn,” said Macku. “So he’s crazy then?”

“Not sure,” said Axonn. He reached out and snatched away Takanuva’s Staff of Light. “Might be better not to let him walk around the city with this. You know how the Turaga feels about citizens carrying weapons.”

They walked through the streets of the city, as shock followed shock for Takanuva. Over there were Matoran buying wares from street stands run by Vortixx; further on, a Skakdi was hawking a show, boasting of the amazing Visorak pyramid that could be seen inside for just five widgees. And on every street corner, there was the presence of law enforcers – not Toa, not even Vahki, but Dark Hunters!

Macku left Takanuva with Toa Jaller. The Toa of Fire looked the same as he always had, but he viewed Takanuva without the wariness the Ga-Matoran had. “Well, you’re obviously not Takanuva,” he said. “But as long as you’re not a Makuta in disguise, you’re welcome in the kingdom. What can I do for you?”

“Just talk to me,” Takanuva said. “Tell me about this place. Are we ... is this really the island of Mata Nui?”

Jaller laughed. “Wow. I haven’t heard it called that in close to 10,000 years. Anyway, yes, this was the island of Mata Nui, but it’s a lot more than that now.”

“I see that. What ... I mean, how ...?”

Jaller pointed to a massive stone wall. “That’s what you want. There’s a Wall of History in every district – Kopeke made sure of that. You’ll find answers there.” Jaller paused, and then added, “You know, it’s funny . I know I never met you, but somehow you seem familiar. Why did you ask to see me, anyway?”

Takanuva thought about telling Jaller the truth. He could share all sorts of things only the real Takanuva would know. But then he decided that, at best, he would scare his old friend ... and at worst, he would wind up arrested by the Hunters.

“Right. Well, I met Turaga Takanuva once, and he ... um ... told me what a great friend you were. He said if I was ever in trouble, to come see you.”

“Well, that’s a pleasant surprise,” said Jaller. “None of the Toa Mahri are very popular around here, even after all this time ... even after how things turned out. I don’t think anyone’s even seen Matoro in five or six thousand years.”

The name startled Takanuva. Matoro was dead, killed when he sacrificed his life to save the Great Spirit Mata Nui and the universe. A theory was starting to form in the mind of the Toa of Light, and the Wall of History was where it could be proven or disproven. He thanked Jaller and hurried on.

Yes, it was all there all right. The first thing he noticed was the date – it was 10,000 years after he had left Metru Nui! But that wasn’t half as surprising as the story the carvings told.

The Toa Mahri had journeyed to the underwater city of Mahri Nui in search of the Mask of Life, just as he recalled. But after that, the story had changed. Toa Matoro – referred to in the carvings as the “Disgraced One” – had hesitated a few moments too long in his pursuit of the mask. The core of the universe had been sealed off, making it impossible for him to revive the Great Spirit Mata Nui with the mask. And Mata Nui, ruler and protector of the entire Matoran universe, had died.

But the tale didn’t end there. The Turaga of Metru Nui had been planning for just such an eventuality. Mobilizing the Toa, the Vortixx, the Skakdi, and many of the universe’s other species, they led a mass migration to the surface over the course of a few days. The Order of Mata Nui revealed its existence and helped as well. Even as more and more beings poured from Metru Nui up to the Mata Nui, those who were already there worked to construct floating platforms to hold them all. Naturally, not everyone made it – it just wasn’t physically possible to evacuate a universe in that short an amount of time – but many did. It was obvious that only by

working together could they survive on the surface, and so the concept of the Kingdom was born.

Only two species from the original universe were not represented here. The Zyglak had refused to evacuate, choosing death over accepting assistance from Matoran. The Makuta attempted to migrate, only to find their way barred by Toa Takanuva and the Order. Together, they drove the Makuta back underground, and no sign had been seen of them since. His destiny achieved, Takanuva had sacrificed his power to bring a new generation of Toa into being. These included Toa Kapura, Toa Balta, Toa Dalu, Toa Velika, Toa Defilak, and a new Toa of Light, Tanma. Takanuva had then become a Turaga and was named leader of the Kingdom in recognition of his heroism.

Things got stranger from there. Turaga Takanuva had formed a new ruling council, consisting of Turaga Dume, a prime Skakdi warlord, Roodaka, the Shadowed One, Helryx, and a Nynrah Matoran. Dark Hunters had become the primary law enforcers, while Toa were put to work using their powers to help the city in other ways. First, they prevented the collapse of the original island in the wake of Mata Nui's death. Then they created new and more stable land masses to support the city's expansion. After 10 millennia, the Kingdom was now a mega-city and home to all the survivors of the original universe.

Turaga Takanuva and his Council ruled from the Coliseum. Toa Takanuva not only couldn't resist paying a visit to his other self, but he needed to find some way out of here. The Wall had shown him he had not simply traveled into his future somehow. This was not his universe at all.

As he walked, he had to admit that part of his wished he didn't have to leave. Who would have imagined that Matoro's failure would have resulted in a paradise like this? Everywhere he looked, he saw beings of different species working side by side. Only Toa and Hunters carried weapons, but they looked like they hadn't been used in ages.

He expected to find the Coliseum heavily guarded, but the opposite was the case. The seat of government was open to all in the Kingdom. Instead of asking to see Turaga Takanuva, though, he sent a message to Helryx. It was short, reminding her of what her original plan had been to warn the Toa Nuva about conditions in Karda Nui and asking if she could get him in to see the Turaga.

That produced results. Takanuva was escorted by Trinuma into the Turaga's chamber at the top of the Coliseum. Turaga Takanuva was in conference with Toa Tanma and Roodaka. Resting in the center of a large table was a Rahkshi head.

"You say this Rahkshi appeared in the center of the city, near the Piraka fountain?" the Turaga said.

Roodaka nodded. "A bunch of Fe-Matoran were there feeding Avak and Thok, making plans to add iron supports to the western land mass. They spotted a Panrahk and called the Hunters, who took care of it. This is all that was left."

"It shouldn't have been able to get through," said Tanma, grimly.

"Maybe it was an accident," Turaga Takanuva offered, sounding as if he didn't believe it himself. "Maybe one slipped through before the light barriers went up and has been hiding here all this time."

"I wish," said Toa Tanma.

"The light barriers are going down," said Toa Takanuva. All three turned to look at him, startled. "I ... know a little about light."

Turaga Takanuva started to say something, then stopped. He turned to Roodaka and Tanma and asked them to leave the chamber. Once they were gone, he said, "How is this possible?"

"You know, then?" said the Toa.

"How could I not?" said the Turaga. "And Helryx has told me what she planned to do, if things had gone differently. You're from ... someplace else, I take it?"

The Toa nodded. "Someplace else, it's true, but not someplace as peaceful. You have done an amazing job." He smiled. "I'm proud of me."

The Turaga shook his head. "It can't last. Onua and the others have done all they can, but the original island cannot survive much longer. We will have to move on again, perhaps to the stars if Nuju and Nuparu's project works. But until then, the Makuta – if they still live -- must not be allowed into the Kingdom!"

Turaga Takanuva looked at his Toa counterpart from another universe, not his own. "I know this isn't your world, and I know the message you carry is vital. But Tanma ... and the entire Kingdom ... could use your aid. When you're done, we can find a way to send you back. Will you help?"

Toa Takanuva nodded. "Of course. But ... I could use my Staff of Light back."

Turaga Takanuva smiled. "Oh, that weapon went out of style 10,000 years ago. I think we can find you something better than that, old friend."

TO BE CONCLUDED