

Epilogue

The battle was over.

The Bara Magna desert was a disaster area. The surrounding mountains had been pulverized or flattened and massive scorch marks scarred the sands. The ground was littered with the bodies of those who had lost their lives in the clash, along with countless shattered pieces of Rahkshi armor. Dominating it all, of course, was the fallen robot that once had been Makuta's greatest weapon.

Tahu and Takanuva stood on a dune, looking at the metallic shell inside which they had lived their entire lives. No doubt the inner workings had been heavily damaged and there would be casualties. But as they watched the multitudes streaming out of the robot, they saw many familiar figures. More than likely, most had taken shelter after the initial quake and so survived the much larger shock. They stumbled out onto the sands – Toa, Matoran villagers, Vortixx traders, Skakdi barbarians, agents of the Order of Mata Nui, Dark Hunter bandits, animals, birds, insects and more – shielding their eyes against the bright sun of their new world.

“Do you think Makuta's really gone?” asked Takanuva.

Tahu nodded. “Yes, I do. He never saw it coming, so he had no time to will his spirit out of that body. I think – I *hope* – he died with the robot.”

“And what about the rest? The Matoran, the other Toa ... us ... can we all survive here?”

Tahu looked out over the vast desert. Already, he could see Agori coming to the aid of Matoran, Glatorian talking with Toa, and members of other species already scouting for someplace to settle and regroup.

“You know what, Takanuva? I think we're going to be just fine.”

“I'm just happy you're alive,” said Takanuva. “When you fell over like that, I thought sure you were dead. Are you sure you're okay?”

“I'm sure,” Tahu said smiling. Two thin beams of heat vision shot from his eyes then, striking the sand and burning three words into the ground:

Unity.

Duty.

Destiny.

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Mata Nui looked down at the various populations meeting so far below and felt like he was seeing the future. The Matoran and Agori had much to learn from each other. The Toa teamed with the Glatorian would safeguard both sets of villagers from any threat. Natural alliances were being forged even now.

He turned his attention to the fallen form of Makuta. There was another alliance that should have existed, but never came to pass. Had he and Makuta worked together, they could have restored Spherus Magna without the devastation and loss of life. But Makuta's greed and ambition wouldn't allow that. In the end, both his mad dreams and the body he had stolen were wreckage.

Makuta was the past. It was time to worry about today and tomorrow for this world.

When he had gone to Raanu and asked to take the Agori's city away from them, Mata Nui had made a vow to himself. If he succeeded in rebuilding the planet, he would not stop there. He would give the Agori a new life, a new chance to thrive here. Now it was time to begin that work.

Mata Nui scanned the body he wore. It was badly damaged and power levels were barely high enough to do what had to be done. But if he could call upon the Mask of Life one last time, combine its energies with the robot's, then maybe ...

Of course, there was one other aspect of what he was about to do that he tried to ignore. There was no way he would survive it. The robot was already dangerously unstable and channeling so much power through it at once would surely mean its destruction. Mata Nui would die with it.

If that was how it had to be, so be it. The Great Beings owed this world and its people a debt, and he was going to pay it.

Mata Nui looked toward the sky and stretched out his arms. He summoned the energies that coursed through his body, even as he called out to the Mask of Life. The mask at first resisted – it, too, knew that it might well not survive this, and it did not want to cease to exist. Mata Nui could have forced it to aid him – he had a stronger will – but he did not. Instead, he simply pictured in his mind how Spherus Magna could be if this was successful. He knew the mask would sense what was in his thoughts and that it would know this would be the ultimate use of its power.

A moment later, Mata Nui felt the power of the mask merge with what little remained of his own. Then he willed that power to flow from his body and sweep across the planet. Everywhere it touched, mountains rose, forest flourished, life appeared where none had been before. In the desert of Bara Magna, time seemed to flow backwards as barren sand gave way to a jungle teeming with trees and plants and long-dead rivers returned to life.

The vast ocean of Aqua Magna felt Mata Nui's touch as well. Underwater, plants flourished, providing a bounty for the fish that swam in the sea. The power of the Mask of Life touched even the twisted, mutated beings who lived in the depths, curing them of the worst of their afflictions while leaving them able to survive beneath the waves.

In the great forest of Bota Magna, the giant, bio-mechanical reptiles created so long ago by the Great Beings watched, amazed, as their homeland shifted and changed all around them. Areas where trees and foliage had ceased to grow suddenly were green again. Smaller animals scurried from their hiding places to feast on the new growth.

Agori and Glatorian stood in the once-desert and were speechless. This was not the world they once knew – it was better. After 100,000 years of struggling to survive, of scraping for every morsel of food and drop of water, now there was enough for all. As they watched in awe, clouds gathered above their heads for the first time in living memory, it began to rain in Bara Magna.

“He did it,” whispered Kiina. “I can’t believe it.”

“It’s amazing,” said Ackar, in shock. “I can’t even ... I don’t know how to put it into words ...”

“He promised me, Ackar,” Kiina continued. “He promised to bring me to a new world. Instead, he brought the new world to me.”

“Wait,” Ackar said, a new note of urgency in his voice. “Look at Mata Nui! He’s ... he’s collapsing!”

It was far worse than that. The overwhelming strain had taxed Mata Nui's robot body past its limit. The metal that made it up was disintegrating rapidly, along with its interior mechanisms. Even from a distance, the two Glatorian could see the destruction spreading rapidly.

"Come on!" yelled Kiina. "He needs our help!"

Ackar and Kiina leapt atop sand stalkers and urged the beasts forward. Kiina couldn't give voice to what she was feeling inside – Mata Nui, her friend, was dying for them. He had given his last bit of energy to defend them from Makuta and save their world, and there would likely be nothing they could do for him in return.

Except mourn, she said to herself.

Before they got too close to the site of his fall, they had to rein the sand stalkers to a halt. The air was filled with metal dust – along with a few larger pieces of the body scattered here and there, this was all that remained of the giant robot.

"We're too late," Kiina said softly. "He's gone."

Ackar stood silently amid the metallic refuse that had once been inhabited by his friend. Mata Nui had done more than save the Agori from the Skrall. He had saved Ackar from himself. The veteran Glatorian had been on his way to forced retirement, and a life spent training young fighters who didn't remember him or wandering between villages trying to find one more match. Mata Nui had been the one who showed him he still had value, that a Glatorian was more than a strong right arm and a suit of armor. He'd had faith in Ackar when Ackar had none in himself.

"Our troubles weren't his," said the fire Glatorian. "He could have gone north in search of his own answers and left us to deal with the Skrall, if he had wanted. Instead, he fought beside us and risked his life for people he didn't even know. There will never be another like him."

Kiina looked around. Toa, Agori, Matoran, and Glatorian had gathered now, drawn by the sight of the great robot's collapse. Some looked grief-stricken, others merely puzzled, and some fearful. Mata Nui had granted them a new life and a new world, and no doubt they expected him to lead them into the future. Instead, he was gone and they were on their own again.

She turned back to the pile of wreckage, damp from the gentle rain. For a moment, she thought a shaft of sunlight had forced its way through the clouds, for there was a faint glow in the center of the rubble. But then the glow grew brighter. Ackar saw it, too, and climbed over the

twisted metal to reach the source. He reached down and emerged with the Mask of Life, now gleaming brighter than a sun.

“Watch out!” yelled one of the Toa. “That’s dangerous!”

Ackar returned to Kiina’s side, cradling the mask in both hands. He knew the Toa was probably right and holding onto this object wasn’t a smart move. But something told him he was meant to retrieve it and keep it safe.

The mask flared so brightly Ackar and all those present had to close their eyes for a moment. When they opened them again, the Mask of Life was hovering in mid-air. As if that was not enough to astonish them, a voice came from the mask as well --- the voice of Mata Nui.

“My friends,” he said. “The debt owed to all of you has been repaid. You have your world back again. Live on it in peace.”

“Mata Nui?” said Kiina. “We thought you were dead.”

“My mind and spirit lived inside this mask for so long that when the body I wore died, it was drawn back to it,” answered Mata Nui.

“The mask can do amazing things,” said Toa Tahu. “You could use it to make a body for yourself, couldn’t you? We could all use your wisdom and your guidance.”

“I think ...” There was a pause. “I think perhaps this is not the time for me to walk among you. You all have a new life to build. My destiny is fulfilled, but for many of you, it has yet to be written. You need to find your path without my shadow hanging over you.”

“But ... but all the battles we fought, all that we endured, was to bring you back to us,” said Takanuva.

“And in so doing, you grew as a people past the point where you needed a Great Spirit to guide you,” Mata Nui said gently. “The true power does not reside with me. It lives inside all of you.”

“So this is ... goodbye?” asked Kiina.

“Never goodbye,” answered Mata Nui. “Even I cannot predict the future, or if the time will come when I shall be at your side once more. But until that day arrives, I have something I must ask of you.”

“Anything,” said Ackar. “Name it.”

“The Great Beings,” said Mata Nui. “They vanished 100,000 years ago, not long after creating me. They were tormented by guilt over what they knew would happen to Spherus Magna, and their role in causing it. Find them ... tell them the planet is whole once more ... convince them to share their gifts with you. I learned what it can mean to have friends, not subjects; allies, rather than workers or soldiers. Perhaps they can do the same.”

“If that’s what you want, it’s done,” said Ackar.

“The time has come,” said Mata Nui. “All journey’s must come to an end, but this time, there is a new beginning as well. There will be challenges to face and enemies to fight, but I know you will overcome. All that has gone before, my friends, has only served to give birth to this new day.

“Let unity, duty and destiny be your guides. Be well, be strong, care for this world and for each other. Farewell.”

The light faded from the mask until it was the dimmest of glows. But no one present doubted that, somehow, Mata Nui’s consciousness still lingered there.

Kiina caught the Mask of Life as it slowly fell to the ground. She stared at in silence for a long time, before saying, “I always knew it would end one day. I never thought it would end like this. It’s too soon, Ackar.”

“I think any time would have been too soon,” said Ackar “I hope none of us ever have cause to regret what just happened.”

“No. Mata Nui was right,” said Tahu. “We will honor him, and all those who fought for him, in our memories. But the time has come to move on.”

Tahu reached out. After a moment, Kiina handed the mask to him. He cradled it in his hands, remembering all the victories and defeats, the arguments, and the moments of revelation. He recalled the times it seemed there was nowhere to go next, no way to solve a mystery – and how things would suddenly fall together and the way became clear. He thought about the Matoran villagers, whose curiosity could sometimes drive him to distraction ... but whose love for Mata Nui and for justice and peace could never be questioned. It was the Matoran who lived to hear the tales of the past, and it was they who would keep those tales alive in the future. True, there were dangers on this world, both known – Skrall, Skakdi, and more – and unknown. But as they always had before, somehow they would find a way to overcome.

“Come, my friends,” he said, at last. “It is time to go.”

THE END



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