

Storm of Thundera

By Clare

Chapter 12

I watched as two of Kayon's men hauled a woman with blue skin and long white hair into the Refuge. Looking at her closely, I noted that she was wearing the same green gown she had worn when she contacted me via videolink on my way to Third Earth, though it was now worn and travel-stained. Nevertheless, this was Icelia and maybe I would now have a chance to find out just whose side she was on.

At that moment, however, the men escorting her halted in front of my father and forced her to kneel before him. "Picked up this Lunatac near the River of Despair," one of them explained, referring to a river I had been told was full of all kinds of nasty creatures. "What do you want us to do with her?"

My father leaned forward in his chair. "Was she alone?"

"As far as we could tell - at least, we didn't see any other Lunatacs nearby. And it was enough trouble catching this one. She tried to freeze us, but we put a stop to that with our Freeze Inhibitor." He gestured towards a collar around Icelia's neck; that had to be the Freeze Inhibitor, a device which prevented beings with ice-related abilities from using their powers. I'd heard of such devices, but this was the first time I'd actually seen one. "We thought you might want to question her," the man went on.

"I certainly do," my father said, signalling the guards to stand down, then turning to Icelia. "Lunatac," he said sternly, "can you explain your presence here?"

"I refuse to answer any questions unless you address me by name," Icelia retorted, her eyes fixed firmly on my father.

"Very well," my father said, not used to be ordered about by Lunatacs but seeing he had no choice if he wanted to get anywhere. "What is your name?"

"It's Icelia. And I have important . . ."

"Oh yes?" was my father's response, cutting her off in mid-sentence. "And what exactly would a Lunatac like you deem to be "important"?"

Icelia continued speaking as if she hadn't been interrupted. ". . . news that concerns your son and everyone who carries part of the Statue of Omens." Before anyone could stop her, she reached into her pocket and, moments later, held up the same fragment of statue she had shown me over the videolink. "You see this?" she asked in a tone which dared everyone present to disbelieve her. "This is what the Cult of Mumm-Ra are after. I have . . ."

She got no further before a mutter of contempt began to circulate round the room, though I refrained from joining in. Fangelo cleared his throat and turned to face the Ice Lunatac. "Yes, we are well aware of what the Cult of Mumm-Ra are doing," he told her. "What we're interested in is what you are doing here. And how you came to have part of the Statue of Omens . . ." He folded his arms and fixed Icelia with a penetrating stare.

Icelia paused, deliberating on whether or not she should co-operate. Then, she shrugged. "Very well - it seems I have little choice."

And Icelia launched into a long account of how she had been given one of the fragments by a human working for the Galactic Police; at the time, she had been under arrest for her part in a robbery, but had gained the trust of the arresting officer, who had then asked her to "look after something". That something had proved to be a part of the Statue of Omens, though she did not recognise its significance at the time. "But our government did," Icelia explained. "There are . . . were legends on the Ice Moon which told of a Statue which . . ."

"And you expect us to believe that?" asked Ocelotra, cutting Icelia off in mid-sentence.

Icelia ignored the interruption. ". . . was the one thing which could keep Mumm-Ra from escaping and wreaking havoc once more. But it was fragmented, scattered among different races, and he needed someone to inherit his piece. That's how I came to have this," she concluded, holding her fragment of the Statue of Omens up for us all to see.

"Oh, yes?" Ocelotra's tone was sceptical. "And why didn't this officer entrust the fragment to one of his fellows?"

Before Icelia could reply, the entire Refuge was suddenly shaken by a very powerful earthquake, the floor vibrating and shuddering beneath our feet. It was more violent than anything I had ever experienced before and, to make matters worse, some instinct told me that this earthquake wasn't natural. Indeed, I knew from what the native Third Earthlings had told me that earthquakes were rare in this area. And no-one had ever recorded one this big. Already, I could see dust (and even small pebbles) falling from the ceiling.

"Outside!" my father shouted, above the ensuing cries of panic. "It's our only chance!"

Not wanting to end up buried under tons of rubble, we all raced to the exit, Kayon escorting Icelia. I suspect some of us would have preferred to leave her to get crushed, but, since there was no time to debate the issue, we had to take her with us. Even so, as the tremors died down into silence, there were those of us who were highly suspicious of the Ice Lunatac who had come into our midst.

"I don't see why you had to bring *her*!" Jaya said to Kayon, pointing an accusing finger at Icelia. "She probably caused that quake!"

"How could I?" Icelia shot back, glaring at the young Warrior Maiden as though she would like to use her Ice powers on her. "I'm an Ice Lunatac - I can't cause earthquakes."

"OK," Queen Tia cut in before Jaya could say anything in reply. "I think we'll have to believe Icelia on that one. Ice Lunatacs do not have the power to trigger Earthquakes - I know that much about them . . . Which still leaves us with the question of what *did* cause it," she added after a moment's pause.

"To say nothing of what we're going to do now," filled in Ocelotra, gesturing towards where the boulder which had once hidden the entrance to the Refuge lay tilted on its side. We all looked at it, each of us feeling the full impact of what had happened. If the way into the Refuge was blocked, that meant we had lost the one place we had been safe from the Cult of Mumm-Ra, the one place we could hide while we put together a plan to counter the greatest threat since Mumm-Ra was sealed into the Book of Omens more than eighty years before.

Suddenly, I felt the racial memory of generations of Thundercat Lords stirring within me. "Do?" I said, stepping out in front of the assembled throng. "I'll tell you what we'll do! Whether the Cult caused that quake or not makes no difference - we won't let them win! And we can do that if we remember the Code of Thundera!" I held my hand horizontally across my chest in the traditional Thundercat salute as I said the words: "Justice! Truth! Honour! Loyalty!"

And, with one voice, my fellow Thundercats echoed my words.

"Good speech, young Storm," Ro-bear Bill said as we continued our trek. "You sounded just like your great-grandfather."

We were on a journey with no foreseeable end, at least not one that would be favourable for us. I was part of a long caravan of beings, led by my parents and Queen Tia, while Ocelotra, Fangelo and Pumar acted as a rear guard. Kayon was in the centre of the column with Icelia, whom we were still suspicious of; consequently, we had agreed that it would be best to keep her where she had the least potential to cause trouble. We would decide on her long-term future later . . . if there was a later. We had no way of knowing what had caused the earthquake which demolished the Refuge, just a suspicion that the Cult of Mumm-Ra were somehow mixed up in it.

"Well, I wish he was here right now," I said, recalling all the stories Wilykit had told me about Lion-O's brave deeds. But, since he wasn't, we would have to handle this ourselves. We would have to take on the Cult of Mumm-Ra and either emerge triumphant or . . .

As though simply thinking about the Cult of Mumm-Ra had tempted fate, we suddenly found our path blocked by a entire phalanx of Mutants and Lunatacs. At the head of the column stood none other than Lizarius himself, with Grimla at his side, both of them smirking with evil triumph.

Scanning the rest of the Cult, I quickly identified Jacklon, Gravlok and several others - in fact, it looked as though the whole Cult was out in force. But what did they want? Whatever it was, I was certain it would not be good.

At the head of our column, my father stared Lizarius full in the face. Then, he said a single word: "Lizarius."

"Sssso," Lizarius hissed. "The ratsssss have emerged from their hole. Good, that meansssssss the Ssssseismatron hassssssss done itsssssss job."

"So, it was you!" My mother's angry voice rang out clearly. "Your scum caused that earthquake!" I had never seen her look so angry before; her flame red hair made her look as though she was on fire with rage. "The Thundranium in the Subway?" she added at length, after she had calmed down a little. "Was that your work as well?" I had almost forgotten about that, with everything else that had been happening lately, but it seemed my mother had not.

In response, Grimla and Lizarius parted, allowing a male Psy Lunatac to step forward. "Meet Psychon," Grimla said, gesturing towards the male of her race. "He's highly skilled in the art of Concealment and Masking - which made it easy for him to infiltrate your insignificant world. As for the Thundranium, basically the same thing."

It did not take me long to work out what Grimla meant. Psychon must have used his powers to make everyone on New Thundera think he was a Thunderian - or at least one of the races allied with us. And he must have used those same powers to pass off his cargo of Thundranium as something harmless. How he had managed to release it into the Subway was anyone's guess. Had he somehow found work as a member of a maintenance crew? In any case, at least we now knew who had been responsible for the Thundranium and it seemed to bear out my suspicions that the Thundranium had been released to distract the Thundercats while the Cult of Mumm-Ra finalised their plans.

But there was one thing none of us understood. And it was Lynxari who gave voice to our concerns. "Why are you telling us this?"

"Simple," replied Grimla. "We can't let any of you die without knowing every detail of our plans. And die you will once Mumm-Ra is set free."

"You've still got to get past the defences in the Book of Omens!" my mother shouted defiantly. And the look on her face made it clear that anyone who wanted to attack the Book of Omens (which she was carrying in a satchel) would have to get past her first, a task she clearly planned on making as difficult as possible.

"We found a way round those defences," Grimla said dismissively. Then, at a silent signal from her, several of the Mutants and Lunatacs behind her held up fragments of marble, all of which were glowing with a fierce light. For a moment, I wondered where I had seen that light before,

but, then, I remembered. When Koris had held his piece of the Statue of Omens close to the one held by the Berbils, both pieces had glowed. That could only mean . . .

"Asssss you can ssssee," Lizarius hissed, gesturing towards the glowing fragment, "we have obtained sssseveral more fragmentsssss of the Ssssstatue of Omenssss. And we have embued them with evil magic, magic which will allow ussssss to call forth Mumm-Ra even while the Book of Omenssssss remainssssss intact!"

"Ha!" I shouted before I could stop myself. "If you're still missing some of the pieces, your plan can't possibly work!"

Lizarius's sharp ears soon picked me out from among the crowd. "Sssssso, Ssssssstorm of Thundera," he said, walking towards me and prodding me under the chin with his claw so that I was forced to look him directly in the eye. "You've causssssed usssss a great deal of trouble. Now, for the lassssst time, where did you hide your fragment?!"

Well, that was one bit of information I had no intention of revealing, certainly not to Lizarius; I had sworn on the Code of Thundera that I would never tell anyone from the Cult of Mumm-Ra where my piece of the Statue had been concealed. And swearing on the Code of Thundera was the most sacred oath a Thundercat could make; breaking it was absolutely forbidden. There seemed to be only one way out of this.

"We'll have to make a fight of it," I told my father, drawing level with him.

We quickly drew up our plans. Lynxari and two of Kayon's men would take the non-combatants (namely Koris, the Berbils and the Brutemen) to the Feliner III and try to get them away from Third Earth. Though, if the rest of us were unable to hold the Cult back, even this might not be enough to save them. Everyone else would fight, including myself. My mother had wanted me to escape with the others who were heading back to the Feliner III, but I refused to hear of it. As a future Lord of the Thundercats, I needed to get as much combat experience as possible; weapons practice with Pumar was all very well, but there was no substitute for the real thing. In the end, my father relented. "He has to fight his first real battle some time," he told my mother, unsheathing the Sword of Omens.

Icelia presented a different problem. None of us knew if we could really trust her in this battle and we didn't want to risk sending her with the non-combatants in case she tried something there. Eventually, however, we agreed that she should remain under the careful eye of Kayon, who would do everything he could to ensure that she didn't try to join the other side. If she was even on our side to begin with . . . Although, when I thought about it, I had never seen any Ice Lunatacs among the Cult of Mumm-Ra, so there might just be some truth in the story Icelia had told when she first contacted me. Even so, I would remain wary until she proved she could be trusted.

Tense moments passed, during which I found myself thinking about my childhood - the games I had played with Hunter, the lessons I had spent longing to do something more exciting than study, listening to Wilykit's stories. Then, my thoughts were interrupted by an assortment of voices all bellowing one word:

"AAAATTTTTTAAAAACCCCCCKKKK!"