

Timestream

Part 3

By Knight Writer

"What can I do?" she asked, hating herself for sounding so small. She wanted to rage at the pair of them, decry their words as nonsense, yet that feeling had become a certainty. The words of Jarvis and Ajax had struck a chord of truth deep within her which rang out hard enough to bring a tingle to her skin. She reached out as best she could with her psionic ability, and sensed no deception from Jarvis.

No, she thought, he's still holding back. But, at least he's not lying. The hell of surviving on Third Earth had honed her sixth sense enough to detect when one was being less than honest. Jarvis' words were true. Hope exploded within her, spreading excitement through her nerves, yet she still held back.

"I have some questions I want answered first," she said and was glad she kept the giddy schoolgirl notes from her voice.

"Ask," Jarvis replied, "but we have to move soon."

"Why do you need me? And for what?"

"You've been altered by the cascade of changes in the timeline caused by the flux point," Jarvis said. "If I can compare what you remember to what history recorded..."

"Don't you know where this... flux point is?"

"We have a general area of time," he replied, "but that's not good enough." Jarvis sighed heavily before continuing. "What doesn't add up is the area itself. We've been able to identify it closely enough to nail it as sometime between the destruction of Old Thundera and your arrival on Third Earth."

"That only leaves around ten years or so," she grouched in a sour tone.

"Pretty much," Ajax said.

"I don't know how I can help you, then," Cheetara said. "Everything went according to plan. Next question."

"Yes?"

"Why do you keep saying our people? You're not Thunderian."

"I'm half Thunderian, actually."

"I'm no biologist," she said, "but how is interspecies breeding even possible?"

"A mommy and daddy who love each other very much, about a century of research, and an assload of luck," Ajax said.

"My mother is Thunderian, my father a humanoid," Jarvis added.

"Okay," Cheetara said, following the developing chain of logic. "Since we don't have that yet, the only way Lion-O could have kittens was with either me or WilyKit."

"I'll save you some guess work," Jarvis said. "It was with you."

"Well," she said, when she wanted to scream. She could feel the pieces of the puzzle coming together, and could sense them doing the same from Jarvis. He knew more than he was telling, but was still in the dark. Best to play along a bit more. "I bear Lion-O's children. Yet, this flux point happens before we land on this planet..." A chilling notion made itself known, a dichotomy which could not be denied yet she fought to dismiss.

"It's impossible for me to have had Lion-O's cubs," she said. "How could he have even led us?"

"According to history, he did. He had a rough start, but his unmatched connection to the Eye of Thundera helped a lot."

"Giving him the Eye?" she asked, furious enough to let the growing dread go unnoticed. "Letting him sleep with me?! He was ONLY FOURTEEN YEARS OLD!" Jarvis and Ajax gaped openly at her before facing each other.

"Boss," the avatar of Ajax said in a hushed voice, "I think we just struck gold."

"What are you talking about?!" Cheetara demanded.

"We just found the focal point," Ajax supplied, "the event that got changed."

"Ajax!" Jarvis shouted. "Put all non-critical systems toward calculating our best point of arrival!"

"What the hell are you talking about?!"

"You just gave us what we needed, or most of it," Jarvis said before turning back to Ajax's avatar. "How long?!"

"Problem there, boss," Ajax said. "It's gonna take me about five hours to pinpoint a likely spot. We got seven until the cascade hits our time."

"Close," Jarvis muttered, "Damn close, but it's our only shot. DO IT!"

"Your wish, and all that," Ajax said before his avatar vanished.

"TALK, DAMNIT!" she roared, preparing to lunge for Jarvis. He merely turned to face her.

"Cheetara, you say High King Lion-O was only fourteen when you all landed on Third Earth."

"My memories may be of so-called altered events, but they're true!" Or, are they? she silently wondered. She forced her anger down, recalling points of the conversation that had stood out as odd. The knowledge came with horrible implacability, that things having gone to plan... had gone horribly wrong instead. "How?" she asked, the heat of anger having been replaced with cold fear.

"High King Lion-O was fourteen in mind when you all came to Third Earth," Jarvis explained, but was

nearly twenty in body."

"How..." She barely caught her cheek in her right hand before it could impact the table. "How is that possible? We were only supposed to barely age in stasis..."

"That's one of the greatest mysteries of our past," Jarvis explained. "No blueprints of the flagship exist in our time. With the development of FTL, suspension capsules were remanded to medical use. With the advent of advanced medicine, suspension capsule technology was abandoned altogether. It's been two centuries since anyone's even bothered researching it. Even the most hard-core history and retro-science buffs have any of a dozen wild theories and no proof."

"An impossible malfunction," she gasped. "That was all it took?" One tiny pebble in time's river could cause such a whirlpool of despair?

"Any change can be all it takes," Jarvis said in a soothing tone. "Come on, let's head to Ops. I think you need a change of scenery."

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Ops consisted of a half dome with a recessed floor. No monitors she could discern were upon any of the drab walls, the only real decoration being two chairs in the center of the lower floor.

"How do you keep track of anything in here?" she asked, the metal of the floor cold against her bare feet.

"Holo-monitors," Jarvis said before taking his seat. "Normally Ajax manages what information is displayed where, but I've tasked pretty much all of his resources to finding our ingress point to the past."

"So, no idea of what's outside."

"That doesn't matter," Jarvis said while she sat across from him. "The Chronoslip doesn't exist in the physical dimension you've become accustomed to. How else could we observe the distant past without getting involved?"

"Sythe won't find us, I take it?"

"His men swarmed Crystal Canyon hours ago. Tough to find something that's not on your dimensional plane." Cheetara merely nodded at that. "We have about five hours. I'll answer all the questions I can."

"Without Ajax?"

"The archives aren't anything he needs to access directly. Look, long story short, you have questions, I have answers. I think you deserve them."

"Because if this works, I won't be around to remember them?" Cheetara studied his face closely.

"I won't lie. In a word, yes."

"I thought so. What was supposed to become of us?" Her choice was made, and she had no reservations whatsoever. The feeling she had harbored for so long had finally borne its truth. She had to die, so that she could live.

I can deal with that, she thought as she spoke with Jarvis.