

A New Decade

Third Earth Adventures, Era Two

The Dark Times: Prologue

By Purrsia Kat & Spaced Angel

It is said that the passage of time matters little to the universe. The days pass and life in its many forms continues a never-ending cycle of death and birth. Such happens in a million ways on a million worlds, but it is as the fall of a raindrop into a mighty ocean in the greater understanding of the universe. For how can the affairs of the mortal world matter to that which thinks itself eternal?

These patterns will continue until that which saw the beginning would surely see its end. When the new age begins, only that which is able to survive the devastation will know what remains of the old. Whether that is a gift or a curse, only time will tell, for those who have known what it is to endure when one age ends do not tell their stories. They keep their secrets and watch and remember, becoming bound up in their own legends and their own mysteries until not even they can recall their beginning.

Such stories were told of the Eye of Thundera, silent in its prison in the hilt of the weapon the Thundercats had named the Sword of Omens. In its time had it heard tales of great fantasy woven around its origins and some of them could even have been true. Like the universe, age had ceased to be a concern to the Eye of Thundera millennia ago. To its current holder, it had revealed part of that truth, but had left him with more questions than answers.

Not that answers mattered. It was enough to know that it existed and had lent its powers to the Thundercats' cause. All else was mere detail, of more importance to the world of men than to the ineffable power at its heart.

And so, in its silence, it watched and waited and gave freely when its charges needed it. To one that saw all and knew all, nothing ever came as a surprise. For the Thundercats, a decade had passed since their arrival on their adopted home planet, but for the Eye of Thundera, it might well have been but a mere blink of its all-seeing eye.

Unimportant to the eternal perhaps, but significant, at least to those who had lived those years. It had seen age take its hold on its mortal charges. Those who had been but children were now grown beyond their tender years. The two Thunderkittens, WilyKit and WilyKat, had become Thundercats in every sense of the word. With their childhood

years behind them, they were indistinguishable from their elders in training and experience and few could have guessed that this brother and sister had arrived on Third Earth as youngsters. They still possessed a nose for fun and mischief and were surely as cunning as ever. But with physical maturity also came the inevitable emotional maturity as well.

Time had changed everyone. Panthro was no longer quite so mighty as he reached his fiftieth year. It was a brave Thundercat who would dare say so to his face, but the Eye had seen the change. Years of laughter had left their mark on his brow and laced a spider's web of lines around his eyes. He was strong – there was no denying that – but it was rare now to see him heaving boulders from the ground without calling upon his friends to lend a hand. Aches and pains called more often in his joints and muscles, though he believed he gave nothing away to that fact. He was never one to complain. Panthro was as proud as ever, evidenced enough by how little he let his missing limb hinder him.

He was still master of his domain when it came to the Thundertank as well, although he was passing the wisdom of his years onto his protégé, WilyKat, who was proving to be a fast and willing learner. The gawky cub of yesteryear had even dared to tinker with Panthro's baby when the master's back was turned. The time when Panthro would have had a few sharp words to say about that seemed to have passed. Indeed, he had praised WilyKat's efforts and had declared himself impressed. Time, it seemed, could mellow even the hottest of tempers.

If age was improving some, then the Eye had seen how others wallowed in self-pity for the passing years. Snarf in particular, although only several years older than Panthro, lamented his age as the herald of decline. If not the ache in his back, then he was plagued by pains in his knees or his toes or, bizarrely, his nose. The Eye had not been alone in noticing that these symptoms manifested themselves touching anything not involving the children of the Lair. For the younger set of twins and Velouria, it seemed there was nothing he would not do. When it came to volunteering for cleaning out the Thundrillium condenser or rewiring the control panels, Snarf succumbed to his ailments. The other occupants of the Lair had noted this and tolerated his distress with less than the sympathy Snarf would have liked. Hence the grumbled complaints that followed him wherever he went.

Others bore their woes more stoically. The need that drove Tygra to don glasses when he joined Felina for their lessons was not one that was generally known beyond his family throughout the Lair. Felina knew how to keep a secret, as did her daughter, who often now joined them in their studies. Like her mother, Jonca had proved a quick learner and was a scholar who took her task seriously. Unlike her brother, whose attention drifted within moments of a lesson starting, she was a serious student, eager to learn all that the Book of Omens had to offer. Tygra had viewed Jonca's role as perhaps a sign to bow out, although by this time he too was quite fluent in the language, if not much better than Felina at using it to unlock the riddles and mysteries of the ancient tome. However, his drive to learn and keep his mind sharp kept him returning,

and so it was that the trio pored over their studies together. Jonca, even only into her eighth year, was fluent in the ancient language and took delight in annoying her sibling by holding conversations with both her mother and Tygra within his earshot. Inevitably, the boy they'd called Leon would stomp his feet in frustration and run to his father for comfort.

That father and son were much alike was something the Eye of Thundera had known since the child's birth. The day Lion-O had closed his young son's hand around the hilt of the Sword of Omens only served to confirm what the all-seeing had already known. Even in his tender years, he had his father's firm grip and his tiny fingers seemed to find their place with confidence. Books were not his calling. The boy was born to be a warrior. If in looks, there was more of his mother about the eyes, there could be no doubt that when the time came, he would be a worthy successor to his father.

Lion-O had told this to the boy and this news had brought forth floods of tears. A time when his father was not going to be there for him did not seem possible to the child. Lion-O had dried his tears and told him that that prospect lay many years in the future. Between now and then, he had assured him, he would be there to teach him all he knew and all that the Eye of Thundera had shown him. He would teach him how to use it and how to become one with it, to let it rule him as much as he would rule it. Lion-O had sworn this on the Sword of Omens itself and the Eye had taken his words deep within to remember and record. The moment of anguish had passed and father and son had left the Sword Chamber, comforted by this promise. The Eye saw them go, as it saw all, and kept its counsel.

How could it do otherwise? For one of infinite power, it was essentially powerless. It saw and knew, but without a channel, it stood apart from the life that moved around it. Without the wielder of the Sword of Omens, it could play no part in the protection of the lives it watched. Even then, aside from warning of pending dangers, it could only act when called upon. It did not judge nor interfere, but merely responded.

Sometimes, the wielder forgot that fact and believed himself invincible. Over-confidence bred arrogance and that led to a hasty demise. Time and again did the Eye remember those to whom it had entrusted its powers change from humble, awe-stuck youths to brash leaders, throwing themselves headlong into trouble in the mistaken belief that the Eye would always protect them. It remembered too their deaths, some swift, accompanied by fleeting shock that their protector had failed them. Others had lingered on in unspeakable agonies and, grown suddenly wise too late, had tried to pass onto their successors the lesson they had failed to learn. Death, as Lion-O had told the boy, was inevitable. The Eye could not prevent the decay of the mortal. But how soon that state was achieved lay in the hands of the wielder of the Sword of Omens.

For all its powers, it could not see into the future. At times it toyed with likely predictions, based on the known facts. If ever a promise was to be kept, then the Eye was sure Lion-O had meant what he had sworn to the boy. Like all his ancestors, he too had changed since becoming Lord of the Thundercats. Except his change did not follow the

others. The Lion-O who had arrived on Third Earth as a fearless, headstrong youth had settled into a safer pattern of defence and protection of his family and friends. It was a change the Eye had become aware of before any of his mortal friends.

Where once he had spent long hours in quiet contemplation with the Sword or had poured out his heart and his troubles to a sympathetic and dispassionate companion, now days could pass where Lion-O did not visit the Sword Chamber. Fatherhood had undoubtedly played a role in this. He had relished his role in raising the twins with Felina and when he did take up the Sword it was usually with one or the other of the children at his side. The Eye felt no jealousy in its loss, if indeed it felt anything. Things were as they should be. If the change touched it at all, it was only in the knowledge that the next generation was secure. There would be another Lord of the Thundercats after Lion-O had joined his ancestors on the Astral Plain.

For the present Lord, however, it had long since felt another change. The Lion-O of a decade ago had been distracted and in turmoil. His mind did not reel and wander as it had done when last they had faced Mumm-ra. The old demon had yet to recover from their battle and the most the Thundercats had to worry about were infrequent and increasingly desperate attacks from Slithe and his band of Mutants.

Mostly, the Eye slept in its prison, opening rarely now to do battle with a foe that seemed to have lost heart in its purpose. Only Grune retained that fire that had driven him in the past. It had never diminished and burnt as brightly now as ever. If there were still danger to the Thundercats on Third Earth, it was likely to come from him. The Eye knew of his cunning and keen nature and it suspected that he too had sensed the change in this older Lion-O, happy now in his relationship with Felina as friends instead of the warring partners that had driven him to distraction in years past. A life without arguments and stress was preferable to that which they had before and yet it seemed to have robbed him of some of his fire, as if the unhappiness between them had fired and driven him. Contentment had brought calmness and most deadly of all complacency. Like all his predecessors, he was beginning to believe in his own myth. The Eye could have told him that that was the quickest way to the Astral Plain.

But it kept its silence and answered only when needed. Once, Lion-O had called upon it to reveal its past by using the Book of Omens to delve deeper into its origins. With the Book, the Eye could reveal some of its wisdom and the Guardian had told Lion-O a story much like that which he'd already witnessed. Since then his interest had waned, another symptom of his confidence. He no longer asked nor was interested in knowing and so had robbed the Eye of its voice. Had it cared, it would have known frustration and anger. But it existed, no more, no less than that. Unlike the others of the Lair, who sought to give themselves a voice, it did not struggle against its chains, but chose to watch.

The girl, Velouria, in particular intrigued it. No definable words came from her lips, yet it had seen the others understand and converse with her. They did not understand, as the Eye perceived through thoughts and feelings, but rather through elaborate hand

gestures, which, when performed in a particular sequence gave her the ability to speak without words. Young and old throughout the Lair were skilled in this silent language and, as her mother and father had promised, she did not miss a thing. Sometimes, she could even understand the others if they weren't signing, as long as she could get a good look at their lips.

Changes had even come about the Lair to accommodate her needs, such as flashing lights to accompany the audible blare of the alarm system so she, too, could be warned of danger. In this, her ninth year, her life was full of smiles and strangled laughter. It was the only sound she could make and one that she made often, except when she came to seek the solitude of the Sword Chamber, sometimes with a book for company, sometimes with just her thoughts. Her thoughts could be sensed by the Eye more strongly than the others, and it knew that spoke of a mental intensity, if yet fully untapped, that could rival those of her parents.

From the short space that separated them, the Eye had watched and observed. Once, for one brief moment, she had summoned up the courage to draw closer. Her hand had hovered over its shining prison and the ache for her touch was exquisite agony. Her fingers brushed its gleaming red surface, only for a second, but it had been enough. Understanding had passed between the eternal and the mortal. She knew what it was like to be impotent, to lack the voice to communicate her needs.

The only difference was that she had found a way out of her prison. Even then, the Eye had sensed frustration. She had to learn patience when the others were slow to understand. It had found within her resentment that she was different and a sense of loss that she could not share fully in their world of sound. It was the fact that she could not remember the sound of her mother's voice, and yet could not confide her sorrows in the others without risk of sparking more guilt from her father.

Their touch had been brief, but understanding had passed so swiftly that the Eye had responded by filling her mind with all that her dulled hearing denied her. She had recoiled instantly, frightened by the noise, and had fled the chamber. But eventually she had returned to touch the Eye again and listen to the sounds of a world that was forever closed to her. The sound of her parents' voices, the song of a bird, the gurgling rhythm of a forest brook, and the sound of her friends laughing. Since that moment, her own laughter had never been strained again.

If it gave to her, the Eye also took something in return. Through her, it perceived the others under its protection in a way that Lion-O did not. The light she shed on the three most recent additions, although not so new to its understanding any more over the years, was illuminating. Lion-O saw them in terms of their capabilities and skills – the blacksmith, the healer and the giver of wisdom. Even after all these years, there was still distance, as though he had never truly identified with them.

Velouria, however, saw them as friends. Lynx-O had been closed to her for a time, through their inability to see or hear what the other was saying. In recent years, the

development of a Braille board had permitted them to communicate through touch. Although they now understood each other, and shared a bond given both knew what it was like to be denied a sense, she was never to be as close to him as she was to his younger friends. Through her, the Eye had seen their humour, their kindness, their compassion and the brief moments of intimacy that lingered just that little bit longer than the pair cared to admit. As she left the years of childhood, she turned to them more than the twins, seeking their understanding rather than indulging in the immaturity of her younger playmates.

This she showed to the Eye and in its wisdom it understood. It knew what it was to live apart and, if it was content only to exist, it knew that those around it wanted more. It wished Velouria all the best in her quest. Others were not so lucky. Far beyond the confines of the Lair, it knew of the existence of another whose life had touched those of the Thundercats if only for a time.

If the civil war on Plun-darr had brought death and hardship to many, it had at least released the boy, Jax, from his bonds. Matters of kingship had concerned the warring parties, not the fantastic tales of a boy who had claimed to know where the Eye of Thundera was to be found. He had become a nuisance, and no one cared whether he lived or died. He had grown used to such indifference, hardened to the reality of an uncaring world. At the first chance that came along, he had run, far from Plun-darr, living a hand to mouth existence. Like flotsam on the ocean of the universe, he washed up on one planet after another, stealing away and stowing away whenever he saw the opportunity present itself. Running from his past, he was not at all sure what he wanted out of life or even why he kept on living it. Until finally he had found his way back to the only home where once he had mattered to someone.

Back on Third Earth, he found a changed world. The one who had loved him and protected him had soon found others to pour her pity upon. He had seen her with her offspring and at first, stayed away. There was no place for him there. He did not return to the Lair, but kept to the forests, watching from the shadows and weeping for a second chance he didn't feel he could have anymore.

But then one day their paths crossed by chance inside the forest, with just her and her children and no imposing figure of a husband to be found. But Jax had grown into a lanky jackal teenager and there was no recognition in her eyes. The only thing he saw in her eyes was fear and mistrust. In fact, she immediately moved to protect her offspring from the offending Mutant in her path and beat a hasty retreat before he had a chance to choke out a greeting.

Of all the rejections he had suffered, this hurt the most, because the love he thought he felt from her those years ago seemed so genuine. She'd really cared, she'd saved him...but had she? She cared? Then surely, she would have remembered him as he had her. Years did little to damper his recognition of Felina's older self. She saved him? For what? This miserable existence he'd led for sixteen years? And here, he thought his

years of running and drifting would be over once they reunited. He should have known better than to dare to hope.

Grief was festering into bitterness and resentment and the Thundercats in their ignorance were gaining a new enemy. They had, after all, left him to rot with the scary Thunderian and the rag tag crew at Castle Plun-Darr, even after he'd risked himself in the first place bringing that sword back to the magical book. He remembered then fearing she'd never come out of the book, and he'd never see her again. Well, he was right for too long on one point, and that hurt him more than he cared to admit.

Nowhere else he turned on Third Earth had a friendly face to greet him, for they too had been conditioned to fear his kind after a decade of Slithe and his bunch scourging the countryside. Though, he had no interest in returning to his kind, either. Surely, not to spend his days among that notorious bunch. There truly was nothing here for him now, just like anywhere else he'd been, really. And yet, he couldn't bring himself to hitch the next ride out. Not yet. He remained, watching and lurking in the shadows as Felina played with her new family, and a hurt grew inside him larger than anyone could know, more than maybe even Jax himself knew.

Only the Eye of Thundera knew, but what was knowledge without a voice? And so the Eye watched and understood, both gifted and cursed in its vision, and counted the days until its waiting was over.

A new decade

The radio plays the sounds we made

And everything seems to feel just right

Coming through your lonely mind

Well I've seen things

That scarred and bruised and left me blind

So come on, listen along with me

I think you need a little company

And how long will I run for?

Who am I running from?

And it makes sense

The youth coming up and making you dance

'Cause I've got some living inside of me

So come on I could use the company

And how long will I run for?

Who am I running from?

But now I've seen my face in a cardboard wall

Nobody comes, nobody calls

How long will I run for?

Who am I running from?

Teenage tears sting my eyeballs

In a town where I wasn't born

And I will never suffer

So come on, come on, come on

But now I see my face in a cardboard wall

Nobody comes, nobody calls

If you're looking for me

I'm there and it's you

If you're looking for me out there it's true

If you're looking for

I'll be looking for you

-- A New Decade, The Verve