

It wasn't supposed to be like this. At least, that was what he thought, but as his weary, sunken eyes scanned around at the desolate landscape, how could he NOT feel that way? It was like a vision of Thundera before its tortured demise, with barren landscapes, grit-laden, howling winds, a russet sky devoid of any moisture and life, ground-- more dust than ground-- that had surrendered to the violent bucklings from below and to the burning rage of a compassionless sun above. Only this time, the burning rage of the sun was replaced with an unending cover of darkness. Yes, Thundera's demise was a great loss too much to bear for many, but the demise of New Thundera was one enormous step above that.

A remaining, scraggly member of the Serval clan shambled his gaunt and awkward frame up a towering hill, forcing himself with waning strength against the slope, still determined to become one with the ruins of Cat's Lair before his final breath, and he keenly felt that breath coming soon. He caught glimpses of it from afar, piles of rubble, from what he could see, and jutting beams of steel, as if some statue had crumbled away and left behind a jagged skeleton. A skeleton that displayed for all to see the end of an era, the end of a genus, the end of the Code of Thundera. Servali laughed raspily, but his laughter soon gave way to fits of vile coughing.

The Code. Just so many words now.

Servali remembered days of a gentler sun, of vibrant and verdant fields, of people living and breathing and existing.

Oh, how different now. How different.

Servali remembered when he pledged himself to the ThunderCats, when he swore to uphold Honour, Truth, Justice and Loyalty. He was young and eager and ready to prove himself. Perhaps a bit overzealous, but a good person, to be sure. At least, that was what he was told.

How could nice people allow a second cataclysm happen?

Servali remembered a great battle. He didn't remember much as of late. He didn't care to, but he did remember this. It was burned in his mind for all of his time. Evil beings and groups united, seeking unholy vengeance upon those who had brought them down repeatedly: The ThunderCats. They clashed, and Servali felt a sense of pride, a sense of belonging, a sense of knowing what he was doing was right. It was most assuredly a lengthy battle, but it didn't matter. He and his allies were going to win, as usual. It was the greatest battle he had ever witnessed.

It was also the last.

Magic clashed explosively with magic, psychic energies wrestled with psychic energies, and steel bit ravenously against steel. So many to fight against. Mumm-Ra, the Shadow Master, Grune, Tashi, the Crystal Queen, the Mutants, the Lunattacks, the Berserkers. The evil host, as summoned by Mumm-Ra, Servali believed, was as expansive as it was determined to finish the ThunderCats once and for all. The first to fall, Servali recalled, was Tygra. Tygra didn't die physically, he gathered from various cries emanating from the battle din. No, Alluro had killed his mind, in a sense. Shut it off. Followed by Cheetara doing the same to Alluro.

That might have been the beginning of the end, when Cheetara couldn't control her psychic abilities any more than she could control her emotional state then. Servali could only guess what caused the loss of control, but it happened nonetheless. Cheetara was consumed not long after in a raging, destructive psychic maelstrom that left everyone directly near her mentally dead as well. Cheetara included. Servali considered himself lucky to be far enough away from the demented influence.

He wished he had died alongside Cheetara now.

Lion-O had been one of a few who weren't close enough to have died from the psychic blast, but he was close enough to have his mind altered. Panthro, too. All sense of compassion and logic left them. They began to tear through everyone, enemies and allies alike. Panthro went on a random killing spree, while Lion-O became single-minded in his attempt to get to Mumm-Ra. Lynx-O died at the hands of the maddened Panthro. A sharp twist of the neck, a loud pop of disconnecting bones and ligaments, and a final, confused look on the elder lynx, all took about a second to transpire. Lion-O only seemed more directed than usual, but only when he finally met with Mumm-Ra did Lion-O's altered nature shine through as brightly as dying sun. As Mumm-Ra was gathering dark energies to unleash a mighty... something upon his foes, Lion-O drove the Sword of Omens right though the undead demon priest's unbeating heart.

If only the timing had been better.... If only Lion-O hadn't done what he did at that precise moment....

The spell backfired. The dark magical energies gushed forth from Mumm-Ra's chest like a geyser of darkness and death. Lion-O fell back, spared the attack from the cloud of darkness that shrouded the area around Mumm-Ra. So Servali thought. The ancient mummy was nowhere to be seen anymore. Tashi fell victim to the cloud, though. A horrid scream of a thousand torments rang forth from her throat before she fell eerily silent, cut off mid scream. Everyone took notice. Everyone ran, even Lion-O, even Servali. Then, a hiss like the death-rattle of some hideous beast issued forth from the centre of the cloud of darkness tore through the air. The ground trembled in fear, giving Servali reason to stumble, but he quickly regained his footing and ran off further, not bothering to turn back to see the source of that single, that solitary hiss. He ran, for what seemed like forever, until he finally found the strength of will to turn around. The cloud was still expanding. Again, Servali ran, but he knew he wouldn't last long. Exhaustion was already burning into his body. In panicked desperation, he rushed into a cave, and he stumbled his way through to the end of the stony corridor, encased in the cold darkness found within. Servali, curled up into a ball, trembled himself, and waited, and waited, and waited....

Servali found himself still in darkness when he finally awoke. He realised that he must have waited the entire day in the cave. He slowly crawled out, doing his best to remember and reverse the route he took to get so far into the cave. He felt around as he crawled, until he was certain he was outside again. He immediately noted a difference. Everything was all so alien now. The air was dry and still. The ground was dry as well, but warm instead. Not a single star shone in the sky. Not a single moon illuminated the night. All was darkness. All was silence. Servali shouted out, hoping that someone would hear. He was scared enough of being alone now that he wouldn't mind coming across the Lunattacks or the Mutants at this point. However, his cries went unanswered. Thus began his days of solitary wandering.

Servali always wondered why he was spared. Was it fate that spared him? Did the darkness not take him because he was already safe within the darkness of the cave? He wasn't sure. All he knew were days and weeks of loneliness and hunger and thirst and silence and darkness. Food was basically non-existent, and any water he found was brackish, bitter, and occasionally revolting. He drank nonetheless, if not to slake his thirst, then to fill his empty stomach. The days were barely lit by a sun blotted out by the black clouds that lingered above, and the nights were bitterly cold and blindingly dark. What had happened to the others? Was anyone else left alive? What happened to the Shadow Master? Surely he of all those present at the battle should have survived that vile cloud of darkness. Servali looked around, confused. Where should he go?

After thinking at length, he decided to return to the one place he felt he

himself should finally lay in eternal repose: Cat's Lair. Days yielded to weeks before he finally came upon the once mighty hill that supported the once mighty fortress. He looked upon it with a sense of loss. Why did this come to be? Both sides annihilated, a planet devastated, from one single battle. Servali limped into the heart of the ruin, the only sounds provided by the cries of those slain long ago born upon the incessant winds and the echoes of Servali's erratic footsteps. Deeper and deeper within he made his way, until he came to the throne room, and there was an image that broke the serval's will. Upon the throne was a skeleton, once proud and dignified and mighty, but now reduced to ashen bones and tattered clothing and a sword hilt held in one hand and the blade in the other. Servali gazed upon the sword, and he knew. He knew. Servali collapsed next to the throne, and he uttered words between laboured breaths.

"I said I'd stay by your side until the end, and I meant it. I'm not doing this for you, though. No, not any more. I'm not doing this for the Code, either. I'm doing this for me. Don't ask me why, though. Don't ask me why. Just seems... the right thing... to... do."

Servali kept his word. He remained by Lion-O's side, and over the months and the years, he slowly merged with the devastation and the despair, and with the bleakness of the throne room. He remained by Lion-O's side, until the end happened, for Servali... and for everything on New Thundera.