

Exodus

by Servali

A "What If?" Exodus
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Part 1:

A large spaceship sped away from a planet in the grips of destructive forces. There were explosions on the surface and terrible earthquakes as the planet fell apart. In the ship flying away, there were several naked humanoid cat-like creatures: a male tiger named Tygra, a male panther named Panthro, a female cheetah named Cheetara, and two kids of an undiscernible feline identity, twins, one male and one female, named WilyKit and WilyKat. There was also a burly male cat, wearing fearsome armour yet no helmet, and a stripe of grey running down the centre of his mane. He stood nearly motionless as everyone watched the telescreen.

"It's finished." Panthro told the others.

The armoured one nodded silently at Panthro's words.

"Shall I awaken Lion-O now?" Tygra asked.

Cheetara looked at the others. "No need to upset the--"

"No, wake him," the armoured one interrupted. "If he's going to rule, he needs to learn to take the bad with the good! Cheetara, you go and bring him here."

Cheetara nodded and obediently headed to Lion-O's room.

Meanwhile, across the ship, a young red-maned lion was asleep in his bed. Cheetara walked in and shook him gently to wake him up. "Lion-O," she whispered, leaning over him closely.

The young lion shook his head. "What? Oh, Cheetara..."

"I am so sorry to wake you Lion-O, but Grune bids me bring you to him," she told him with a warm smile.

Lion-O climbed out of bed. "Uh, ok. Sure, Cheetara."

A small red and yellow cat-like creature named Snarf was laying at the foot of the bed. When Lion-O got up from the bed, Snarf immediately woke up and growled fiercely, ready to pounce. Then, his eyes focused upon the cheetah woman standing next to Lion-O. "Oh, it's you, Cheetara," he realised. "So, what's so important that you needed to wake up Lion-O, and why didn't you wake me first?"

"Grune told me to," Cheetara told Snarf with a hint of a smile, "and--"

"Grune?" Snarf interrupted with curiosity evident upon his furry face. He cocked his head at the mention of Grune's name.

"Yes," Cheetara nodded solemnly. "He requested Lion-O's presence out on the flight deck."

"Well? you still should have woken me up first," he complained, "and I hope you don't mind my tagging along. If you do, tough. Now, let's go see what Grune wants with Lion-O."

Cheetara grinned and sighed at Snarf before leading Lion-O through the doorway.

Snarf tossed Cheetara a hint of a scowl, albeit not a serious one. "Don't sigh at me," Snarf said with mock bitterness. "I'm just doing my job. After all, I'm his guardian. You know, be at his side at all times, know what he's up to at all times."

"Aw, Snarf." Lion-O complained. "I'm practically grown up! I don't need to be protected like that anymore."

"Sorry, Lion-O," Snarf said, shaking his head. "That's the job Grune gave me, and that's the job I'm going to do until he tells me otherwise, even if it means watching over you until you're as old as I am now."

"I hope not," Lion-O pouted. "I'll **never** get to do anything fun that way."

"Perhaps you **could** tone your protectiveness down a little," Cheetara said with amusement as she and Lion-O walked through the doorway.

"Yeah, right," Snarf complained again. "You're not responsible for Lion-O's welfare. I am, shnyarf, shnyarf. That cub has a knack for wandering right into trouble when you least expect it. He'd somehow get in a scuffle with a bunch of Mutants when my back's turned. What'll happen? I'll get the blame for it, even after I mow those Mutants down before they even have a chance to harm one hair on Lion-O's head! That's what!" Snarf promptly followed the two out the door, staying close to Lion-O the whole time.

All the Thundercats were present on the flight deck as Lion-O came in with Cheetara and Snarf. Lion-O walked over to Grune. "What's up, Grune?" he asked.

Grune remained silent as he set his eyes upon the heir to the throne of Thundera. What would be left of it, anyway. He merely pointed to the telescreen.

"What's on the screen?" Lion-O asked. The image of a planet appeared on the monitor. "That planet? What's happening to it?" he asked. The planet then exploded violently. "What was that?" Lion-O asked Grune.

"Thundera," Grune simply said with a mix of sorrow, remorse and anger.

The monitor showed fiery rocks floating around space. Lion-O cast Grune a horrified look. "Thundera? But? but?."

Grune sighed deeply, readying himself to prepare Lion-O for his future. "Thundera's no more, Lion-O, but the Code of Thundera will live on with you, the Lord of the ThunderCats. You have a sacred duty to uphold the Code's ideals-- Truth, Justice, Honour and Loyalty-- on our new home, wherever that'll be."

"I will, Grune! I swear it!" Lion-O declared enthusiastically. "I mean, I'll try?," he added with waning confidence.

Grune nodded. "I know you will. It's an enormous responsibility for one as young as you, but you aren't alone. The nobles you see gathered here: Panthro, Cheetara?," Lion-O looked at each noble's face as Grune said their names. Cheetara winked at him as he looked at her. "Tygra, and even," Grune grinned slightly, "WilyKit and WilyKat will teach you what you need to know to rule properly."

Snarf looked up, annoyed. "Hmph! Not a single mention of a certain snarf, I notice, shnyarf, shnyarf," he complained to those gathered. "Go on, just take all the glory, and leave ol' Snarf to soften up the enemy before you finish them off and get your names

written in all the history books. I won't mind. Nope, not one bit." Snarf folded his arms and looked away from the others, his nose up in the air.

"No, we definitely can't forget about you, Snarf," Grune admitted with a snort of amusement. "My humblest apologies," Grune said as he bowed in an exaggerated manner.

"Oh, stop with the acting already," Snarf grinned as he noticed Grune's display. He shook his head and rolled his eyes at the sight. "Formalities like that never suited you well."

Grune permitted himself a brief, quiet chuckle. "You know me too well, Snarf. I might have to do something about that."

"Like what?" Snarf nearly laughed. "Smarm me to death?"

Grune nearly laughed himself. "All things are possible, if given the chance. At least, that's what Jaga used to say."

Snarf couldn't resist the urge to roll his eyes again at the sabre-tooth throwback. Lion-O gave Grune a questioning look, but Grune shook his head. "Later," he merely said before leading Lion-O towards a door. Once there, Grune resumed an air of seriousness. "There's one more thing you need to see, Lion-O. The greatest part of your heritage." Grune led Lion-O through a sliding door and pointed to a sword bathed in a beautiful light on a holder. "This is the Sword of Omens. Set inside it is the source of our power, the Eye of Thundera."

Lion-O walked over to the sword, and the Eye pulsed with power. He picked it up, swung it around, and nearly dropped it as the sword seemingly moved on its own. "Grune! The sword is alive!"

Grune quietly nodded.

"But there are holes in the hilt, Grune, and I don't see any eye." Lion-O said, confused.

"The Eye sleeps until it's needed," Grune informed him, "and those aren't just any holes you're looking at, Lion-O. If you look through them and ask for its power, you'll be granted sight beyond sight."

"Sight beyond sight?" Lion-O repeated curiously. "What's that?"

"In time, Lion-O, you'll see," was Grune's response.

"But if I do need the Eye, how can I wake it up and let it know?"

"No need. It'll know before you do."

Lion-O shrugged, not quite sure what to make of what Grune said. He looked to the sword, and he grunted and struggled with it. "It's so heavy. I can't even lift it."

Grune nodded. "No, you're not yet strong enough to wield it. But--" Grune then turned to Snarf. "Snarf, go fetch the others."

"Aw, blast it," Snarf yawned mockingly, "just when this was getting interesting." Snarf then casually turned and left the chamber.

Grune returned his attention to Lion-O. "But, Lion-O, it won't be long before it feels like a part of you. When that happens, you'll be a force to reckon with." Grune grinned slightly. "Perhaps more of a force than Grune the Mighty himself."

Lion-O blushed. "Aw, I don't think I'll ever be as good as you."

Grune set a firm hand upon Lion-O's shoulder. "No. You'll be better," he admitted his hope quietly.

Lion-O was about to protest the likelihood of that happening when the ThunderCats finally entered the room.

"You wish to see us, Grune?" Tygra asked.

Grune nodded. "The way we used to live, that's gone now. You'll all need to learn new ways, just like Lion-O is here right now," he declared as he patted Lion-O on the shoulder. "On Thundera, you didn't need protective clothing or special weapons, and the Eye of Thundera rested in the Sword of Omens, known and protected only by me, Jaga, and Leonira."

"My mom and Jaga knew about the Sword of Omens, too?" Lion-O asked with surprise.

Grune nodded again, permitting himself a slight grin. "Yes, they did. Especially Jaga. He made it."

"Wow," Lion-O said in awe, "I wish I could've met Jaga. He was a great warrior, I hear."

Grune chuckled. "And your mother and I weren't?" he teased.

Lion-O grew a bit embarrassed, despite the fact that he knew Grune was fooling around again. "Well, I didn't mean it like that. It's just? I didn't get to know Jaga."

"I doubt you would have liked him much. He was a bit? smarmy," Grune said with a wider grin.

Lion-O gave everyone confused glances. "Smarmy? What`s that mean?"

Snarf laughed, remembering Jaga`s preachiness quite well. "Don't ask, Lion-O. You don't want to know."

Grune smiled at the cub and ruffled his mane fiercely.

"Hey, cut it out," Lion-O protested, playfully swatting Grune's hand away. "You make my hair feel all funny doing that."

"All right, I'll stop? for now." Grune looked to the others, who were all grinning, save Snarf, who was rolling his eyes once again. Grune, now serious, continued his speech. "We don't know what's going to happen to us at our new home, but I *do* know how the Eye can help you fare better there." Grune turned to Lion-O, his hand extended. "The sword."

Without a word, Lion-O handed Grune the Sword of Omens.

Grune smiled as he took the sword from Lion-O, and he held it high into the air. "Ho!" he called out mightily, and the Eye awoke. The Sword of Omens extended, and the chamber was awash in the light of the signal from the Eye of Thundera. Lion-O and the others watched in awe as they began to glow, too. When the display was finished, each of the ThunderCats-- Snarf included-- was equipped with clothing and weaponry of some sort. Cheetara found herself wrapped within a form-fitting leotard, and a bo staff in hand. Tygra wore a light and dark blue jumpsuit, and a whip was found by his side. Panthro was outfitted with spiked suspenders, and he held nunchakus, one end in each hand. Snarf, too was outfitted with suspenders that formed an X over his chest. Upon his tail was a spiked metal band, and upon the backs of his hands were metal claws that extended when he bent his wrists. WilyKit found herself in a skirt-like outfit, while WilyKat was covered within a tunic. Each twin had pouches of pellets attached to their newly acquired belts. Lion-O looked upon himself, and found that even he was clothed in a blue, sleeveless shirt.

"Wow?," Lion-O and the ThunderKittens said simultaneously, awed as they were by the power of the sword. Lion-O was so awed, that he didn't even notice that he had no weapon of his own.

"Amazing," Tygra stated.

Cheetara nodded in agreement as she examined her new weapon.

"Shnee-yarf! Now **these** are weapons worthy of a snarfin guardian," Snarf gleefully declared as he tried out his new **toys** by practicing some moves upon an imaginary target. "Watch out, everyone! Snarf the Fierce is on the loose."

"You'll have to make room for Panthro the Deadly," Panthro said humorously to Snarf as he swung around his nunchakus, "because I'm not going to let you have all the fun, **old-timer**."

Snarf laughed at Panthro. "Oh, yeah? Well, we'll see about that. I might be old, but I'll bet you one hundred-- no, one **thousand** Thunder-dollars you won't last ten seconds with me, **especially** now," he boasted confidently.

"You're on," Panthro chuckled.

Grune smiled at the two, glad that their joking around was distracting everyone from the fate of Thundera. "That's something I wouldn't want to miss." Grune then handed the sword back to Lion-O, who was still too awestruck to say anything. Lion-O merely stared at it as he held it once again.

Suddenly they were interrupted by an ear-splitting alarm.

"Grune! We're being attacked!" Tygra announced.

Grune turned to Lion-O. "Remain here in the sword chamber!" he commanded as he began to run out.

"No!" Lion-O protested. "If there's to be fighting then I should--"

"No arguing!" Grune growled back. "Snarf, you keep him here and look after him!" He then ran out after the others.

Snarf nodded his compliance to Grune's demands and stood in front of Lion-O. "I'd just like to see someone try to get past me now! You're safer than ever before, Lion-O."

Lion-O frowned. "Aww! I don't want to be safe! Safe is boring!" he whined.

Snarf scowled at Lion-O. "R-r-r-r-r? Yeah, well, safe might be boring, but dead's dead, and I'm not about to see that happen to you, got it?"

Lion-O nodded, but his pride was still hurt. He was a ThunderCat, wasn't he? Shouldn't he be helping the others? He walked to the nearest corner, hefting the sword along with him, and sulked. He thought about kicking the sword stand, but he didn't feel like getting any more verbal lashings from Snarf.

Grune arrived on the flight deck, put on his helmet and turned to the others. "Who dares attack us?"

"Mutants," Tygra replied.

"Wretched, cowardly vermin!" Grune roared as he slammed a fist onto the console. "Of course they'd attack us now, in our darkest of times!"

WilyKit and WilyKat backed away from the angered sabre-tooth, not wishing to get on his bad side, which, they felt, was **any** side of him now. Then everyone then grew quiet, watched the telescreen, and prepared for the inevitable?.

Outside the ship, several smaller ships swarmed around the Thundercats' ship fleet and fired on it. On the main enemy ship, a jackal mutant, a simian mutant, a vulture mutant, and a rat mutant were gathered.

"Nyeh heh heh, direct hit, Ratar-O!" Jackalman announced, watching the battle from a window.

"Excellent!" the ratman commander replied from his chair. "Soon, we'll be rid of those pesky ThunderCats forever, **and** we'll steal from them the greatest treasure of all: the Eye of Thundera!"

The gathering of mutants laughed with evil glee as they continued their assault upon the fleeing Thunderian ships.

Back on the deck of the Thundercats' ship, the ThunderCats were monitoring the battle.

"We just lost one, Grune," Panthro said as one of their fleet exploded.

Grune grabbed the nearest communicator. "Flagship to convoy! Defensive formations! NOW!" he bellowed.

The Thunderian ships manoeuvred and flocked around the flagship. The flagship fired on the mutant ships and blew a few of them up, while the mutants returned fire and destroyed all but one of the Thunderian ships: the flagship.

"We've lost them, Grune! We've lost all the ships!" Panthro reported angrily.

"Except for ours," Cheetara noted. "We haven't taken a single hit."

Grune shook his head. "I know why."

Puzzled, Lion-O looked to Grune. "Why?"

"They're after the Eye of Thundera, and they know it's here."

"Then?," WilyKat started, worry evident in his expression.

"Yes," Tygra said, completing WilyKat's thought, "we can expect visitors at any moment."

The ship then shook violently, rocking the occupants of the flagship.

"What's that?" Cheetara asked.

"Tractor beam rays!" Panthro shouted.

Beams of blue light encircled the flagship and drew it next to one of the mutant ships. Frightened, Lion-O looked around, trying to make sense of what was happening.

"No need to be afraid," Snarf said, attempting to console Lion-O. "I won't let one single Mutant who wants to get at you get past me. I swear it."

"I'm not ****gulp**** afraid." Lion-O said.

"Good," Snarf said with a nod as he assumed a battle-ready stance, "because fear is a worse enemy than any mutant out there. Trust me."

To that, Lion-O merely nodded.

An airlock moved from the mutant ship against the side of the flagship, and a reptile mutant came through, and fired a laser through the ThunderCat insignia painted on the wall, making a hole for them to enter through.

Inside a ship, an alarm sounded. Tygra and Grune looked up while Panthro tapped at the controls. "We've been breached!"

"Prepare to repel boarders!" Tygra ordered.

"Right in front of you, Tygra!" Cheetara answered, and sped ahead of him with her super speed. She met up with some reptillians, and ran circles around them with a rope, ensnaring them in it.

Meanwhile, Tygra combated two monkians. He lashed his whip around himself and became invisible.

"Where'd he go?" one of the monkians asked.

"Now you don't see me?," Tygra's voice sounded, and he suddenly reappeared, jumping on them. "Now you do!" he exclaimed, giving them a sound beating.

Panthro was busy fighting mutants as well. He flipped through the air and landed in the middle of four jackalmen. One whipped a mace at him, but Panthro stopped it with his hands and crushed it. "If you were as mean as you are ugly, then maybe you'd be trouble." he said with a laugh.

The ThunderKittens were backed into a corner by reptile mutants. They ran at the kittens, who tossed pellets at them. The pellets exploded in an array of blinding flashes, and when the reptiles could see again, the kittens were gone.

In another part of the ship, some of the mutants were busy rummaging through things, searching for the Eye of Thundera. Jackalman walked through a door and met up with Ratar-O and Vultureman. "Nothing there. Any luck at your end, Ratar-O?" he asked.

"No." Ratar-O said with growing frustration. "What's in there?" he

asked, pointing at a door.

"Caaaw, let's find out," Vultureman said as he approached it.

"It would help if I knew what the Eye of Thundera looks like," Jackalman admitted. "Have you ever seen it?"

"Only in pictures and holo-projections," Vultureman admitted smugly.

"I have," Ratar-O darkly replied, "It's embedded within a sword, and if it weren't for that freak of a furball, Grune, I would have easily torn it from Jaga's corpse and claimed it as my own. Now, let's stop wasting time and see what's behind that door."

They walked into the room holding the Sword of Omens, Lion-O, and Snarf, and the Eye of Thundera pulsed in warning.

Lion-O held the Sword of Omens in a defensive stance, and Snarf was growling angrily as he lashed out with his tail.

"And there it is, embedded in the Sword of Omens like I said!" Ratar-O announced.

"You'd all better get out of here right now, or you'll have Snarf the Fierce to deal with!" Snarf warned.

"And what manner of laughable creature is this?" Ratar-O scoffed.

Snarf was quite offended. "Think I'm funny, do ya?"

"Snarf! Stop!" Lion-O said worriedly.

Jackalman shot his gun at Snarf, ensnaring him in a net. Snarf struggled, but to no avail. Then, Snarf remembered the blades upon his hands. He flexed his wrists, and the blades popped out with metallic "thwips". He easily tore through the net. "So, you Mutants want a piece of ol' Snarf, do you? Well, I hope you have some good medics, because you're going to need them to piece you all back together when I'm done with you!" Snarf approached menacingly, and Jackalman, intimidated, stumbled and fell backwards.

"Help me, nyeh-heh-heh!" Jackalman cried out pathetically as he tried to crawl away. "Save me from that.. that? What is that thing?"

"Toast," Vultureman shouted with glee as he blasted at Snarf with a gun of his own. The beam spread out, so that despite Snarf's attempt

to dodge, he was still struck by the beam. He was thrust violently against the far wall, and the impact knocked him unconscious. He slid down the wall and fell into a heap, his fur slightly singed and smoking.

"Snarf! No!" Lion-O cried out.

Jackalman, feeling safer now, got up on his feet and rejoined the others. Vultureman glared at him for his cowardice. His head turned away from Vultureman, Jackalman snorted in aggravation. "I'd like to see how *you'd* act when you're being attacked by that? whatever it was," Jackalman grumbled to himself.

Ratar-O laughed as he turned to Lion-O. "So much for that pathetic creature. Now, youth, hand over that sword!"

"You shall not have it while I live." Lion-O decreed with bravado.

All three mutants laughed heartily. "The cub threatens *us*? Why, he can hardly hold onto that sword, much less lift it!" Jackalman exclaimed.

Vultureman approached the cub, and Lion-O stepped away.

"Stay away, or, or, or you'll get it!" Lion-O warned, trying his best to point the sword at the vile-looking avian, albeit not too successfully.

Vultureman cawed in laughter as he continued his slow, threatening approach. "No need to be scared, brat. Just hand over the sword, and we'll just leave--"

"I'm not scared!" Lion-O protested, despite the fact that he *was* frightened. However, he remembered Snarf's words, about how fear can be a worse enemy than any mutant. Lion-O then gathered up all his resolve, and he stepped forward, again trying to point the sword at Vultureman. "And I said, YOU SHALL NOT HAVE IT," he added with more confidence. Suddenly, the Eye of Thundera pulsed, and Lion-O's eyes glowed yellow with power. He swung the sword high, and the Eye opened and projected the ThunderCat signal upon the wall.

"What's happening?" Jackalman wondered fearfully as he began to back away from Lion-O. Vultureman was shying away from the sword-wielding cub as well.

"Nothing *I* can't take care of, you spineless cowards," a confident

Ratar-O said as he drew out his twin sais. "Now, let`s see if the Eye of Thundera is a match for the Rat`s Eyes."

Lion-O swung the glowing sword above his head while the Mutants watched with interest. The sword was pulsing fiercely with power now. Suddenly, there was a mighty roar, and a large, ghostly black cat emerged from the Eye and pounced upon a surprised Ratar-O, knocking him off balance and onto the floor. It bounced off him and chased Vultureman and Jackalman around the chamber. The two mutants then fled out of the chamber as fast as they could.

"Come back, cowards!" Ratar-O demanded with a shake of his fist as he stood once again, but the two mutants didn't obey. They kept running. The ghostly feline then focused its attention back upon Ratar-O. It emitted yet another powerful growl, and its eyes flashed red. Even with his Rat`s Eyes, Ratar-O didn`t want to tangle with this? feline apparition, not while aboard an enemy ship. "There'll be another time, ThunderBrat!" Ratar-O yelled, "and you`ll suffer greatly for this insult to me!" He then fled. All the mutants returned to their ship, and the ship sped away, leaving the flagship damaged in space, with a gaping hole in the side.

In the sword chamber, the ghostly feline returned to the Eye of Thundera. After a few seconds of disbelief, Lion-O finally came to his senses. He ran over to the fallen Snarf and shook him, in the hopes of reviving him. "Snarf, are you all right? Come on Snarf. Say something!"

Snarf slowly woke up. "Shnee-yarf?," he mumbled almost unintelligibly. He looked up to Lion-O with unfocused eyes.

"Good old Snarf." Lion-O said as he hugged him. "You scared me. I wasn't sure what happened to you."

"What hit me?" Snarf finally asked as he slowly stood once Lion-O let go of him. "Felt like I was smacked around with a flaming meteor or something," he admitted as he patted himself down.

Grune and the other ThunderCats finally rushed in, fearing the worst.

"Lion-O! Snarf!" Grune exclaimed. "Are you two all right?".

"Yeah, Snarf took a few lumps, but I managed to hold 'em off." Lion-O answered.

"Looks like you managed to drive them off with the sword," Grune said

with a relieved grin, and the sword pulsed with power once again.

Lion-O grinned sheepishly. "Well the sword kind of did it for me.?"

Everyone else laughed, except for Snarf. "Ah, I see. Still, well done. You`ll be a fine warrior yet," Grune complimented. Lion-O blushed at Grune's words. Grune then turned around to the others, his look of relief fading into one of growing concern. "We have other matters to attend to, now that the mutants are gone. To the bridge, all of us." Everyone else nodded in compliance and followed Grune out of the chamber.

A little while later, the ThunderCats were all gathered on the bridge of the ship. Grune turned to Panthro. "How bad?"

Panthro turned around. "Well I patched up the hole and I guess it's ok."

Grune looked at Panthro sternly. "You *guess*?"

Panthro nodded, unfazed by Grune's stare. "There wasn't much to work with."

Grune nodded in understanding. "Go on."

Panthro turned to the consoles at the front of the bridge. "The navigational system's pretty well shot. We can manoeuvre some but not well enough to get to the galaxy we were headed for. The best we can do is this." He hit a button on the panel and pointed to the image on the monitor. "Not much as galaxies go."

"It's dinky is what it is." WilyKat commented.

"Hmph. Smaller than that, even," Snarf added, unimpressed.

"See this puny little sun?" Panthro asked. "I've run a galactic scan for atmospheric compatibility and this blue planet"-- He pointed to an image of a planet labeled "3P" on the monitor-- "the third planet in, gives me a readout of 96%."

Lion-O looked confused. "Atmo-spheric com... com.."

Tygra smiled at the cub. "That means we can breathe the air, Lion-O."

"Even so, it's light-years away." Cheetara said.

"Oh, yeah," WilyKat agreed nervously. "I guess we'd have to make the trip in the suspension capsules."

"And that`s exactly what I want you all to do now," Grune ordered. "Get in the suspension capsules. I'll pilot this ship to our new home."

"No, Grune," Panthro argued. "Without suspension you'll die. We can set the ship on robot pilot."

"This ship's still damaged," Grune pointed out. "It might not make it on auto. Manually piloting it is the only way to guarantee our safe arrival. That, and I refuse to hear of any one of you sacrificing your life to get us there. I summoned each of you to teach Lion-O to become a great ruler and leader, and that`s \*exactly\* what you`re going to do. My mind is set. I`m electing myself as the pilot."

"We cannot be sure it won`t make it on auto. We'll take our chances together, Grune, as a team," Tygra said.

"Yes, Grune, please!" Lion-O pleaded. "You're just as important as they are. Please, Grune, I don`t want to lose any--"

"Oh, enough!" Snarf growled forcefully, garnering the attention of everyone around him. "No more of this blasted mushy stuff! I can't take it any more!" Snarf looked around to the others. "Look, I'm by far the oldest of us, and from what I've heard, we'll still age in the capsules, even though they slow it down a bit. Problem is, even in suspension, I doubt I'd live long enough to complete the journey. Now, get into those capsules, and that means you, too, Grune. "

"But Snarf," Lion-O argued, "I thought you swore to protect me until, well? whenever." Lion-O looked on the verge of tears.

Snarf walked solemnly over to Lion-O and squeezed his shoulder compassionately with his hand. "Remember what you said earlier, that you don't need to be so protected anymore? Well, after what happened in the sword chamber, I see you're right. You don't need me anymore. Besides, you have all of them to protect you now," Snarf said as he motioned to the other ThunderCats. Lion-O was about to complain, but Snarf pointed a finger at him. "Quiet. Not another word out of you. You get in there, and let good ol' Snarf take care of things."

Lion-O looked up to Grune, hoping that there were something he could

do to make Snarf change his mind, but Grune merely stared sadly at the cub. He could find no way to put it more gently. Then again, Grune wasn't exactly one for gentleness. "It's the truth, Lion-O. One way or another, he won't be with us when we arrive at our new home."

Lion-O turned back to Snarf, tears now falling from his eyes. "I'm gonna miss you, Snarf."

"Aw, Lion-O, stop it. You're getting all mushy on me, now," Snarf complained, but he had begun to cry as well. Snarf sniffed and grew aggravated. "Now look at what you're making me do."

Lion-O rushed to Snarf and held him tightly. Snarf hugged Lion-O tightly in return. "It's gonna turn out all right. You'll see," Snarf said, trying to console Lion-O. "Now, get in that pod, before I throw you in there."

Lion-O hesitated, and Grune patted Lion-O on the shoulder once again. "Be brave, Lion-O. You have to be now." Grune patted the Sword of Omens, which was now sheathed in the Claw Shield by his side. "The Eye of Thundera will be waiting for you when we get to our new home. Until then, it'll be safe with me."

Lion-O nodded sadly, and he slowly entered the capsule, but not before giving Snarf one last glance that said goodbye.

WilyKat walked to his capsule, pressed the button to open it, and climbed in. "I wish Snarf wasn't so?. practical," he said sadly to his sister, who nodded.

"All right, if we're going to do it, let's do it!" Panthro agreed, climbing into a pod of his own.

All the other ThunderCats, except for Grune, bade Snarf goodbye, and Snarf did his best to dismiss each one as being silly. Grune was the last to enter the capsule. Before entering, though, he looked over to Snarf, who was standing a bit away from the capsules, his back turned to them. "You sure you want to go through with this?" he asked. "Not exactly the way for us warriors to go."

Snarf looked back to Grune. "Yeah, yeah, I know, but let's face it. There's no other choice. Lion-O's going to need you more than he's going to need me, and I'm just not going to make it one way or another. Well, that, and being in tight spots gives me the creeps." Snarf shivered slightly at the thought of being cooped up in a

capsule for who knew how long.

Grune chuckled, but it couldn't hide the sadness in his voice. "I'm going to miss you, old friend. We've battled a lot of Mutants together. It won't be the same without you."

"Aw, don't *you* start getting all sappy now, too," Snarf complained, grinning. Then, Snarf grew serious. "Watch over him for me. Keep him from harm and all that nonsense."

"I swear it, by the Code of Thundera," Grune responded with equal seriousness and a raised hand.

"And? and?," Snarf stammered, growing frustrated again, "Aw, blast it! Tell Lion-O I love him, too, when you all wake up."

Grune nodded. "May the Eye of Thundera protect you," he said as he entered his capsule.

"Yeah, yeah, and right back at you, what you said," Snarf quietly replied with a grin. He looked at all of the ThunderCats, all of them now in their capsules in suspension. "Well, looks like I'm going to get plenty of peace and quiet, aren't I?" Snarf sat in the pilot's chair, and he looked around at the console. "I sure do hope I don't screw things up. Mechanics was never my specialty. Wait, or is it electronics? Blast, I'll be the death of us yet!" he joked to himself, trying to lighten his mood. He wasn't too successful. Snarf slumped into the chair and sighed as the ship flew through space towards its final destination. "Plenty of peace and quiet now. At least, there better be...."

Snarf, greatly advanced in age now, weakly climbed up and collapsed into the chair in front of the control panel. "Looks like my time's finally come. That robot pilot better make it from here, else it's gonna have to reckon with one angry snarven ghost." Snarf closed his eyes, and his body vanished, leaving only his weapons upon the chair. The ship continued to fly through space, and it eventually landed on the tiny planet. The robot pilot began the landing sequence, but because it was damaged, the ship crash-landed and flew to pieces. The suspension pods were flung from the ship and scattered around the wreckage site. Only one pod popped open immediately. It was Lion-O's.

And he was still young.